Digital citizenship in later life:
Insights from participatory action research
with older content creators

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Abstract

Within the context of rapid digitalisation of societies, older people increasingly require digital skills to participate civically. However, research has largely overlooked the digital dimension of older adults' civic participation. Grounding my research in Serrat and colleagues' (2019) later life civic participation framework, I explored digital content creation and community radio as pathways to increased civic participation and digital engagement in later life. Working collaboratively with older adults using participatory action research (PAR), I locate older adults' digital citizenship at the intersection of Gerontology and Human-Computer Interaction research. Using qualitative methods, I explored: 1) an older people's organisation's media output as part of their age-friendly efforts, and 2) community radio production as a pathway to increased digital participation in later life. Both research strands, interwoven in a process of PAR, shed light on older adults' digital citizenship. My collaboration with the older people's organisation exemplifies a collective social civic activity organised by older adults themselves. Findings highlight the importance of older adults as active contributors in digitalised societies. My collaboration with older radio show hosts and other stakeholders, brought together at a radio festival, evolved into the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative. Findings demonstrate the importance of community radio to facilitate age-inclusive citizen dialogue and highlight how digital technologies can support communities of practice in bridging collective social and political forms of civic participation in later life. I reflect on my PAR journey, highlighting the process of doing research within an evolving ecosystem of individuals, third sector organisations and technologies, especially throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. I discuss the contributions of my research to current debates on older adults' civic participation and propose a digital citizenship perspective rooted in community-based research, outlining implications for policy and practice to prioritise the concept of digital participation to support older adults' civic participation online.

Peer reviewed publications

- Reuter, A., Liddle, J. and Scharf, T. (2020). Digitalising the Age-Friendly City: Insights from Participatory Action Research. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 17 (21). https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17218281

- Reuter, A. and Liddle, J. (2020). The Later Life Audio and Radio Co- operative: considering radio as a technology to promote citizen dialogue in later life. In *9th International Conference on Software Development and Technologies for Enhancing Accessibility and Fighting Info Exclusion (DSAI '20),* 2–4 December 2020, virtual. ACM, New York, USA, pp.153157. https://doi.org/10.1145/3439231.3439237

- Reuter, A., Scharf, T. and Smeddinck, J. (2020). Content Creation in Later Life: Reconsidering Older Adults' Digital Participation and Inclusion. In *Proceedings of the ACM Human- Computer Interaction 4, Computer-Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing (CSCW '20).* ACM, New York, USA, pp.1-23. https://doi.org/10.1145/3434166

- Reuter, A., Bartindale, T., Morrissey, K., Scharf, T. and Liddle, J. (2019). Older Voices: Supporting Community Radio Production for Civic Participation in Later Life. In *CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems Proceedings (CHI '19)*, 4-9 May 2019, Glasgow, Scotland UK. ACM, New York, USA, pp.1-13. https://doi.org/10.1145/3290605.3300664

Research awards

- 2021: Newcastle University engagement and place award in the category of 'access and participation'

- 2021: Telling tales of engagement funding (£10.000) awarded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's (EPSRC) digital economy scheme

- 2020: Stirling Prize for best research poster, awarded by the British Society of Gerontology: https://slides.com/arreut/llarn-poster/fullscreen

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List of acronyms

AFC: Age-friendly city

AFCC: Age-friendly cities and communities

AMARC: Association for Community Radio Broadcasters (French: Association Mondiale Des Radiodiffuseurs Communautaires)

AR: Action Research

HCI: Human-Computer Interaction

ICT: Information and Communication Technology

LLARC: Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative

PAR: Participatory action research

RtD: Research through Design

WHO: World Health Organization

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Chapter 1: Introduction

With the growing digitalisation of society, civic discourses are increasingly shifting to digital spaces. Older individuals who wish to take part in civic life are therefore often required to use digital technologies as a means of participation, a development that gained even more importance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital spaces create opportunities, for example the possibility of having one's voice heard online and reaching a wider audience. However, some people, such as older adults, might experience a heightened risk of exclusion from online civic participatory activities (Walsh, Scharf and Keating, 2017) due to inequal access and use of digital technologies (Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal, 2007). To counteract the intersecting trends of civic and digital exclusion in later life, government initiatives predominantly seek to ensure that public services remain accessible and, as a result, focus primarily on the digital inclusion of older adults. However, by solely viewing older adults as passive recipients or consumers of services, digital inclusion strategies often under-emphasise the concept of digital participation and disregard the many active contributions of older adults who are creating online content (Waycott *et al.*, 2013). Some initiatives aim to promote active ageing and recognise a wide range of capacities in later life, such as the World Health Organization's (WHO) age-friendly cities and communities (AFCC) agenda. However, scenarios in which older adults are talked about with regard to issues related to ageing, rather than contributing their own voices to discussions, are common (Ayalon *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, older people's voices are absent especially in debates around technology use or the design of new technologies (Vines *et al.*, 2015).

The research presented in this thesis addresses the topics of ageing, digitalisation and civic participation through an interdisciplinary lens. Drawing together the scientific fields of gerontology and Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), my research critically examines the potential of content creation activities as a way to promote more age-friendly approaches to supporting civic participation and digital engagement in later life. Using participatory action research (PAR) over the course of approximately four years, I collaborated with older people who actively contribute to a digital society by producing media content, such as online communications and community radio shows. The research presented in this thesis adds a digital dimension to existing knowledge and, in doing so, seeks to build on a later life civic participation framework developed by Serrat, Scharf, Villar and Gómez (2019). Reflecting its interdisciplinary nature, the thesis draws on research debates in three key fields. First, it develops current debates on social exclusion and civic participation in gerontology, with a particular focus on the WHO's age-friendly cities initiative. Second, in considering content creation and digital citizenship in later life, the thesis connects the fields of HCI and ageing

research. Third, with a growing interest in community radio as a point of community participation, it addresses opportunities relating to current practice involving older adults in the community radio sector.

1.1 Research Context

1.1.1 Personal journey

My personal academic journey towards researching the intersection of ageing and technology with an emphasis on older people's civic participation is as exploratory and interwoven as the participatory research presented in this thesis. Before realising this project, there were many days of calculating statistics, trial and error "dead-ends" where I did not feel truly interested in a research topic. However, one overarching and consistent aspect of this research journey was my interest in conducting research with older people. Lucky coincidences of meeting the right people at the right time helped me shape my research interests and develop this project. Starting out with a psychology degree in Germany, my initial research interest was in conducting quantitative work with questionnaires to assess the links between older adults' well-being and their social connectedness in Berlin. I continued to focus my research efforts on quantitative work when I moved to Newcastle, working on a cross-cultural project with large cohort studies to investigate psychological determinants of loneliness in later life in England and Germany. At this point, I already knew that I wanted to pursue a PhD and an application to the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT), run by Open Lab at Newcastle University, was suggested. Even though I had never considered HCI as a field I could be interested in, I was attracted to the idea of engaging with a participatory research project that could not only challenge the idea that older adults are disengaged from the digital world but also acknowledge the continuity of older people as active technology users throughout later life. I became part of the Open Lab CDT in Digital Civics, starting my project with an MRes in 2018 and then taking it further with this PhD. Despite my initial focus on quantitative research, I built this project entirely around qualitative and participatory methods. Even though it was difficult at times, I learned to love and embrace the participatory research process. It was this process that ultimately expanded my personal research interests, allowing me to weave together many different threads between ageing and technology research and leading me to settle on working with content creation as a specific type of digital citizenship in later life. Even though this topic was already timely in light of the increasing digitalisation of ageing societies, the COVID-19 pandemic has tended to confirm the wider scientific and societal benefits.

1.1.2 Digitalisation and civic participation in later life

Demographic ageing, with increasing life expectancy and rising proportions of older people in countries around the world, has led to a growing interest in civic participation in later life and the potential of older people to become more engaged in shaping the decisions that affect their lives (Serrat *et al.*, 2019). According to Dixon, cited in Hall, Rennick and Williams (2019), "by 2050, the world will have more than two billion people over the age of 60" (p.11). This simple demographic fact opens up discussions on how to age well and creates a need for policy action on a global scale. Of particular concern for these policies are issues such as the social exclusion of older adults, which in its multidimensionality cuts across differing domains of daily life (Walsh, Scharf and Keating, 2017). Considering the dynamic nature of social exclusion, which might lead to accumulated disadvantage across generations or the life course (Scharf and Keating, 2012), older adults represent one of the societal groups that might be disproportionally affected by exclusion from civic participatory activities (Walsh, Scharf and Keating, 2017). This risk of exclusion from civic participatory activities in later life is exacerbated by the so-called 'digital divide' (Age UK, 2018). The concept of the digital divide originally described the uneven distribution of access to digital technologies globally and within societies (Norris, 2001b). It now increasingly encompasses digital skills and the frequency of using digital technologies (Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal, 2007). Indeed, according to Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal (2007) a "digital citizen" is somebody who uses the internet "regularly and effectively – that is, on a daily basis" (p.1). Even though an increasing number of older adults use the internet (Office for National Statistics, 2019) and access to broadband has been extended to cover most of the UK (Office of Communications, 2018), they are still less likely to use the internet than other age groups (Office of Communications, 2021).

Older women and people living in deprived areas have been shown to be the least likely to go online (Centre for Ageing Better, 2020), demonstrating an example of the dynamics of social exclusion across different domains and how the accumulation of different types of exclusion, i.e. area-based exclusion, can reinforce existing digital inequalities. It is therefore important to consider the impact of digitalisation alongside the narrative of exclusion in later life to support effectively older adults' active citizenship. Indeed, the discourse on global population ageing has been accompanied by international efforts to ensure that older adults age actively (World Health Organization, 2002) and in age-friendly environments (World Health Organization, 2007b). These agendas often incorporate a focus on increasing older adults' civic participation as a main influencing factor in support of a healthy and active later life (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021a). However, the term civic participation, which encompasses a rich variety of

social and political activities that shape the life of a community (Adler and Goggin, 2005), is often associated predominantly with volunteering (Martinson and Minkler, 2006; Serrat *et al.*, 2019). As a consequence, other forms of civic activity are typically underrepresented in public discourse and research. Additionally, civic participatory activities have been traditionally researched in in-person contexts, excluding internet-mediated forms. However, digital forms of civic participation, such as creating and signing petitions online or engaging with local government services, are now becoming the norm (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021a). In light of this development, and the most recent increase of older adults' internet use associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Centre for Ageing Better, 2020), it becomes evident that addressing a digital dimension alongside the discourse on older adults' civic participation is timely. The research presented in this thesis therefore aims to contribute new understandings of digital forms of civic participation in later life to academic debates, focusing on the creation of content as a form of social and political citizenship.

1.1.3 Older content creators

Even though content creation is not referred to in itself as a traditional form of later life civic participation (Serrat *et al.*, 2019), the production of media content can underpin many different types of civic activity. This can range from writing blogs with political content to having a voice in one's community and digital spaces more generally. The potential of content creation to support civic participation is widely recognised with regard to younger people, including as part of the school curriculum in countries such as the UK (UK Government, 2017) and the US (Bennett, 2008). Older adults tend to be overlooked as active content creators (Waycott *et al.*, 2013). Even the development of new social technologies often prioritises accessibility functions to allow older users to view content produced by others as opposed to creating and sharing their own productions (Waycott *et al.*, 2013). The lack of older people's voices in digital spaces is reinforced, as older adults are often mis-represented by the mainstream media discourse (Ayalon *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, ageism, or the discrimination of people based on their age, has become an established part of digital platforms which can include design or algorithmic mechanisms that strategically deprioritise, disregard or exclude older people (Rosales and Fernández-Ardèvol, 2020). Still, research highlights an increasing number of older adults who engage in producing digital content. This content includes blogs (Celdrán, Serrat and Villar, 2019; Celdrán *et al.*, 2021), Instagram posts (McGrath, 2018) or YouTube videos (Harley and Fitzpatrick, 2009). Older content creators often identify social benefits as their main motivations to engage with the production of digital media (Brewer and Piper, 2016). This PhD project attempts to hone in on the civic factors that underlie digital content creation activities

in later life. It does this with reference to two types of example. First, it explores different content creation workflows that underlie the distribution of information of interest to older adults within an age-friendly city, such as developing a newsletter to be distributed via email. Second, it considers the creation of community radio content as a form of civic participation that has the potential to challenge ageism in the media by promoting older people's voices through broadcasting.

1.2   Research Questions and Aims

Against this broad background that connects debates on civic participation in gerontology and HCI, I address two research questions in my thesis:

- How do older adults engage with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices? (RQ1)

- How can age-friendly communities better exploit digital technologies and community media to support older people's civic participation? (RQ2)

By responding to these research questions, I aim to critically analyse the potential of content creation activities as a form of civic activity in age-friendly cities. My research seeks to promote the view of older people as active digital citizens in their communities, using digital technologies for their participation, as opposed to their being stereotypically viewed as disengaged from the digital world. Using PAR, I aim to merge research and practice in the interdisciplinary space of gerontology and HCI and provide an example of a socially engaged piece of research that meaningfully involves older people throughout the PAR process.

1.3   Contribution

The research presented in my thesis seeks to develop original insights on the topic of older adults' digital citizenship, conducted as a piece of PAR over the course of nearly four years. I highlight two examples of how older adults make use of digital content creation activities as part of their civic participation. I present these examples in two separate chapters (Chapters 4 and 5). The first findings chapter (Chapter 4) concentrates on my collaboration with a local older people's forum in Newcastle upon Tyne. In this thesis, I refer to this organisation using the pseudonym Age Voice to respect the organisation's work as a whole, rather than focusing on individual members' opinions. I consider the ways in which the production of digital media supports the organisation's civic participation activities. The second findings chapter (Chapter

[5](#)) focuses on the production of radio and audio content as a civic activity. For this aspect of the research, I collaborated with older radio show hosts and age-friendly radio stations across the UK. All collaborators from this part of the PAR project explicitly wished to be named in this thesis, reflecting the considerable pride taken in their broadcasting work. This collaboration resulted in the creation of the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC), a network aimed at promoting the voices of older people through community radio broadcasting.

I locate the contributions of my research in three different domains:

1) The academic contribution with regards to exploring digital aspects of civic participation in later life;
2) The implementation of PAR into a fully-functioning, growing and international co-operative; and
3) The application of these findings as part of age-friendly initiatives or public policy on older adults' digital citizenship.

Whilst the topics of digitalisation, civic participation and age-friendliness have been a focus of researchers for quite some time, the importance of this research field became more obvious to the wider public during the COVID-19 pandemic. My PAR outlines real-life examples of how older adults can become active contributors of diverse content in digital spaces. Even though this issue was of importance before the pandemic, the need to prioritise digital spaces over in-person collaborations throughout the pandemic further emphasised the value of this line of work. During this difficult time, my collaborators were forced to rethink fundamentally their existing workflows. They subsequently co-created new ways of engaging with one another, with content creation technologies, and with the research process. This led to unique contributions within the interdisciplinary academic discourse in the fields of gerontology and HCI. I propose an extension of the later life civic participation framework with a digital dimension and highlight the importance of digital technologies as facilitators that bridge social and political forms of civic participation in later life. With regard to conducting PAR, I share insights on how, collaboratively, we transformed this PAR project into LLARC. Additionally, I gained a unique perspective on age-friendly and public policy on the topic of digital citizenship, which I will discuss with regard to implications before and throughout the pandemic.

1.4   Thesis structure

My thesis is structured in a manner that first contextualises the interdisciplinary research space and draws together debates on ageing, civic participation and digital citizenship from the fields of gerontology and HCI. Using PAR with different stakeholders and groups of older people, I then outline the potential of (digital) content creation activities as a way to support older adults' civic and digital participation. I chose to structure this thesis chronologically and highlight methods and results from each of my collaborations separately. This approach allows me to represent the development of the PAR and its inherently "messy" design process (Stolterman, 2008).

In Chapter 2, I present concepts and frameworks on ageing, civic participation and digital citizenship from the fields of gerontology and HCI. I critically appraise how these fields intersect in the existing literature. With regard to gerontology, I ground my work in the later life civic participation framework developed by Serrat *et al.* (2019), alongside the opposing discourse on civic exclusion of older people and the WHO age-friendly initiative as a supportive framework to promote the inclusion of older adults in society. Moving towards the field of HCI, I critically review research carried out with regard to older adults' digital citizenship and highlight the need to consider creative means of civic participation in later life, such as (digital) content creation activities or participation within the community radio sector.

Outlining my general method of using PAR in Chapter 3, I describe the principles of how PAR is traditionally used in the fields of gerontology and HCI. Linking both fields, this description is followed by an analytical reflection of my research project as an interdisciplinary PAR project in practice, outlining ethical considerations on conducting participatory research with older adults. Additionally, I make a case for my overall methodological approach to this project and each of the specific methods used for data collection. As an approach to the analysis of qualitative data, I illustrate my use of thematic analysis. I elaborate on these methodological choices throughout the following chapters in order to present a coherent narrative of the PAR process.

Chapter 4 represents the first of two findings chapters, in which I share insights from working collaboratively with older content creators. This chapter focuses specifically on my collaboration with an older people's organisation in Newcastle upon Tyne. In order to protect the group's identity, it is referred to in this thesis with the pseudonym 'Age Voice'. Working closely with the organisation's communications volunteers, I explore RQ1 by analysing how

older adults engage with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices. Using a combination of embedded research, semi-structured interviews, co-design workshops, and research through design, I critically position my findings on older adults' digital participation alongside the age-friendly discourse to give insight on RQ2. Locating this part of my research as a collective social form of civic participation in a later life civic participation framework (Serrat *et al.*, 2019), I highlight the need to re-imagine new, digital forms of older adults' civic participation within age-friendly contexts.

In Chapter 5, I build on findings from the local collaboration in Newcastle by more broadly analysing collective forms of later life civic participation on a societal level. I focus predominantly on the production of community radio as a content creation activity to support civic participation in later life, contributing insight to RQ1. In addition, I address the role of digital technologies in this specific context. I address RQ2 by reviewing the development of the PAR from exploring collaborations with older radio producers and age-friendly community radio stations across the UK, and the subsequent creation of the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC) as a direct outcome of my PAR project. Findings from this chapter highlight ways in which older adults can become active radio content creators, the process of building the LLARC network and ensuring its future sustainability, and the role played by digital technologies in the network as a means of transforming collective social action into collective political forms of later life civic participation.

In Chapter 6, I discuss my research findings by weaving together the threads of ageing, civic participation and digitalisation. In this chapter, I highlight the need to incorporate a digital dimension in the later life civic participation framework proposed by Serrat *et al.* (2019). I discuss the implications of my research with regard to age-friendly policy and practice, and consider key learning points that arise from conducting PAR within a complex socio-technical system. In my concluding chapter (Chapter 7), I present my contributions to the topic of digital and civic participation in later life and outline how this may guide future research in this area.

Chapter 2: Ageing, civic participation and digitalisation

2.1   Introduction

The research presented in this thesis critically examines the potential of content creation as an age-friendly approach to promote civic participation and digital engagement in later life. In this chapter, I present the concept of later life civic participation within the fields of gerontology, Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and the intersection of both by introducing the interdisciplinary idea of digital citizenship. First, drawing on gerontological literature, I review the concept of social exclusion, and its sub-dimension of exclusion from civic activities, and subsequently locate these ideas alongside a later life civic participation framework as a response. Additionally, I link these ideas with debates about the age-friendly city initiative. I then move on to the field of HCI, critically appraising research that has been carried out on the topics of ageing and technology. Joining the discourses on age-friendly cities and digitalisation, I review literature on digital citizenship and contrast the existing digital inclusion and digital participation frameworks. Highlighting the need to consider creative ways to participate digitally in later life, I present research carried out with older content creators in the digital and community radio space. Synthesising the aforementioned literature, I highlight as a key gap in the existing literature the lack of research on how older adults engage with digital content creation activities and leverage the community radio sector as part of their civic participatory practices. My research seeks to respond to this knowledge gap. The literature review presented in this chapter was conducted as an ongoing task throughout the PhD, due to the dynamic nature of my interdisciplinary PAR project. Indeed, PAR projects often do not follow the traditional research design of reviewing literature at one point in time (Kemmis, Nixon and McTaggart, 2014). I found that reviewing literature throughout the PAR process supported my understanding of where my work was located at each point in time, whilst remaining flexible and open to co-creating the process with my collaborators.

2.2   Gerontology

Responding to the global economic and social trend of population ageing and the resulting demographic change, later life has become a central focus of political debates and research. According to Phillipson (2013), "[p]opulation ageing refers to both the increase in average (median) age of the population and the increase in the number and proportion of older people in the population" (p.12). Due to rising life expectancy and falling birth rates, populations around the world are getting older (Hall, Rennick and Williams, 2019). Alongside the inception of frameworks such as the World Health Organization's 'active ageing' initiative in the early 2000s, which aims to promote healthy and active ageing across the life-course (World Health Organization, 2002), policies often address the challenges associated with increased longevity,

including rising demand for health and social care. Its potential for societal transformation (e.g. innovative lifestyles, intergenerational communities, new leisure and cultural activities) remains underrepresented (Phillipson, 2013). In research, the discipline of gerontology, the study of ageing, explores later life through a multidisciplinary lens. The early stages of gerontology research in the 20th century mainly focused on addressing the so-called 'burden' of later life (Bernard, Ray and Reynolds, 2020), exploring biological, psychological, and sociological determinants of ageing (Bond, Coleman and Peace, 1993) and an individual's capability to adjust to these 'problems' (Phillipson, 2013). Progressively, the view of ageing evolved, with gerontologists increasingly adopting theories that conceptualised ageing as a more dynamic process across the life course (Phillipson, 2013). In its current state, gerontology can be regarded as a multifaceted field exploring ageing societies from perspectives within social and behavioural sciences; humanities; medicine; health; housing; social care; nursing; policy arenas and voluntary agencies (British Society of Gerontology, no date).

Social gerontology, a major field of study within the wider gerontological enterprise, explores in broad terms the social aspects of ageing across the life course. Phillipson (2013) suggests that social gerontology "acknowledges ageing both as a lived, individual experience, as well as one constructed through social, cultural and economic relationships" (p.50) and therefore results in diversity in later life. Since the 1970s, the approach of critical gerontology emerged as a theoretical lens to challenge traditional gerontological approaches in their conceptual and methodological limitations (Phillipson, 1998), one of them being a failure to problematise and address multiple forms of inequality and interlocking oppression across the life course (Holstein and Minkler, 2007). A key influence in the development of critical gerontology was Townsend's work (1981), which critiqued efforts of social gerontology that were "trying to explain individual ageing within a structure, and especially class structure, [which] was accepted without question, rather than trying to explain that structure, its interrelationships and its development" (p.6). Using the concepts of retirement, pensions and residential care as examples of structures that create a social dependency of older people, Townsend advocated for more structural and socio-economic explanations of how people experience later life rather than focusing predominantly on individual choices. This idea has since been taken forward by critical gerontologists who aim to support a commitment to challenging, opposing and changing ways in which ageing is socially constructed (Minkler, 1996; Martinson and Minkler, 2006) and to focus instead on issues related to social justice, social inequalities, equity and marginalisation across the life course (Ziegler and Scharf, 2014). In this context, ageing is

viewed as a social construct, influenced by structural political and economic inequalities, experiences of ageing across the life course, and personal histories (Phillipson, 1998).

With the aim to transform societal structures and systems, critical gerontology investigates the intersections and dynamics between individual, community/cultural and societal influences on ageing. The critical perspective challenges the predominantly biomedical and problem-oriented parameters that often frame debates on ageing. Recognising older adults as part of an increasingly diverse group of citizens, critical gerontologists draw on the difference between content diversity and approach diversity. The former, as more commonly used by traditional social gerontologists, describes group differences in terms of ethnicity, class or gender. The latter takes into account power relations and how they influence inequalities across the life course (Holstein and Minkler, 2007). This differentiation between the two ways of researching diversity in later life is just one example of how a critical gerontology approach aims to challenge how ageing is shaped by structural and societal influences. The critical gerontological understanding of structures and their association with advantage or disadvantage in later life inherently calls for progressive social change. In order to induce this social change as part of critical gerontology research, Holstein and Minkler (2007) suggest using "methodological bricolage". By broadening the understanding of what is considered an 'acceptable form of knowing', critical gerontologists can take 'methodological risks' and draw on a broad range of research questions and methods. These can encompass, among others, personal narratives, fiction, poetry, film or participatory approaches. A fundamental responsibility in this methodological bricolage is to seek understanding rather than demanding broadly generalisable data. This understanding can be the basis for inducing social change. Indeed, participatory action research that places older adults in the centre of research not only as objects of study, but as co-learners and responsible stakeholders in the research process, can be one way for critical gerontologists to bring about social change (Holstein and Minkler, 2007; Ziegler and Scharf, 2014). The commitment to developing the notions of empowerment, citizenship and 'voice' are crucial to the goal of achieving social justice through participatory approaches in critical gerontology.

2.3   Social exclusion of older adults

The construct of social exclusion is closely linked to critical perspectives on ageing, as it emerged from efforts to consider disadvantage in its complexity, epitomised by Townsend's work on structural inequalities that lead to poverty in later life (Townsend, 1981; Walsh, Scharf and Keating, 2017). Rooted in this initial structural critique on poverty, the concept of social

exclusion widens the discourse on disadvantage towards considering citizenship rights and the ability to participate fully in society. By taking into account different individual, structural and societal factors of marginalisation, the concept of social exclusion seeks to explain disadvantage across different domains of life (Walsh, Scharf and Keating, 2017). However, despite the potential of considering social exclusion in gerontology, Walsh, Scharf and Keating (2017) critique that "little is known about the ways in which ageing and exclusion intersect across the life course" (p.82). Indeed, traditional measures of social exclusion still concentrate on material disadvantage as a main source of exclusion and consequently fail to capture the concept in its complex and multidimensional form. As a result of focusing mainly on economic factors as predictors of social exclusion, older people may be shown to be at less risk of exclusion than other social groups. This contradicts the growing empirical body of research that highlights interconnected forms of disadvantage in later life (Walsh *et al.*, 2021). In order to advance the agenda on social exclusion of older people, Walsh, Scharf and Keating (2007) define later life social exclusion as:

> *"a complex process that involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services as people age, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people across the varied and multiple domains of society." (Walsh, Scharf and Keating, 2017 adapted from Levitas et al. 2007)*

Using this definition as a starting point to explore the multidimensionality of social exclusion in later life, Walsh, Scharf and Keating (2007) undertook a review to explore how the social exclusion of older people is conceptually constructed. Drawing on previous work on the topic, they also summarise three elements that describe the dynamics of social exclusion in later life. First, exclusion can be accumulated throughout the life course. Second, older adults might be less able to lift themselves out of exclusion than people at earlier stages of the life course. Third, older people may be more vulnerable to exclusionary processes than people belonging to younger age groups. (Walsh, Scharf and Keating, 2017; Walsh *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, the authors identified that later life social exclusion can affect different domains of life, as indicated in Figure 1, namely 1) services, amenities and mobility, 2) material and financial resources, 3) social relations, 4) socio-cultural aspects, 5) neighbourhood and community, and 6) civic participation. As shown in Figure 2.1, each domain of the framework encompasses a variety of sub-dimensions, which can be interconnected. This might result in interrelationships "between different forms of exclusion where outcomes in one domain may contribute to broader processes that result in outcomes in other domains" (Walsh *et al.*, 2021, p.10) and therefore amplify experiences of exclusion for certain groups of older adults. For example, early empirical work conducted in England suggested that 36% of older people who live in deprived

urban areas were at risk of experiencing multiple forms of exclusion (Scharf, Phillipson and Smith, 2005). Recent evidence shows that older people who live in materially deprived conditions have higher risks of exclusion from social relations and are more prone to experiencing loneliness (Myck, Waldegrave and Dahlberg, 2021), thus highlighting the incremental effect of exclusion from one domain on others.
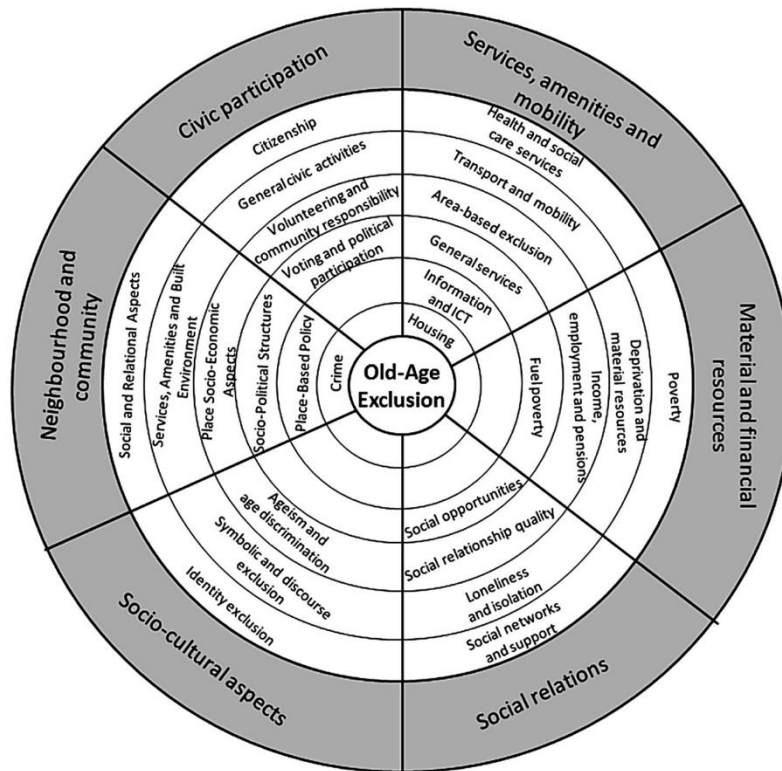
Figure 2.1: Social exclusion in later life framework (Walsh, Scharf and Keating, 2017)

2.3.1 Civic Exclusion

Civic exclusion has been identified as the least well researched area of later life exclusion (Walsh, Scharf and Keating, 2017) and remains insufficiently conceptualised (Torres *et al.*, 2017). According to Serrat and colleagues, civic exclusion in later life can be understood as:

> *"older people's inability to engage in informal and formal activities aimed at seeking improved benefits for others, the community, or wider society, or impacting on collective decision-making processes."* (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021b)

Whilst the social exclusion framework developed by Walsh and colleagues (2017) (Figure 2.1) distinguishes between exclusion from civic participation and exclusion from socio-cultural aspects of life, both domains can play into older adults' civic exclusion (Torres, 2021). The first domain of exclusion from civic participation, also referred to as socio-political exclusion,

examines barriers to civic and political participation (such as involvement in decision-making, collective power and limited agency), which hinder older adults' ability to exercise their citizenship rights to the fullest (Torres, 2021). The second domain of civic exclusion is the socio-cultural domain, which refers to a wider negative societal discourse on ageing or ageist assumptions, that furthers the exclusion of older people by neglecting complex identities and diversity in late life (Torres, 2021).

Civic activities have the potential to counteract social exclusion by supporting older people to express agency in decision-making processes and become fully involved in community life (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021). However, Serrat *et al.* point out that even though there is increasing research interest in both civic participation in later life and old-age social exclusion, the two discourses hardly overlap (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021b). Torres (2021) argues that understandings of civic exclusion need to draw further on more diverse conceptualisations of later life citizenship. This should include accounting for the intersectional nature of exclusion from citizenship activities beyond age, such as acknowledging gender, class, ethnicity or educational background (Torres *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, it requires a reconceptualisation from citizenship as predominantly 'active citizenship' or 'participative governance' towards more differentiated understandings of "how older people engage with policy related to social exclusion" (Torres *et al.*, 2017, p.7). A research agenda on civic exclusion should recognise the diverse ways in which older adults contribute, rather than labelling predominantly formal volunteering activities as "civic", which in turn leads to the marginalisation of older adults who engage in different ways. Indeed, as pointed out by critical gerontologists, by deliberatively ignoring diverse forms of civic participation by using the term interchangeably with volunteering (Martinson and Minkler, 2006), social and civic participation might be portrayed as a 'moral duty' and a normative expectation rather than a "tool for questioning structural sources of inequality and injustice" (Ziegler and Scharf, 2014, p.161). Measuring 'positive' or 'successful' ageing by civic productivity contributes further to a marginalisation of people who are unable or choose not to participate (Martinson and Minkler, 2006). Additionally, Ziegler and Scharf highlight that "where individuals and groups have been marginalised and subject to social injustices over a lifetime, or even over generations, a lack of personal and community resources may result in few choices remaining open for individuals or groups regarding their contributions to society" (Ziegler and Scharf, 2014, p.162).

In their reconceptualisation of later life civic exclusion, Serrat *et al.* suggest the need to examine critically four areas that underpin exclusion from civic activities in later life: 1) the

multidimensionality of civic engagement in terms of moving beyond volunteering as a main focus; 2) the diversity of the older population, taking into account various abilities and choices of participation; 3) the dynamics and experiences of engagement across the life course; and 4) the culturally-embedded processes that characterise civic engagement on a micro, meso and macro level (Figure 2.2) (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021b).
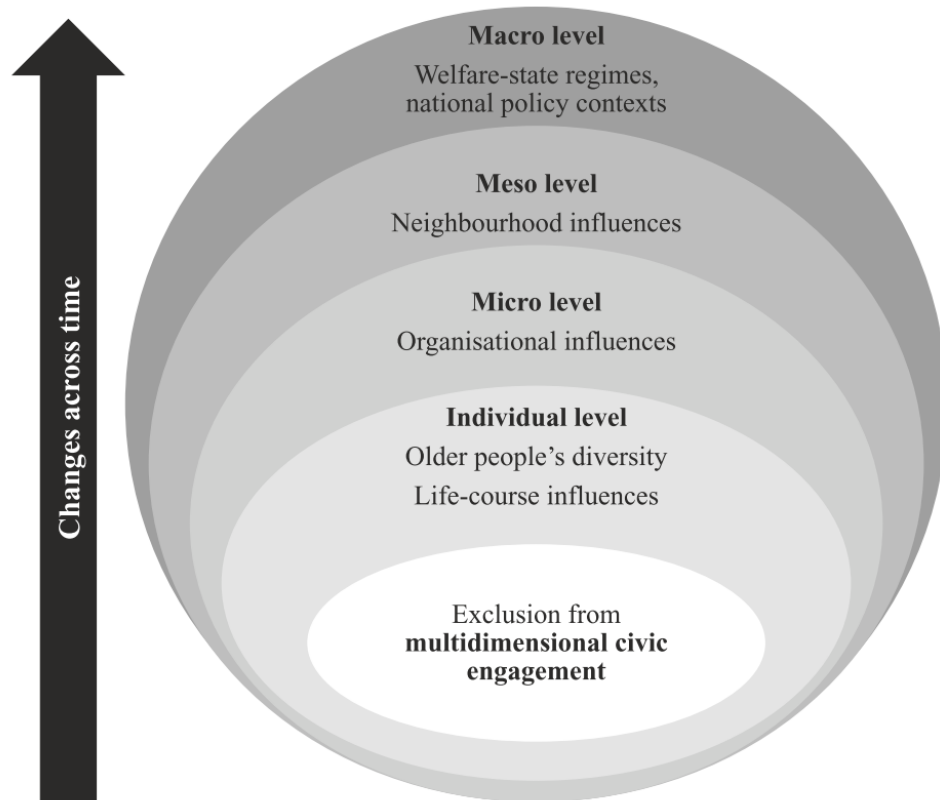
Figure 2.2: Serrat, Scharf and Villar (2021) Proposed conceptual framework for studying exclusion from civic engagement in later life

Considering these four underlying dimensions of later life civic exclusion, as proposed by Serrat, Scharf and Villar (2021), can simultaneously deepen our understanding of barriers to older adults' civic participation. As outlined in the next section, similar to civic exclusion, civic participation manifests through different individual or collective actions and is shaped on the macro level through political and structural conditions.

2.4   Civic participation in later life

Civic participation as a concept that responds to risks of social exclusion in later life focuses on viewing older adults as a 'resource' for their communities (Ziegler and Scharf, 2014). A discourse on citizenship in later life emerged in the 1990s, "as older people themselves began to demand a greater say in the provisions and decisions that affect their lives" which led to a

re-framing of older adults as "a resource and not just a problem" (Bernard, Ray and Reynolds, 2020, p.97). Over recent years, this interest in older adults' civic participation has grown steadily.

Civic participation, broadly defined as the potential to become engaged in shaping one's community (Adler and Goggin, 2005), has become a growing interest in gerontology research due to its potential to intersect positively with many domains of life, such as community engagement, political participation, and also its association with increased individual benefits in terms of health, wellbeing and life satisfaction (McMunn *et al.*, 2009; Scharf, McDonald and Atkins, 2016; Serrat *et al.*, 2019). The term civic participation is often used to refer to "voluntary activity focused on helping others, achieving a public good or solving a community problem, including work undertaken either alone or in cooperation with others in order to effect change" (Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014, p.6). However, due to its multidimensionality and complexity, the concept of civic participation can include many, often differing, definitions. The different foci of these definitions include the description of political, social, and moral factors of engagement (Berger, 2009), the differentiation between manifest forms of political participation and latent social forms (Ekman and Amnå, 2012) or conceptualising newer forms of digitally networked participation (Theocharis and Van Deth, 2016). Furthermore, some aspects of the concept remain under-researched and under-developed within the discipline of gerontology, hindering the development of adequate policy and practice responses aimed at supporting older adults' civic participation (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021).

Conceptualisations of civic participation typically encompass three dimensions. The first dimension involves differentiating between civic engagement and civic participation, with the former emphasising a more passive attentiveness to social and political issues and the latter implying some form of civic action (Berger, 2009; Ekman and Amnå, 2012; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014). A second dimension encompasses activities conducted either on an individual or collective basis (Adler and Goggin, 2005; Ekman and Amnå, 2012). The third dimension addresses the goals of civic activities, which can be primarily political or non-political with a social or civil purpose (Adler and Goggin, 2005; Berger, 2009; Ekman and Amnå, 2012; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014). Based on the last two dimensions, which take into account the individual or collective and political or social dimensions of civic participation, Serrat, Scharf, Villar and Gómez (2019) developed a framework that encompasses four kinds of civic activities (Table 2.1). Subsequently, as part of a scoping review on later life civic participation, Serrat *et al.* mapped 429 studies onto the different types of older adults' civic

participation. The review highlighted that not all types of later life civic participation received the same attention in research. A vast majority of papers looked at collective forms of social participation (Type 2 activities), with a strong focus on older adults' participation in volunteering activities. By contrast, comparably fewer studies examined other types of civic participation. Especially individual forms of social participation (Type 1 activities), for example informal helping behaviours to support neighbours, received the least attention in research whilst at the same time representing the most common form of older adults' civic participation. Additionally, the review showed that research focused heavily on older adults' social participation over forms of political participation, reinforcing a conception of social actors sustaining the welfare state, rather than as political agents "whose voices and opinions must be acknowledged in decision-making processes" (Serrat *et al.*, 2019, p.9). As a result, Serrat *et al.* (2019) suggested broadening the research agenda with regard to:

1) exploring under-researched types of later life civic participation, such as Type 1 activities;

2) contextual factors, taking into account different levels of older adults' civic participation in the micro (individual participation), meso (communities and neighbourhoods), and macro (global) context; and

3) the dynamics of civic participation across the life course.

	Civic participation	
	Social participation	Political participation
Individual forms	Type 1 Prosocial/helping/altruistic behaviours outside family Donation of money/in-kind supports to charities/NGOs	Type 3 Voting Contacting political representatives Donating money to political parties and organisations Signing petitions Writing letters/emails/blogs/articles with political content Boycotting and political consumption Other individual political manifestations
Collective forms	Type 2 Participation in volunteering, community, or charitable organisations	Type 4 Running for or holding a public office Working on campaigns Participation in political organisations or forums Protest activities Participation in social movement organisations Other collective political manifestations

Table 2.1: Later life civic participation framework, Serrat *et al.* 2019

In a more recent study, Serrat *et al.* (2021) extend the initial civic participation framework by exploring the concept of civic engagement more in depth as a concept that subsumes civic and political participation. Based on their literature review on civic engagement in later life, they define the concept as "unpaid, non-professional activities aimed at seeking improved benefit for others, the community, or wider society, or impacting on collective decision-making processes" (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021). Building on their framework of later life civic participation (Table 2.1), the authors propose to include a fifth dimension, which relates specifically to civic engagement: individual forms of social participation *within* families (Table 2.2). Additionally, rather than distinguishing political participation by its collective or individual dimension, the civic engagement framework outlines institutionalised (conventional) and non-institutionalised (unconventional) forms of later life political participation (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021). By differentiating between institutionalised and non-institutionalised forms of civic engagement, civic activities can be captured in the framework in more detail, for example with regard to newer forms of engagement, such as lifestyle-related or less-formalised forms of participation (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021). As the institutionalised/non-institutionalised forms of political participation differ slightly from those individual/collective forms as proposed in the civic participation framework (Table 2.2), I have adapted Serrat *et al.'s* proposed framework for civic engagement activities in Table 2.2 and highlighted changes from the civic participation framework in red.

Civic engagement			
Social participation		Political participation	
Individual forms	Collective forms	Institutionalised	Non-institutionalised
Type 1 (within family)	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5
Caregiving	Participation in volunteering, community, or charitable organisations	Voting Contacting political representatives Donating money to political parties and organisations	Political persuasion Signing petitions Writing letters/emails/blogs/articles with political content
Type 2 (outside family) Prosocial/helping/altruistic behaviours outside family Donation of money/in-kind supports to charities/NGOs		Running for or holding a public office Working on campaigns Participation in political organisations or forums	Buycotting, boycotting and political consumption Protest activities Participation in social movement organisations

Table 2.2: Taxonomy of civic engagement activities adapted from Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021

The changes highlighted in Table 2.2 echo Serrat *et al.'s* 2019 findings, which stated that, in particular, political forms of participation in later life need to be conceptualised further with regard to the difference in civic participation and civic engagement (Serrat *et al.*, 2019).

To summarise, the frameworks presented in the previous two sections (Figures 2.1 and 2.2, Tables 2.1 and 2.2) intend to support the development of a new research agenda on older people's civic participation and associated factors for their civic exclusion (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021). Adopting a critical gerontology perspective, for example by considering diversity in later life and taking into account different individual and societal layers that shape older adults' civic participation, it is crucial to investigate the multidimensionality of this concept further. For the purpose of this project, I refer to the civic participation framework (Table 2.1), which outlines four types of civic activities, as it best reflects the collective dimension of my participatory action research project rather than individual perspectives.

2.5   Age-friendly cities and communities: promoting later life civic participation

One global project that can be understood as an initiative aimed at supporting older adults' civic participation is the World Health Organization's (WHO) age-friendly cities and communities (AFCC) initiative. As a response to the intersecting global trends of population ageing and urbanisation (World Health Organization, 2007), cities and communities across the world work to promote active ageing and create accessible and inclusive city structures (World Health Organization, 2018). While some countries, such as Ireland (Age Friendly Ireland, 2019), have established national age-friendly initiatives, others have created national networks that seek to harness learning and share best practice between age-friendly cities and communities. In the United Kingdom (UK), 41 cities, towns and counties currently belong to a network of age-friendly communities (Centre for Ageing Better, 2021). Rooted in the discourse on healthy and active ageing, age-friendly cities aim to provide a space to promote and maintain physical and mental health across the life course (World Health Organization, 2018). The AFCC initiative is based on a framework that emerged in 2005 from an empirical project involving focus groups of older people in cities around the world. Participants identified the following eight domains as important: Social participation; communication and information; civic participation and employment; housing; transportation; community support and health services; outdoor spaces and buildings; and respect and social inclusion (Buffel, Phillipson and Rémillard-Boilard, 2019) (Figure 2.3).
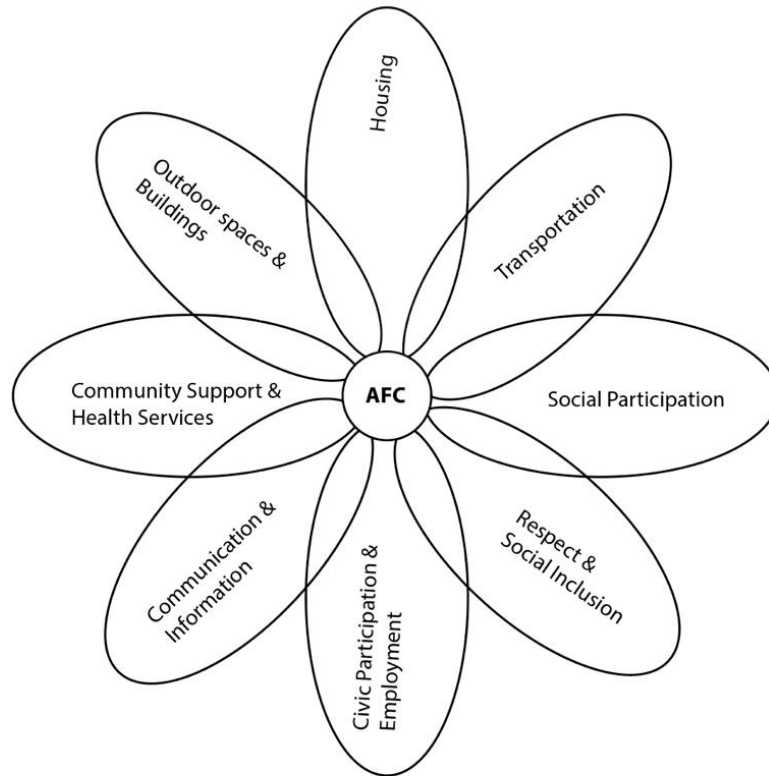
Figure 2.3: Age-friendly city core domains (World Health Organization, 2007)

These domains comprise core features that can be used to assess the relative age-friendliness of different cities and communities (World Health Organization, 2007). Despite the checklist format developed by the WHO to capture these core features, some researchers regard it as more helpful to frame age-friendliness as an ongoing process and commitment to improve the physical and social environment of a city in response to the challenges and opportunities arising from demographic ageing (Liddle *et al.*, 2014; World Health Organization, 2018). The process to become an age-friendly city is based on a cyclical model for continuous improvement that is driven by older people themselves. It involves four stages: engage and understand; plan; act; and measure (World Health Organization, 2018). While the age-friendly concept can be implemented in different ways across the domains, underlying the framework is a life-course perspective that acknowledges diversity at all life stages and promotes citizen contributions to all areas of community life (World Health Organization, 2007).

One concept that lies within the discourse on age-friendly cities and civic engagement is that of 'urban citizenship', which recognises older adults as active agents who have a right to make full use of the city (Buffel, Phillipson and Scharf, 2012). In their 'Manifesto for the age-friendly

movement', Buffel and Handler (2018) argue that the concept of the 'right to the city' includes appropriating urban spaces, participating in decision making and influencing strategies of urban planning and regeneration. This parallels key ideas linked to the concept of civic participation as outlined in section 2.4. Like the concept of civic participation, urban citizenship needs to be considered alongside an exclusion perspective, as urban spaces are characterised by growing inequalities within and between cities, including a trend towards increasing age-segregation. Even though most work focuses on social exclusion of older adults in urban settings, research in rural Ireland has highlighted that addressing older adults' social exclusion in rural communities through informal practices strengthened the communities' age-friendliness (Walsh *et al.*, 2014). Regardless of environmental context, these findings show that preventing the exclusion of older people from participating in age-friendly initiatives, especially people belonging to disadvantaged groups, involves ensuring that all older people have opportunities to exercise their right to have their voice heard (Buffel and Handler, 2018). The WHO AFC initiative recommends a check list with action points to promote older adults' civic participation. These encompass amongst others the promotion of volunteering, i.e. 'a range of flexible options for older volunteers is available, with training, recognition, guidance and compensation for personal costs', or highlight a more structural support of older adults' decision making, i.e. 'decision-making bodies in public, private and voluntary sectors encourage and facilitate membership of older people' (World Health Organization, 2007a). However, this checklist has not been updated since 2007.

Accompanying the global age-friendly agenda has been the rapidly increasing digitalisation of cities and communities, a third global trend that has largely been overlooked in research and policy making relating to age-friendly cities and communities. However, the intersection of civic participation and widespread digitalisation remains under-explored within the age-friendly city framework (Marston and Van Hoof, 2019) and in gerontology research more generally (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021). Whilst some newer conceptualisations of civic participation incorporate digitally networked forms, such as participation through social media, (Theocharis, 2015), most definitions "were coined during the pre-Internet years, disregarding therefore the many channels for participation that information and communication technologies have opened up" (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021, p.3). Whilst some studies examine links between digital tools and civic participation more generally (Livingstone and Markham, 2008; Lukensmeyer, Goldman and Stern, 2012; Theocharis, 2015), the manifold ways in which older adults can and do use digital technologies for their civic participation remain under-researched. This lack of consideration of digital technologies within the discourse on civic participation and

age-friendliness necessitates a review of HCI literature, taking older adults' interactions with digital technologies as the starting point from which to consider citizenship in later life, which I present in the next section.

2.6 Human-Computer Interaction and ageing: from older end-users to citizens

In this section, I demonstrate the trajectory of the development of HCI ageing research from accessibility and end-user assumptions towards community-led and civic approaches. In order to emphasise the intersection between technology and ageing research, I draw on key ideas from the related fields of HCI and Gerontechnology, with Gerontechnology being described as "a relatively recent domain of design research that explores the impact of technology on the quality of older [persons' lives] and the process of individual aging" (Peine, Rollwagen and Neven, 2014, p. 203). Even though there is a degree of overlap between the fields, HCI projects tend to focus more on design and development of digital technologies, and Gerontechnology takes a more theoretical and gerontological-driven stance on informing these design practices (Peine, Rollwagen and Neven, 2014). While my literature review is based predominantly on HCI research and sourced from publications from the field of Computing, I incorporate theoretical insights from the field of Gerontechnology in order to shed light on design, development and theory at the same time.

A major critical analysis of HCI literature over the last 30 years conducted by Vines, Pritchard, Wright, Olivier and Brittain (2015) identified that discourses around technology and ageing can be affected by ageist assumptions, with technology primarily viewed as a solution to reduce perceived burdens of old age, such as biomedical or social decline. Despite the increasing number of studies on ageing and HCI across the most prominent HCI publishing venues, the analysis revealed that HCI publications on ageing lacked diversity, with most papers viewing ageing as a problem which can be managed by technologies. Even though the field of social computing has a history of predominantly treating age as a factor for accessibility and assistive technologies (Vines *et al.*, 2015), the perception is changing and a more differentiated view of later life is increasingly supported through movements within the field. This includes research that assumes a 'situated community' approach and takes into account the "dynamic and mutually-shaping relationship between technologies and their everyday practices" (Righi, Sayago and Blat, 2017) or highlights the need to research diversity in later life (Rogers *et al.*, 2014; Lazar *et al.*, 2017; Righi, Sayago and Blat, 2017; Neves, Waycott and Malta, 2018). In particular the last decade of ageing research in HCI has been marked by regular attempts to re-think the role of technologies in older people's lives and I outline some milestones below.

In 2008, Lindley, Harper and Sellen conducted a literature review which spanned the fields of gerontology and HCI (Lindley, Harper and Sellen, 2008). Despite previous attempts of interdisciplinary research between Gerontology and HCI (such as Gerontechnology), they identified a persisting lack of cross-over between the fields. The authors highlight that this independency resulted in a lack of gerontological research feeding into HCI design iterations and vice versa. With the aim to take into account a social dimension of technology development for older adults, Lindley *et al.* (2008) highlight design directions on how technologies can foster connectedness and social relationships in later life. This framework still positions older adults as end-users of a technological product, but attempts to bridge HCI and gerontology through proposed design recommendations that take into account different values that affect older adults' relationships, such as control over the technology, asymmetry of relationships or intrusiveness of a technology. In 2011, Essén and Östlund pointed out the need for an attitudinal shift in the design of products and services. Until then, older adults were primarily viewed as laggards in the adoption of technologies and forced into a role as passive consumers of products, with their needs determined by the technology designers. The authors argue that by involving older adults in the early-stage design of a local service, new business ideas can be generated with the end goal to serve the increasingly growing market of economically wealthy older adults. This approach values older adults as sources of innovation in the early design stages and, thus, as designers of systems that ultimately serve themselves as active consumers (Essén and Östlund, 2011). Whilst this approach of involving older users in the design of products with the goal to 'unlock the longevity economy' (Coughlin, 2017) and market digital technologies within the context of active ageing is now relatively common (Peine and Neven, 2019), it is also characterised by a paternalistic framing of older technology users as passive recipients of technologies (Peine, Rollwagen and Neven, 2014).

Additionally, the need to move from 'designing for older adults' as a homogenous user group has shifted, looking not only at benefits of involving older adults in the design of products such as outlined by Essén and Östlund (2011), but also with regard to public services. Governments increasingly engage with co-design processes for the digitalisation of their public services, balancing the society's digital transformation whilst at the same time trying to ensure that nobody is left behind. However, older adults are not commonly participants of these co-design processes, because of a lower uptake of digital government services and a lack of experience in participating in co-design processes more generally (Jarke, 2021). Involving older adults in a user-centric design process for public services addresses how older people can actively shape digital public governance (Jarke, 2021) whilst at the same time being end-users of the product.

Considering citizenship more widely beyond the design of digital public services, the prioritisation of "online participation" by governments also impacts older adults' civic participation. In particular, political formats of civic participation now require older activists to have sufficient creative digital skills if they are to participate civically and become active contributors to a community (No, Mook and Schugurensky, 2016). In the following section, I therefore examine more closely the interdisciplinary space of older adults' civic participation and digitalisation, digital citizenship in age-friendly cities and how the frameworks of digital inclusion and participation relate to a Digital Civics agenda.

2.7   Supporting older adults' digital citizenship

Aligned with the HCI trajectory of moving beyond accessibility research to a more differentiated view on later life, this section highlights the need to reframe digital inclusion approaches towards digital participatory citizenship – or Digital Civics. The Digital Civics agenda has been of growing interest in the field of HCI (Olivier and Wright, 2015; Vlachokyriakos *et al.*, 2016). It seeks to understand how technologies can be designed in the context of civic interactions and experiences. This can be done by developing participatory systems that enable citizen engagement in a relational rather than transactional way, by focusing on the co-production and co-ownership of political thinking and action. A foundation for this development is that governments move beyond traditional consultation processes towards an open dialogue with citizens and focus on the creation of technological systems that value differences in experience, values and knowledge (Olivier and Wright, 2015), thus opening up a space for activism (Asad *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, work within this space should recognise and acknowledge the effects of the digital divide, a concept that highlights social divisions with regard to access, distribution and skills of digital technologies (Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal, 2007). The growing digitalisation of public services and ubiquity of digital technologies in daily life, which has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, increases the impact of digital divides on older adults (Age UK, 2018). The numbers of older adults using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are increasing in the UK. Over 98% of UK premises have access to broadband and internet (Office of Communications, 2018), and 83% of adults aged 65-74 and 47% of adults aged 75 and over use the internet (Office of Communications, 2019). The UK government predominantly aims to address digital inclusion in later life to promote access to digital government services and "tackle wider social issues, support economic growth and close equality gaps" (Government UK, 2014). However, taking into account that older adults are at higher risk of exclusion from social and civic activities than other groups in society (Walsh, Scharf and Keating, 2017), the need to include participatory

online skills in digital inclusion strategies becomes evident. A Digital Civics research approach can support communities, including marginalised communities, in their civic and digital participation (Olivier and Wright, 2015). Indeed, the work presented in this thesis adopts a more relational approach to exploring the interdisciplinary space between gerontology and HCI. In my thesis I will therefore consider older adults' digital citizenship beyond government initiatives as a new direction for research focussing on later life civic participation.

2.7.1   *Digital citizenship in age-friendly environments*

One way of promoting participatory frameworks that support older adults' civic participation in digital spaces is through integrating them as part of age-friendly city initiatives. Within increasingly digitalised cities and communities, there is a fundamental need to reconsider what 'urban citizenship' (as outlined in section 2.5) entails and to reframe the potential role to be played by older adults as 'digital citizens' in shaping age-friendly cities and communities. Whilst ICTs have been acknowledged as resources that might support older adults' involvement in local decision making and "navigating and designing their environment" (Buffel and Handler, 2018, p.281), consideration of the role of digital technologies is lacking within the WHO AFC framework (Marston and Van Hoof, 2019). As a response, Marston and van Hoof have proposed a revision of the WHO framework to include technology as part of a smart age-friendly ecosystem that supports older adults' daily lives through ubiquitous and assistive technologies (Marston and Van Hoof, 2019). More recently, a revised definition of age-friendliness has emphasised the role of digital technologies within the age-friendly city setting:

> *Underpinned by a commitment to respect and social inclusion, an age-friendly community is engaged in a strategic and ongoing process to facilitate active ageing by optimising the community's physical, social and digital environments and its supporting infrastructure* (Liddle *et al.*, 2020, p.19)

Adopting the above definition of age-friendliness to reflect the crucial role of the digital environment as a facilitator of active ageing in age-friendly cities and communities, there is a need for research to explore the use of digital technologies beyond resources, assistance and infrastructure, but for a civic purpose.

Against this background, I now highlight the concept of urban citizenship and its digital aspects. I propose a shift from technology as a solution in the age-friendly city towards a focus on the digital civic contributions of older adults, in order to expand on the discourse on technology within the age-friendly city. Digital citizenship can be broadly defined as the ability to participate digitally within society on a regular basis (Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal, 2007).

This aligns with the recent movement within the HCI community towards recognising forms of older adults' engagement with civic technologies in community settings (Righi, Sayago and Blat, 2017; Clarke, 2018) and paying more attention to co-design methodologies with older adults (Vines *et al.*, 2012; Frohlich, Lim and Ahmed, 2016; Leong and Robertson, 2016). One example of a co-design process within an age-friendly city was provided by Clarke, Crivellaro, Di Mascio and Wright, who used participatory media to explore older adults' engagement with the city in the context of urban planning (Clarke *et al.*, 2016; Clarke, 2018). In particular, the interdisciplinary design team considered "how technology can support documentation and re-envisioning of the age-friendly city of the future" (Clarke *et al.*, 2016). The study outlined how technology could be a mediating factor in urban planning contexts, facilitating discussions between local councils and older citizens. The contribution of Clarke *et al.* is important in demonstrating that digital media in particular can support older adults in making active contributions within their neighbourhood, highlighting key concerns for digital age-friendly initiatives to look at ageing beyond accessibility.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the imperative for the active participation of older adults in public debates (Ayalon *et al.*, 2020). The concept of having a voice, as articulated by McCarthy and Wright (2015), relates directly to civic participation as it can foster connectedness and interactions within the community that can lead to social action. The voice can play a constitutive role in communities, as diverse community dialogues can be generated, inclusive of a variety of different and differing voices (McCarthy and Wright, 2015). In the light of the pandemic, a stronger focus on "digital technology" as a key feature of participation in age-friendly debates has therefore become inevitable. The body of work described above highlights the current, somewhat limited, discourse on technology and its role in supporting citizenship in age-friendly cities. While the WHO age-friendly program has operated in an increasingly digitalised environment, linked policies and initiatives have, to date, not sufficiently addressed the concept of digital citizenship in later life. Given the pace with which the digitalisation of society is progressing, there is a need for a more differentiated perspective on digital participation in later life and on pathways that support digital citizenship of older adults. In the next section I outline the concepts of digital inclusion and digital participation as currently implemented in the UK.

2.7.2 *Frameworks: Digital Inclusion and Digital Participation in later life*

As noted in section 2.7, governments have recognised the importance of digital inclusion and made it a central feature of their policy making. In the following paragraphs, I critically assess

the state of the art of the concept of digital inclusion and contrast it with the more recent debates concerning digital participation.

Digital Inclusion

The term digital inclusion, as defined by the UK government, refers to "having the access, skills and motivation to confidently go online to access the opportunities of the internet" (UK Government, 2017). UK digital inclusion policy mainly focuses on four factors in relation to interventions: "access (the ability to connect to the internet and go online), skills (the ability to use the internet and online services), confidence (a fear of crime, lack of trust or not knowing where to start online) and motivation (understanding why using the internet is relevant and helpful)" (UK Government, 2017). As part of its digital inclusion strategy, the UK government supports a range of interventions designed to increase both digital literacy and internet access, such as offering digital buddies schemes or basic digital skills training sessions in local libraries (Government UK, 2014). These skill sessions commonly cover topics such as turning on and controlling a device, connecting to the internet, using e-mails and other online communication tools, and staying safe and legal online. Users of digital inclusion services are classified in categories leading from "actively disengaged" and "reluctantly online" to "confident explorers" (Government UK, 2014). As older adults have lower rates of digital literacy than younger people (Age UK, 2018), they represent a key target group for such digital inclusion programmes (UK Government, 2017). However, these activities fail to take into account digital inequalities and diversity among older adults (Hargittai, Piper and Morris, 2018). Viewing older adults simply as passive recipients or consumers of digital public services paints a one-sided picture, under-emphasising many older people's increasing involvement with digital media and their participation in online communities (Burmeister, 2012). Additionally, with its current emphasis on access rather than active involvement, the concept of digital inclusion fails to recognise the importance of digital participation. In fact, the existing policy approaches contribute to the 'othering' of older people as vulnerable and "digital immigrants", providing a marked contrast to younger "digital natives" who are typically perceived as actively using digital technologies as part of their creative expression and civic activism (Rheingold, 2008; Herold, 2009). Creating opportunities for older adults to actively shape civic life, as opposed to solely becoming digitally included in order to access services, is largely absent from UK government strategies.

Digital Participation

Civic participation becomes increasingly digitalised as citizens start to create and sign petitions online or engage with local government services digitally. Alongside this development, growing numbers of older adults are assuming active civic roles online (Bloch and Bruce, 2011), suggesting that digital participation should be prioritised in digitalisation strategies. The term digital participation "refers to the active involvement in digital society through the use of modern information and communication technology" (Seifert and Rössel, 2019) and forms a key concept for digital citizenship. The concept acknowledges digital inequalities in whether people participate actively or passively in digital society depending on usage, skills, social support and self-perceptions (Seifert and Rössel, 2019). According to Seifert and Rössel (2019), access to the internet (or lack thereof) is merely one element of digital participation, with more skills needed to achieve active involvement. Indeed, other studies have conceptualised digital competence beyond the basic technical level, highlighting the importance of social, critical and creative skills (Helsper and Eynon, 2013), and also putting content creation at the centre of internet skills frameworks (Van Dijk and Van Deursen, 2014).

Considering the wider impact of digital participation beyond access issues entails rethinking the role of digital technologies in older people's lives. To visualise the differences between the concepts of digital inclusion and digital participation, I contrast both frameworks in Table 2.3. First, the table compares the respective goals of digital inclusion, as defined by the UK government, and digital participation, based on my own interpretation of the aforementioned literature. Second, it outlines the skillsets that older people need in order to achieve these goals. Digital skills and goals, as defined in digital inclusion strategies, are mainly focused on access and accessibility features of technologies, whilst the concept of digital participation is oriented towards developing creative digital skills to support older adults' active contributions in digital societies. Third, I compare the outcomes of both concepts, which aim to either support older adults as recipients of digital services or as active citizens who shape civic life online.

	Goals	**Skillset**	**Outcome**
Digital Inclusion	Motivation (understand why the internet is helpful) Access to the internet Strengthen confidence (fear, lack of trust, not knowing where to start online)	Basic digital skills (e.g. turn on and control a device, connect to the internet, use e-mails and other online communication tools, stay safe and legal online)	Older adults as recipients / consumers of digital services
Digital Participation	Active participation in digital society	Contributing content and creative digital skills (e.g. creating videos on YouTube or TikTok, digital design for online campaigns or newsletters)	Active citizens who shape civic life using digital technologies

Table 2.3: Differences between digital inclusion and digital participation

Complementing the discourse on ageing and digital participation in Gerontechnology, Kolland and Wanka (2019) note that sociological discourse on age and technology is increasingly based on quantifiable standards and mainly health-oriented, with the aim to reduce functional decline or enhance self-optimisation in later life. This primarily considers a binary perspective of use vs. non-use of technologies (Kolland and Wanka, 2019). Viewing technology use in later life as a dynamic process, rather than as binary or static, can support a shift towards acknowledging personal patterns not only of why people choose to engage, but also of how and when they engage with technologies (Kolland and Wanka, 2019). This in turn creates more understanding of the active digital participation of older citizens. Indeed, scholars highlight a complex interplay of personal, social, and technological factors that affect older people's digital participation, such as external structures (e.g. living arrangements and social contexts) or internal structures (e.g. attitudes towards a technology or health factors) (Neves, Waycott and Malta, 2018). Additionally, multiple forms of exclusion, such as the relationship between social and digital inequalities (Wanka and Gallistl, 2018), can affect how people choose to engage digitally. Such approaches of looking at digital participation more holistically, however, are largely absent from digital strategies in countries like the UK.

2.8   Content creation: new pathways to older adults' digital participation

Making older people's voices public in digital media spaces can be one way of supporting older adults' digital participation and strengthening the wider recognition of their digital citizenship. By stereotypically viewing older adults as a homogenous group, mainstream media can fail to reflect diversity in later life, especially with regard to active older adults who positively use technologies to meet their life aspirations. While seldom explicitly identified as an independent form of civic participation, digital content creation underpins different types of civic activity, especially in the political domain. Taking the framework of Serrat *et al.* (2019) as an example, this might involve tasks such as "writing letters / emails / blogs / articles with political content" (Serrat *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, older adults are increasingly civically participating in and actively contributing to digital spaces by creating their own content. One example is the creation of blogs, which have been shown to support the self-expression of older adults and in some cases provide a meaningful activity when transitioning towards retirement (Celdran, Serrat and Villar, 2019; Celdrán *et al.*, 2021). Another study by Brewer and Piper (2016) examined older adults' creation of blogs in 20 semi-structured interviews. Blogging was found to support older adults' development of identity, by providing meaning and value throughout retirement, and to enable a sense of community that had positive effects on the older content creators' wellbeing. Additionally, this study showed that one of the key motivations for producing content lies in "being advocates for older people" (Brewer and Piper, 2016), however, this civic focus on content creation is less common in the literature (see section 2.8.1). Other studies have examined reasons that underlie older women's use of Instagram. One such reason was to encourage and inspire other women aged 50 and over to show up in digital spaces, alongside the critique of a lack of an adequate representation of older women in the mainstream media (McGrath, 2018). With regard to videos and YouTube, Ferreira, Sayago and Blat (2017) conducted an ethnographic study that explored the motivations of older adults to produce and share YouTube videos. They found that the appropriation of digital videos reinforced and enriched their participants' inter- and intragenerational communication and recognition within their local communities. Additionally, the findings echoed that creativity, meaningful sharing and joy underpinned their participants' motivations for engaging with video content creation as an activity (Ferreira, Sayago and Blat, 2017). In a further study by Ferreira *et al.* (2019), comparing older adults' active use of ICT across three countries (Spain, Denmark and Brazil), the social appropriation of content produced by older people was identified as the most important goal for engaging with content creation. As two main social reasons, the older participants aimed to create digital records of the family and keep memories of trips, which could be circulated amongst younger generations. Other motivations to engage with ICTs

creatively were to digitalise papers related to hobbies or other interests, and to heighten self-perceived digital inclusion achieved through increased ICT skills (Ferreira, Sayago and Blat, 2019).

Despite these positive examples of older adults who create digital content, older people are still not commonly perceived as active contributors of content in digital spaces (Waycott *et al.*, 2013). Indeed, some might not even see themselves as producers of content (Celdran, Serrat and Villar, 2019) or recognise the civic participatory value of such activity. Waycott *et al.* suggest that this misperception might result from a difference in digital engagement compared to younger producers (Waycott *et al.*, 2013). This is reflected in unique motivations and considerations that apply to older adults as content creators independent of the platform, such as respect for privacy which means that many older adults tend to engage in a more selective, controlled and meaningful process of content sharing (Ferreira, Sayago and Blat, 2019), providing tailored content relevant to smaller audiences or their families. While the audience is a motivating factor for content creation at all ages, some older adults view content creation activities predominantly as a social interaction compared to younger people who tend to further their self-expression through online content creation (Brewer and Piper, 2016). Producing content relevant to their audience gives rise to different considerations about where their audience comes from, and how to attract a bigger audience, cultivate a following and maintain an audience (Brewer and Piper, 2016). Being able to network with audiences is especially relevant to achieving potential interests of being socially connected in later life and using media technologies as a way to create new relationships (Lazar *et al.*, 2017). Adding to Vines *et al.*'s (2015) critique, that the design of technologies often neglects social interactions for the benefit of focusing on health, Brewer and Piper (2016) suggest that the creation of blogs can support a representation of dynamic experiences of growing older. They argue that the design of future technological systems should consider a developmental trajectory in later life and incorporate opportunities for reciprocity of interaction, to support the social aspects of content creation (Brewer and Piper, 2016). Regarding the design of technological systems that support older adults in their content creation activities, Sayago *et al.* pointed out a decade ago that there is no need to oversimplify or design special technologies for older age groups (Sayago, Sloan and Blat, 2011; Sayago, Forbes and Blat, 2012). Indeed, all the studies cited in this section concerned pre-existing forms of content creation available to all age groups, such as blogs (Brewer and Piper, 2016; Celdran, Serrat and Villar, 2019), Instagram (McGrath, 2018) and YouTube (Sayago, Forbes and Blat, 2012).

2.8.1 Content creation in a civic context

During the early stages of YouTube in 2009, Harley and Fitzpatrick, conducted a single case study to investigate online digital videos created by one older man, YouTuber 'Geriatric1927' (Harley and Fitzpatrick, 2009). They highlighted the importance of intergenerational communication and reciprocal learning as outcomes of his content creation activity. Looking mainly at connectedness as an outcome of content creation, the authors also outlined how the co-creation of content (between Geriatric1927 and his large audience) sparked a discourse within the online community. Even though civic activism might not have been the direct goal of this content creation activity, the case demonstrates the potential for older adults to use digital content creation to have a voice within a community and indirectly influence perceptions on age and ageing. Another example of using content creation to underpin digital civic participation is described by Durocher and Gauthier, who explore how mediatised food culture can be a way for older adults to engage with ideals of social justice and equality through blogging (Durocher and Gauthier, 2018). Like Harley and Fitzpatrick (2009), they show that representing opinions through media creates a socialisation space, fostering social connectedness in the digital world. Durocher and Gauthier emphasise that learning is essential to ensure autonomy in the digital space and for staying included in the mediatised culture. They also highlight that digital agency can lead to political agency, thus supporting future civic causes at both individual and collective levels. Focusing on content creation for civic participatory purposes can not only support people in taking the digital turn as citizens (Durocher and Gauthier, 2018) and oppose the view of older adults as digital immigrants (Vines *et al.*, 2015; Brewer and Piper, 2016), but also acknowledges ways in which media technologies empower older adults to maintain their independence. While such developments emphasise the civic purpose of older adults' digital participation, as noted above, this idea has yet to be directly picked up by researchers or government policies. Of additional potential to support older adults' digital citizenship might be age-friendly initiatives, which are based on the idea of 'continuous improvement', yet need to adapt to a digital agenda in more meaningful ways (Marston and Van Hoof, 2019).

2.8.2 Community Radio

One sector that advocates for citizen empowerment and participation through content creation is the community media sector. As a third sector, as opposed to public and commercial broadcasters, community media are non-profit and "owned by or accountable to the community that they seek to serve. Community media are open to participation in the programme making and management by members of the community and make up a highly diverse part of the

European media landscape" (European Parliament, 2007, p.3). They contribute significantly to a pluralistic media sector (UNESCO, 2021). Even though the commercial sector increasingly identifies niche audiences, "consumers are only worth targeting if they can afford the products advertised", which can result in the exclusion of certain groups of people, such as young children, older adults or people belonging to marginalised communities (Lewis, 2008, p.11). Given its participatory nature, community radio in particular offers a voice to different communities, especially those at risk of being ignored or misrepresented in the schedules of national broadcasters. It also encourages diversity in terms of its cultural, political and/or social contributions to sometimes international discourses (Mitchell, 2011). Community radio can serve as a powerful tool for people to "create and produce their own media narratives, challenging radio 'images' of themselves, countering negative stereotypes, and producing positive representations of their lives" (Mitchell and Baxter, 2006, p.74). Indeed, working with a group that included some older women, Rimmer (2021) describes that the production of community radio content can be "radio activism, as a breaker of actual and metaphorical silences, offering women agency and choice to participate more actively in media and in individual and community destinies" (p.4).

Community radio first emerged in the USA in the 1940s as "listener-sponsored" radio, developing into community shows broadcast via open access channels and leading to the creation of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters in the 1970s, which first outlined the values of community radio as non-profit, publicly accessible, and diverse (Lewis, 2008, p.11). Known by its French acronym, AMARC, The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, connects community radio broadcasters with the mission to contribute to the development of the movement worldwide. Its principles advocate for the "expression of different social, political and cultural movements, and the promotion of all initiatives supporting peace and friendship among peoples" (AMARC, 2020). This can happen for example by "promoting the right to communicate, being editorially independent of government, commercial and religious institutions and political parties, providing the right of access to minority and marginalised groups and promoting and protecting cultural and linguistic diversity, and being established as organisations which are not run with a view to profit and ensure their independence by being financed from a variety of sources" (Lewis, 2008, p.13). Despite its many differing definitions and names, as outlined on the AMARC website, the synonym of citizen media "best captures the spirit of the genre" (Lewis, 2008, p.12), highlighting the potential of community radio to strengthen civic participation by encouraging people to become more active in their communities. Indeed, the UK's Community Radio Order

emphasises the potential of community radio to deliver "social gain", which can encompass "a) reaching audiences underserved by existing radio, b) facilitating discussion and the expression of opinion, c) providing education and training to members of the public, and d) understanding the particular community and the strengthening of links within it." (Lewis, 2008, p.20). Indeed, producers of community radio often acquire the necessary skills "on the job" through programme making (Mitchell and Baxter, 2006), thus supporting skill development and cohesion within communities in a participatory way. One example of such participatory approach to community radio training is known as "Action Oriented Media Pedagogy", a concept in which learners can gain skills in communication competence, media competence, social environment, everyday life, and conscious, competent action based on their own life-reality (Günnel, 2008). Additionally, community media have shown the potential to build bridges between communities and public authorities, for example by allowing local stakeholder organisations to create dialogue and articulate issues that are of importance to local communities, which in turn help shape the delivery of local services (Manuel *et al.*, 2017). Such discussions contribute significantly to the formation of social capital as they can help foster tolerance by strengthening specific communities' interests and connecting them with other groups (European Parliament, 2007).

Like many third sector organisations, most community radio stations are predominantly volunteer led. As the Office of Communications reports for 2016 and 2017, while most community radio stations in the UK run on an income below £50,000 a year, they produce on average 89 hours of original live or pre-recorded content per station per week. On average, a UK community radio station is run by 72 volunteers collectively working for 187 hours a week (Office of Communications, 2017). Although a range of communities are represented in community radio (e.g. ethnic minorities, rural/urban, religious, and youth communities), older adults are seldom identified in the public discourse as producers of community radio shows in the UK, despite their high rates of participation in other volunteering activities. Shows produced by older adults appear to be more prevalent in the US, where many retirement communities, such as the Holly Creek Retirement Community, host their own radio stations or produce podcasts in order to reach fellow residents and support them with information (Making our seniors matter, 2015; Colorado Community Media, 2017; TuneIn, 2021). This lack of older people as producers of community radio in the UK could limit the success of the stations. Indeed, Van Vuuren's (2001) case study with three Australian community radio stations demonstrated that a station's financial success might be closely related to their volunteer structure, in particular regarding age and gender balance. Community radio stations with a

cross-section of age groups therefore performed better than those focusing primarily on young adults (van Vuuren, 2001), making a case for the inclusion of older adults in community radio programming. Another case study carried out by Order and O'Mahony in 2017, looked at an Australian community radio station providing readings of magazines and newspapers to blind people, which was predominantly run by older volunteers. When asked about their motivations to volunteer at the community radio station, most older adults mentioned a complex structure of social and self-development goals. Examples were amongst others the development of personal skills, but also making a contribution to the wider community. On the other hand, community radio stations might also provide a safe community for their volunteers, as Rimmer (2021) presents in her research with a group of women of whom some were older. For some, the community radio station provided food, for others a community that cared. Additionally, she highlights the intersectionality of disadvantage, and barriers, which might prevent people from participating in the production of community radio, such as racism, sexism, abuse, poverty, or poor education.

Overall, a nuanced complexity of motivations underpins older adults' intentions to volunteer in a community radio setting with the overall aim to build a purposeful identity. However, as mentioned in section 2.8.1, these intentions are rarely conceptualised as civic participation or a citizenship contribution by the volunteers themselves. Additionally, the authors argue that the shared values between the community radio sector and those of volunteers (e.g. focus on participation) can support older adults' citizenship (Order and O'Mahony, 2017). The few community radio shows produced by older adults that exist in the UK encompass different approaches: from focusing on nostalgia, such as Angel Radio (Angel Radio, no date), to providing a magazine type show, such as the Age Voice radio show in Newcastle, working in intergenerational contexts (Sonder Radio, 2019), or addressing age-related activist topics (Age Speaks, no date). All open up a space for dialogue about later life in their communities and, indeed, demonstrate the importance of community radio stations as pathways to civic and local participation, regardless of the content creators' chronological age.

2.9 Chapter Summary: finding new interdisciplinary directions

This chapter provided a critical overview of the concept of civic participation in later life drawing on literature from the fields of gerontology and HCI. First, I reviewed social exclusion of older adults as a multi-dimensional concept that considers disadvantage in later life in its complexity. In particular, I critically assessed the sub-dimension of exclusion from civic activities and highlighted the need to consider a social exclusion perspective alongside older

adults' citizenship. As a response, I located these ideas alongside Serrat *et al.*'s (2019) framework on later life civic participation, which conceptualises four dimensions of civic activity on an individual / collective and a social / political dimension. Building on the concepts of civic exclusion and civic participation, I presented findings from the literature on how these ideas are considered and implemented as part of age-friendly cities and communities. My review highlighted a lack of consideration of how the increasing digitalisation of society impacts older adults' civic participation. Focusing on the intersection of ageing and technology research, I contrasted existing ideas on digital inclusion and digital participation and then critically appraised research carried out in the field of HCI focusing on content creation as a digital citizenship activity. Highlighting digital participation as a foundation for civic participation in digitalised societies, I synthesised key studies carried out with older content creators. Whilst there are some advances that re-frame the role of older adults as digital contributors, rather than consumers, digital participatory practices have largely been ignored in policies on later life digital inclusion. This might reinforce and perpetuate societal representations of older adults as consumers rather than active, digitally contributing citizens. Indeed, while existing research has explored content creation in later life (such as Waycott *et al.*, 2013; Brewer and Piper, 2016; McGrath, 2018; Celdran, Serrat and Villar, 2019), the implementation of content creation activities with a civic purpose needs to be investigated further. Considering the impact of community radio in supporting civic action in communities, I reviewed the current state of older adults' involvement with the community radio sector and its potential to support citizenship in later life. Synthesising the aforementioned literature, I highlight as a key gap in the existing literature the lack of research on how older adults engage with digital content creation activities and leverage the community radio sector as part of their civic participatory practices. Drawing the threads of gerontology and HCI together, I have highlighted the development in the literature to increasingly consider older adults as citizens in communities and paying attention to their digital citizenship.

This thesis builds on the existing body of work outlined above by exploring the potential of content creation activity as a pathway to increased civic and digital participation in later life. Underpinned by Serrat *et al.*'s framework on later life civic participation (2019) and the digital participation approach, I present research that explores the relationship between digital content creation and collective civic participation in two main ways. Firstly, I consider the organisational level, addressing digital content creation activities and social forms of collective civic participation. Secondly, on a broader societal level, I consider community radio production as a catalyst for the creation of new political forms of collective civic participation

in digital spaces. My research is an example of working with the concepts of empowerment, citizenship and 'voice' by using participatory action research and working closely with older people. Looking at structural conditions that exclude older people from civic life, my research focuses specifically on digital citizenship opportunities. Using a critical gerontology approach, I challenge the notion of older adults as passive digital citizens and support a change towards acknowledging the active contributions of content created by older citizens in digital spaces.

This leads me to identify two over-arching research questions (RQs) that guide my thesis:

- How do older adults engage with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices? (RQ1)

- How can age-friendly communities better exploit digital technologies and community media to support older people's civic participation? (RQ2)

By engaging with communities of older adults directly using participatory action research, I situate the role of digital technologies within the later life civic participation framework. I also explore how digital content creation activities, in particular the production of community radio, can bring about civic action and lead to the formation of a fully functioning co-operative of older radio creators. Throughout the findings chapters, I extend the existing framework of later life civic participation by adding a digital dimension, first highlighting the need to re-imagine new forms of digital engagement (Chapter 4), and subsequently the potential of digital tools to combine collective social and political forms of civic participation (Chapter 5). The next chapter introduces the methodology and methods of collaborating with older adults using participatory action research in this PhD project.

Chapter 3. Methodology and Methods:

Collaborating with older adults using Participatory Action Research

3.1 Introduction

The research presented in this thesis was carried out using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach in order to explore older adults' use of digital technologies as a means of supporting civic participation in later life. In particular, I aimed to understand better the role of digital content creation activities in a civic context. Following the growing trend towards participatory research projects in both gerontology and Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) research, I illustrate how the topics of ageing, civic participation and digitalisation can be addressed by researchers in real-life community settings. Using PAR as an approach to conduct this research allowed me to engage actively with older individuals and community stakeholders who are civically active through their involvement in different content creation activities. This qualitative and participatory research approach had the potential to generate unique, in-depth insights on older adults' civic participation at the intersection of digital and non-digital spaces, adding to and extending the growing body of research that explores ageing in an increasingly digitalised world.

The PhD project presented in this thesis is a continuation of my MRes research carried out in 2018. The participatory MRes project considered content creation within a community radio context as an open and inclusive space for people of all ages to contribute. I chose a participatory research approach as it aligned with the participatory values of community radio, such as supporting communities to participate in programme making and having their voices heard. Additionally, engaging with PAR supported the implementation of a critical view in this interdisciplinary gerontology and HCI project, namely being able to create collective action through research and challenge existing structures that prevent older adults from engaging with digital technologies. The initial research question that guided this element of the research process during my MRes therefore specifically addressed the relationship between audio content creation and civic participation:

- *How do older adults use community radio to have their voices heard within their communities and across the city?*

Building on this initial work, my PhD project evolved from the PAR foundations I established throughout my MRes. Based on the participatory and cyclical nature of PAR, my initial research question was developed further throughout the doctoral research process. Reflecting a necessary flexibility to explore other topics of interest as they emerged, the research questions were shaped through my interactions with the collaborating older adults. Working with a

participatory research approach encouraged dialogue between myself as a researcher and my collaborators with their situated knowledge and led to the development of research questions that have a scientific as well as practical relevance. Of central interest to my doctoral research were the concepts of digital aspects of later life civic participation and digital citizenship, which were reflected in different research questions that I added throughout the PhD project, such as:

- *What is the potential of digital communications and a wider range of content creation activities to support older adults' digital and civic participation?*
- *How can we strengthen the impact of community radio and audio content created by older adults as a way to counteract ageist narratives in mainstream media?*

Following these explorations of research questions throughout my participatory research journey, they slowly evolved into two overall research questions, which guided the work of this thesis:

- How do older adults engage with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices? (RQ1)

- How can age-friendly communities better exploit digital technologies and community media to support older people's civic participation? (RQ2)

In this chapter, I present a critical overview of PAR as an approach, addressing its history, methods and application within gerontology as well as HCI research. I then move on to describe the typical PAR research process and discuss my individual research approach of using PAR, combining research methods from both disciplinary fields. This is followed by a review of key ethical considerations in PAR research and my personal reflections on ethics in practice within this project.

3.2 Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) represents a collaborative and democratic way of conducting community-based and action-oriented research. A perceived strength is that it is seen to challenge hierarchical relationships between researchers and research participants by recognising a plurality of knowledge within communities, and by trying to shift the view of researchers as the sole experts (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007). Even though researchers can take on a catalytic and supportive role, they should not dominate the research process (Rahman,

1991). Indeed, PAR does not claim to be solely a research methodology, but rather a form of social activism that aims to support people's collective praxis and transformation (Rahman and Fals-Borda, 1991). In broad terms, PAR combines theory and practice through an iterative and cyclical approach of planning, action and reflection. The flourishing of communities is a central objective in PAR and, therefore, the research usually addresses a problem field that lies within a community setting, enabling research that is of direct benefit to the communities involved. Due to PAR's commitment to engage with local communities, a diversity of terminology and localised approaches of PAR exist (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007), alongside similar approaches such as Ethnographic Action Research (EAR) (Tacchi, Slater and Hearn, 2003). EAR as an approach uses ethnography to guide the research process and action research to shape action within the project. However, according to Kindon *et al.* (2007), all strands of PAR share a number of key characteristics: aiming to evoke change; treating participants as competent agents; being context-specific and addressing real-life problems; integrating the values and beliefs of a community into the research process; generating knowledge collaboratively with the community; enriching the research process by acknowledging diverse experiences within the community; constructing new meanings through reflections on actions; and measuring the validity of knowledge derived from the PAR according to whether the action successfully addressed a problem for the people involved. As opposed to Action Research (AR), PAR explicitly engages the participants in the research process, emphasising the participatory nature of community-based research.

The historical roots of PAR lie within AR, originally used in the 1940s by social psychologist Kurt Lewin. Using stages similar to planning, action and reflection, Lewin attempted to link theory and practice in order to address real-world problems (Wallerstein and Duran, 2003) and induce social change (Greenwood and Levin, 2006). These AR efforts were subsequently taken further on a larger and systematic scale, mainly in Western industrialised countries, in order to optimise organisational workflows and productivity, also referred to as the Northern tradition (Greenwood and Levin, 2006). The researcher positions themselves externally, by provoking and facilitating from the outside without becoming separated from the real-world consequences of the action (Kemmis, Nixon and McTaggart, 2014). On the other hand, more participatory projects emerged in the early 1970s in Latin America, Asia and Africa, as a response to structural crises and underdevelopment, referred to collectively as the Southern tradition of PAR. These projects shared a commitment to critical consciousness, emancipation and social justice (Wallerstein and Duran, 2003). They predominantly addressed the conditions of poverty and oppression through the design of local interventions, relying and building on the combined

knowledge and efforts of the local people and outsiders involved (Greenwood and Levin, 2006). Throughout the 1980s, a second wave of PAR projects considered, in particular, community and international development contexts aiming to strengthen people's agency within those contexts (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007). Since then, PAR has gained popularity amongst social science researchers resulting in the current diversity of approaches. Most PAR approaches can be placed on a continuum depending on the research context and purpose:

- traditional action research approaches similar to the Northern tradition or known as technical action research with the purpose of improving control over outcomes;
- cooperative and mutual inquiry research, focusing on education; and
- community-based and emancipatory approaches based on the principles developed as part of the Southern tradition (Wallerstein and Duran, 2003; Kemmis, Nixon and McTaggart, 2014).

Ontologically, PAR assumes that knowledge is ever-evolving and co-constructed by human beings who are active and self-reflective agents (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007; Hayes, 2011). PAR is often grounded within critical research theories, such as feminism, critical theory or poststructuralism (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007). The resulting variety of methodological approaches highlights that PAR is a flexible and adaptable approach to research, depending on context, as opposed existing as a fixed method. PAR is underpinned by a participatory epistemology, which acknowledges the capacities of research participants as well as researchers to reflect on the perspective from which knowledge is created and to situate this knowledge accordingly (Rose, 1997). Indeed, reflexivity is critical to conducting PAR fieldwork as a measure of quality control (Keahey, 2021). It can be defined as the "self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher" (England, 1994), as it leads to acknowledging the ways in which researchers co-construct their research findings based on their social background, assumptions, positioning and behaviour (Finlay and Gough, 2008). Reflexivity is therefore linked closely to the concepts of positionality and power (Sultana, 2007), which are fundamental to all ethical considerations in PAR (outlined in section 3.6). Through the contextualisation of fieldwork, reflexivity helps to situate a research project and challenges conventional scientific ideas of objectivity (Finlay and Gough, 2008) by acknowledging the effect of research on communities (Rose, 1997). The act of reflexivity can be challenging in itself and the reflexive journey might look different depending on the research tradition in which it is embedded. Reflexivities, the many versions of reflexivity (Finlay, 2017), can happen, for example, through introspection, intersubjective reflection, mutual collaboration,

social critique or ironic deconstruction (Finlay and Gough, 2008). This complexity of reflexivity in research has been widely discussed, in particular amongst feminist scholars, acknowledging uncertainties and vulnerability within the process of being reflexive (England, 1994; Rose, 1997; Irwin, 2006). Indeed, reflexivity is to be seen as a dynamic process overarching a research project, as opposed to a one-off occurrence (Finlay and Gough, 2008). At the beginning of this project, I accepted that I was a novice when it came to conducting qualitative research. Following steps of the Practical Guide on Reflexivity (Finlay and Gough, 2008) and using a research diary, I learned to integrate aspects of reflexivity within my research project. I describe my personal reflexivity of the PAR with regard to ethical considerations in section 3.6 of this chapter and I aim to be as transparent as possible about my reflections and learning processes throughout the thesis.

According to McTaggart (1994), early critiques of PAR encompassed amongst others: a lack of rigour, for example regarding a generalisation of PAR, pressures on practitioners such as the time needed to conduct the research or to sustain the democratic processes, and perceived weaknesses regarding subjectivity and the interpretation of experiences. Some of these traditional critiques such as lack of rigour have to be viewed within the context of the scientific discourse at the time, which was characterised by a phasing out of positivistic research towards postmodern critical and feminist theories (McTaggart, 1994), in which multiple realities co-exist (Kelly 2005, cited in MacDonald, 2012). Today, these traditional criticisms are widely acknowledged as common features of PAR (Hayes, 2014). Indeed, they are often reframed as strengths of PAR to decentralise and democratise research processes (MacDonald, 2012) and produce locally and culturally relevant knowledge (Keahey, 2021). However, other critiques of PAR remain challenges to this day, such as institutional time limitations and the sustainability of PAR projects (Keahey, 2021). Additionally, Kemmis (2006) points out alongside the rise of participatory research projects the need to remain sufficiently critical in PAR and be capable to 'tell unwelcoming truths', rather than performing PAR only to increase the efficiency of practices or implement government policies or programmes. This also encompasses demonstrating critical reflections on the participatory intent of a research project and the actual participation achieved throughout the process, emphasising that "participation is a process that must be generated [over time]" (Greenwood, Whyte and Harkavy, 1993, p.176; Keahey, 2021).

3.2.1 The PAR research process

PAR values the research process as much as the research outcomes. As a consequence, a project can be successful not just in terms of research quality, but also in terms of how the participants'

capacities developed as a result (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007). A typical PAR process repetitively follows the key stages of: 1) planning, 2) action and observation, and 3) reflection on change (Kemmis, Nixon and McTaggart, 2014). While PAR encourages researchers and community collaborators to work together at all stages of the process, the levels of participation might vary depending on the stage (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007).
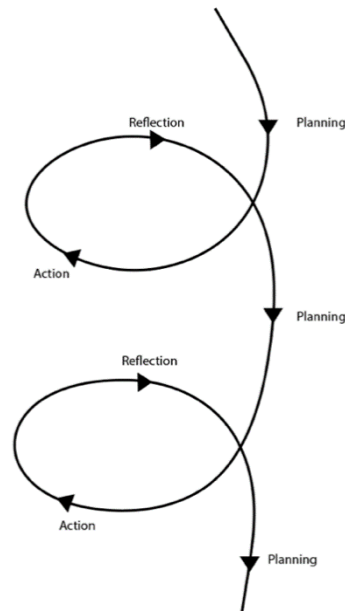
Figure 3.1: The Participatory Action Research Spiral based on Hayes (2012)

Even though these stages are separately defined in theory, the reality of PAR often looks less neat as stages overlap and plans change (see section 3.3). In most cases of PAR, there is no defined end point to the research process, so this circular pattern will often be followed as part of a long-term engagement. Determining the end of a PAR project should need a careful evaluation and usually requires that the community has developed the ability to maintain the change which was achieved throughout the PAR (Hayes, 2012). However, in practice, the end to research resources, such as funding or researcher contracts, can determine the end point of PAR and is not necessarily reflected in theoretical representations of the process. Beyond the research process itself, thought needs to be given to the dissemination of PAR findings. Aligned with the principle of democracy in PAR, researchers should be reflective of their authority to represent a community's point of view, thus highlighting the need for dissemination of the research findings in academic as well as non-academic ways in order to be of value to the community. This might entail writing and publishing reports together with research partners or disseminating the research in other creative ways, which highlight the action achieved in the PAR through an adequate presentation and interpretation of the research depending on the social context (Cahill and Torre, 2007). However, according to a systematic review on the

dissemination of PAR findings, "the needs and goals of various stakeholders in the [PAR] collaboration can affect dissemination" (Chen *et al.*, 2010, p.376). Tensions arising as part of the dissemination process might include: conflicts between academic publication timelines and the iterative nature of including collaborators in PAR, collaborators' time and resources especially in underserved communities, or literacy and cultural differences between researchers and collaborators (Chen *et al.*, 2010). Yet, according to Chen *et al.,* the dissemination of PAR findings is an intrinsically valuable part of PAR and can contribute to maintaining good working relationships between communities and researchers.

3.2.2   Methods in PAR

Through its participatory nature, PAR is more than a research methodology. It is an opportunity for people to reflect and act together and make their practices more rational, sustainable and just (Kemmis, Nixon and McTaggart, 2014). Therefore, a variety of methods can be used for PAR. According to Kindon *et al.*, these methods can be focused on dialogue, such as interviews or group discussions, or be creative, by being arts-based or making use of various media, for example storytelling. All methods aim to support collective action and enable participants to "generate information and share knowledge on their own terms using their own symbols, language or art forms" (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007, p.17), similar to the approach of methodological bricolage, which describes the use of diverse methods of inquiry in critical gerontology as coined by Holstein and Minkler (2007). As opposed to traditional research approaches, PAR methods require the researcher to be flexible and take on a facilitating role rather than directing the process. Ultimately, when done well, the methods used in PAR will enable reflexivity in both researcher and research participants, enabling them to negotiate the meaning of the knowledge that was generated together (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007).

3.2.3   Participatory Action Research in gerontology

Literature reviews on participatory methods in gerontology establish that whilst the number of PAR projects within the field of gerontology is increasing, PAR is often not used to its full potential. The participatory involvement of older adults as active research collaborators in PAR projects has remained uncommon over the last ten years (Blair and Minkler, 2009; Corrado *et al.*, 2020). Older adults tend to be positioned as participants rather than collaborators or co-researchers (Corrado *et al.*, 2020). The reasons for not involving older adults as prominent partners are manifold, ranging from restrictions within the academic institutional environment (e.g. research funding or failure to accommodate the flexibility of PAR, both common challenges for PAR researchers as outlined in the previous section) to underlying ageist

assumptions about older adults' abilities to fulfil meaningful roles in the research process (Blair and Minkler, 2009; Corrado *et al.*, 2020). Despite these challenges, gerontologists increasingly engage with PAR and community-based research to address a variety of topics.

Working on the topics of later life citizenship and ageism, therefore similar to central concerns of this thesis, one example of such PAR project has been conducted by Trentham and Neysmith (2018). The researchers collaborated with a group of older adults in Canada, who tracked the results of their advocacy work over a period of two years. Recognising ageism and social policies as structural limitations to older people's civic participation, the authors located PAR as a methodology that places value on enabling older people in leadership and research roles. Coming from a social justice perspective and the belief in rights for older citizens, the participants of this PAR project explored barriers in their advocacy work on home care policy issues and how these were overcome. Of central focus in their analysis was the concept of ageism and how the older activists encountered and resisted ageist assumptions as part of their advocacy work (Trentham and Neysmith, 2018).

A critical perspective, such as the one outlined in the example by Trentham and Neysmith (2018), lends itself to PAR approaches. Indeed, critical gerontologists especially have engaged with PAR as a key tool that can enable critical thinking, social change and reflexivity (Ziegler and Scharf, 2014). Critical gerontology aims to challenge and change ways in which societies construct ageing, in particular in its focus on social structures that perpetuate injustice and inequalities. By using PAR methods, critical gerontologists aim to involve older adults in the "production and dissemination of gerontological knowledge and in the development of policy and practice" (Ziegler and Scharf, 2014). Ziegler and Scharf emphasise that in fact participatory methods always need to be evaluated within a critical framework in order to oppose participation as a "normative expectation for 'good' older citizens" and to not further marginalise those older adults involved in PAR. The authors use the example of the CALL-ME project, which implemented PAR as a response to the structural issue of social exclusion in disadvantaged communities in Manchester. The researchers worked closely with older residents to establish neighbourhood group activities, which could support the creation of opportunities for social participation despite the structural barriers faced. Even after the formal end of the project, some of the initiatives remained active, providing evidence of a sustainable social change through PAR (Ziegler and Scharf, 2014). Bringing a critical lens to PAR in gerontology is therefore of twofold benefit. First, by creating sustainable structural change through PAR as a response to a problem raised by critical gerontologists, and second, by critically addressing

the persisting key challenges of PAR in gerontology (Blair and Minkler, 2009; Corrado *et al.*, 2020). However, whilst PAR is well-suited to achieve sustainable social change, achieving this sustainability often remains difficult for researchers, who are tasked with a complexity of tasks throughout the PAR process, whilst at the same time operating in a system that limits their access to time and funding needed to respond to these multifaceted requirements of creating sustainable PAR action (Corrado *et al.*, 2020; Keahey, 2021).

Another example of involving older adults in participatory research is the work of Tine Buffel (2018). Aligned with the WHO's key idea to involve older people in the development of age-friendly policy (World Health Organization, 2007b), Buffel involved older people in the city of Manchester as co-researchers in order to support the development and improvement of the city's age-friendly communities. Reflecting the critical gerontology approach, one intention was to include, in particular, older residents who faced a heightened risk of social exclusion. With the aim to explore age-friendliness in their city, Buffel trained the older co-researchers in how to carry out research throughout all stages of the research process. She reflects that co-researching with older people challenges stereotypes of older people as passive respondents to change in their communities. Indeed, her co-researchers' motivations to engage with the research process were partly community-oriented, for example contributing to neighbourhood change, and partly personal, for example skill development or "keeping busy" in later life. This study highlights the advantage of engaging with participatory methodologies in gerontology as a way to challenge power differences between different groups, which in turn supports the sustainability of age-friendly projects (Buffel, 2018).

3.2.4 *Participatory Action Research in Human-Computer Interaction*
Even though the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) is still dominated by traditional social sciences approaches, such as surveys or top-down fieldwork, PAR has been increasingly taken up as an approach to address real-world community problems with regard to technology (Hayes, 2012). If conducted well, PAR in HCI can be a systematic and rigorous research approach that promotes a social, technological or sociotechnical change with communities. By being explicitly democratic, collaborative and interdisciplinary (Hayes, 2011), PAR offers a framework in particular to researchers working on civically engaged HCI and technology projects. Often PAR in HCI is also coupled with a focus on elements of activism or justice-oriented technology design (Strohmayer *et al.*, 2020). Regarding practices of technology design, the field of HCI distinguishes between PAR and the more commonly used alternative methodology of Participatory Design (PD). Both approaches are related, but distinct. PAR in

HCI focuses on the development of action, which can include a range of socio-technical interventions, whereas PD tends to be more limited to the design of technological solutions (Hayes, 2014). PD historically aimed at involving those affected by the introduction of new technologies with the design process, but is now also used to change social relations through designing (Light and Akama, 2014) or for designing technologies with communities (Klerks *et al.*, 2020). Combined with PAR's aim to create learning through action, both approaches augment each other and the combination can be a powerful way for HCI researchers to address social issues (Hayes, 2011, 2014). In the context of interdisciplinary ageing and technology research, such as presented in this thesis, a PAR approach can include a broader "variety of social and technological changes within the larger sociotechnical context in which the [P]AR project is situated" (Hayes, 2014, p.57), thus having a greater scale and purpose than PD, which carries the notion of designing a technological solution (Grigorovich *et al.*, 2021). Indeed, Grigorovich *et al.* (2021) outline that whilst PD "can be an effective approach to addressing the needs and preferences of older adults in the development of technologies for their use, PAR is more appropriate when the goal of the research is more broadly to challenge the oppression of older adults and to engage older adults as equal research partners to collectively identify solutions for social change" (Grigorovich *et al.*, 2021, p.6). This implies that especially researchers working at the intersection of gerontology and technology research, a field in which PD approaches are common, should pay attention to implementing PAR to its full potential.

One example of a participatory methodology, which blurs the lines between PD and PAR in ageing and technology research, is provided by Zamir *et al.* (2018). The authors used a collaborative action research approach to explore how to better support older people in care homes with regard to video-call technologies. Following a traditional action research cycle, the project underwent stages of planning, action and reflection in collaboration with care home staff, older residents and their families. The action part of the project concerned the implementation of a video-call technology. As a result of the reflection stage, the researchers highlight ways in which the use of technologies could be optimised in the care home setting (Zamir *et al.*, 2018). Even though this example is more concerned with the development and usability of a technology in a specific setting, and therefore holds more similarities to a participatory design (PD) process than action research, it represents the efforts made to include older adults as active stakeholders in the research process.

Indeed, similar demands to push towards conducting community-based projects on ageing (Righi, Sayago and Blat, 2017), acknowledging diversity in later life (Vines *et al.*, 2015) and

encouraging more older adults to take part in civic participatory design (Clarke *et al.*, 2016; Clarke, 2018) have been made at the intersection of HCI and gerontology research. However, the overall use of PAR in projects on HCI and ageing or Gerontechnology remains scarce (Grigorovich *et al.*, 2021).

Overall, the number of projects implementing PAR as an approach is increasing in both fields, gerontology and HCI. However, despite being well-suited as a research approach in socio-technical environments, not many PAR projects examine situated expressions of ageing and technology in an interdisciplinary context. As presented in the previous sections, PAR can support the involvement of older adults as active stakeholders in research and society and therefore complements a critical gerontology thinking. Even though HCI scholars increasingly advocate for a more critical lens on the topics of ageing and technology, for example through the use of PAR, PD remains the predominant approach to research in this field (Grigorovich *et al.*, 2021). This might be due to general challenges of conducting PAR as outlined above, which arise from existing academic structures that lack flexibility to support such projects.

3.3   PAR in practice: an interdisciplinary project linking gerontology and HCI

In this section, I describe how I addressed my two research questions *'how do older adults engage with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices'* (RQ1) and *'how can age-friendly communities better exploit digital technologies and community media to support older people's civic participation'* (RQ2) over the course of the PAR, developing an interdisciplinary research project that bridges the contexts of digitalisation and ageing research. I first give a broad chronological overview of the continuation of my MRes project into the PhD to provide context for the later description of the PAR cycles with their associated methods that were used in this project.

Based on the research conducted as part of my MRes programme (Reuter *et al.*, 2019), I had already established a positive and constructive collaboration with the radio team of the Age Voice. Age Voice is a Newcastle-based organisation, by and for older people. I present a more detailed overview of the organisation in the associated findings chapter (Chapter 4). In this thesis, the organisation is referred to by a pseudonym in order to respect my individual collaborators' identities and highlight the joint impact that the Age Voice members make in their city as an organisation, rather than individual efforts. As part of my interest in the intersection between ageing, civic participation and digitalisation, I was looking for a partner organisation that would allow me to develop my ideas over the course of my MRes and doctoral

research. My MRes collaboration with the Age Voice's radio team involved working on the digitalisation of the team's audio output by using the custom-designed *Radio Grabber* software. This software was co-designed with the radio team throughout my MRes with the purpose of facilitating an easy-to-use workflow that digitalises the audio content created by the radio team in order to reach a wider audience (Reuter *et al.*, 2019). By engaging team members in regular uploading sessions and facilitating the use of the audio editing software, 46 individual recorded conversations were uploaded and added to playlists. Through the digitalisation of their content, the team could track audience statistics and engagement, something that was not previously achieved with their live broadcasts. Moving from MRes into my doctoral research, the research focus shifted from creating technological responses, such as the *Radio Grabber*, towards a more meaningful PAR collaboration with Age Voice. During our co-developed research process, the Age Voice communications team initially approached me to suggest exploring the organisation's digital communications structure. I attended several meetings with the organisation's communications leads and executive officer to discuss the potential to extend and deepen our collaboration through the PhD PAR process. This involved listening to each other's ideas on research projects and narrowing them down to find a common ground. Members of the organisation voiced their need to develop a wider communications strategy and together we developed and shaped some practical questions to which they were seeking answers and which could guide our initial phase of the research:

- How and why is information communicated in the organisation?
- How can the organisation develop a communications strategy that co-ordinates their current content creation activities and reaches the intended audience?
- How can people who have never used digital technologies learn to use them in order to contribute to the organisation's digital work?

As an outcome of these meetings, we drafted a collaboration agreement (Appendix A) that outlined an initial idea of how a continued research collaboration might look. This agreement was approved by all parties (the organisation, me, and my supervisors). Even though we did not subsequently refer back to it, I perceived the document to be an important step to formalise the collaboration and to set shared expectations for the project. This time between the MRes and PhD research represented the start of my first PAR process spiral in collaboration with Age Voice (Figure 3.2). As mentioned in section 3.2.1, the reality of PAR often looks different to the theoretical PAR spiral diagram. Figure 3.2 reflects my own experience with PAR and shows that such research is not always a linear process, and indeed, can be quite messy. Throughout

this section and the following findings chapters, I will develop and refer back to this figure to illustrate the PAR stages and specific methods used as part of the overall PAR approach.

PAR cycle 1: September 2018 - January 2019

Collaboration agreement &
action: exploring the Age Voice's media
landscape

PAR cycle 5: throughout 2019

Exploring radio shows produced
by older adults

PAR cycle 2: February - September 2019

Designing an improved
communications strategy

PAR cycle 3: March - April 2019

Older people's voices
in the market

PAR cycle 6: October 2019

Connecting the groups at a Radio
Festival for older adults

PAR cycle 4: October 2019

Launching newsletter

PAR cycle 7: from October 2019 onward

Taking the network forward

Figure 3.2: Overview of the PAR cycles of this project

3.3.1 PAR cycle 1: Exploring the Age Voice's media landscape

As outlined in the collaboration agreement, which I consider as a summary of the planning stage, we started by exploring the organisation's existing communications output and workflows as part of a workshop throughout the first action stage. At this stage, I also clarified my research questions to critically assess how older adults engage with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices (RQ1) and explore how age-friendly communities can better exploit digital technologies and community media to support older people's civic participation (RQ2). At the end of the workshop, we collectively reflected on the organisation's media landscape and contributed our thoughts on the research process as part of the PAR reflection stage. Our subsequent PAR cycles were based on insights from this workshop to address issues that were important to the organisation and problems that the communication team members identified with their media output. Figure 3.3 also shows that this cycle included two reflection stages, one collaborative reflection with the Age Voice team that informed the next research stage, and a personal reflection on my own perceptions of the process. I maintained a research diary for my personal reflections throughout the PAR process, which also helped me to reflect on times when the PAR required a negotiation of interests.
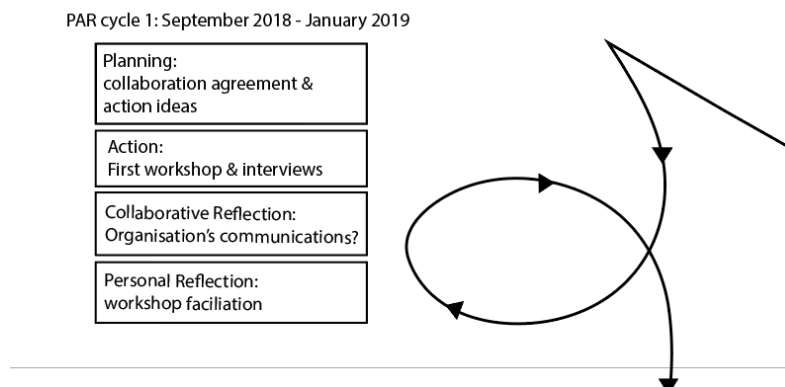
Figure 3.3: PAR cycle 1 with the Age Voice

3.3.2 PAR cycles 2, 3 and 4: Developing the Age Voice's communications

Some of the subsequent PAR cycles had a longer working timespan, such as a re-design of the organisation's e-mail newsletter in design workshops (PAR cycle 2). Others were shorter projects, for example reflections on using digital audio as a way of capturing older adults' voices in the local covered market marked a dead-end for this particular cycle 3 of the PAR process (Figure 3.4). Even though cycles 2 and 4 of the PAR, the creation and the launch of the organisation's e-mail newsletter, are represented as two separate loops in Figure 3.4, in reality they required an ongoing iteration of planning and action between the Age Voice volunteers

and myself. I will elaborate on this process in more detail in the relevant findings chapter (Chapter 4).
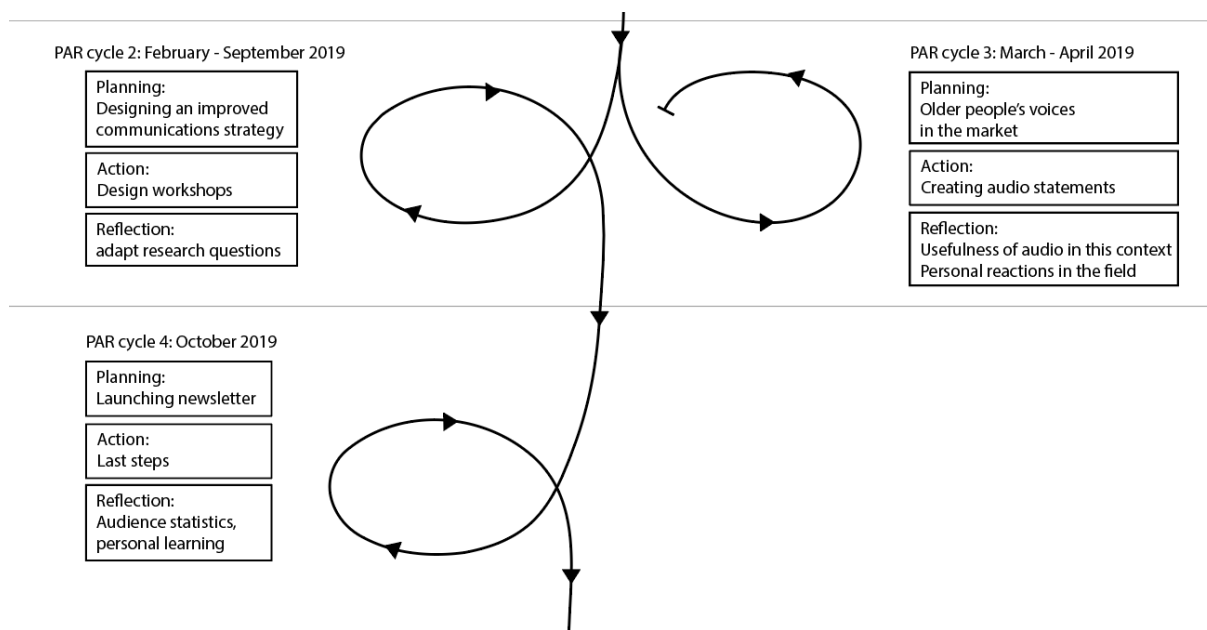
Figure 3.4: PAR cycles 2, 3 and 4 with the Age Voice

3.3.3   PAR cycle 5: Exploring radio shows produced by older adults

Alongside work on these projects, I continued to collaborate with the Age Voice's radio team, mainly supporting their digital uploads and attending monthly live broadcasts. In 2019, through Twitter and in discussion with my supervisory team, I started to become aware of, and actively seek out, other UK-based radio shows produced by older adults (Figure 3.5). This represented the planning stage of a parallel research effort to focus on the creation of community radio, as a specific type of content creation. Subsequently, and with their permission, all collaborators from this part of the PAR will be referred to with their names, as they pride themselves on their work in radio broadcasting and are identifiable members of the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (Chapter 5).
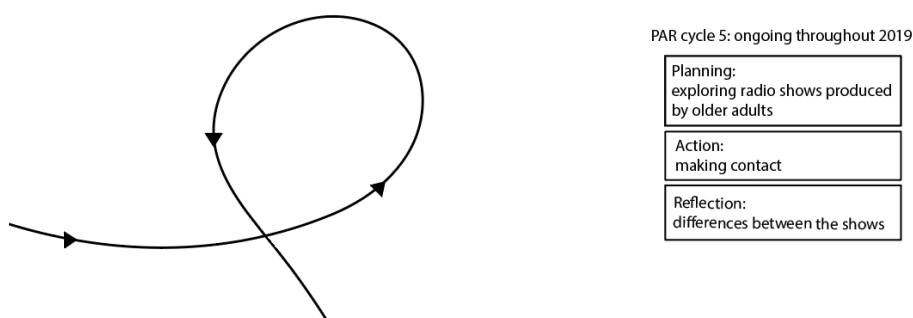
Figure 3.5: PAR cycle 5: collaboration with older community radio show hosts

In order to find out more about radio shows created by older adults and to explore potential synergies, I first contacted Age Speaks on Twitter (action stage). Age Speaks is a talk-based radio show produced at a community radio station in East London, addressing the topic of age and ageing from different angles. As a result of this initial contact, in March 2019, I was invited to appear as a guest on the Age Speaks show. Around the same time, I also contacted a further radio station, Sonder Radio, via Twitter. Sonder Radio is a Manchester-based internet radio station whose team have developed a training programme that engages older adults in the creation of broadcasts. I was invited to meet the team and to learn more about the radio station. Through these two visits to London and Manchester, I realised that a number of communities across England were already using (community) radio in different ways to involve and empower older adults in broadcasting (reflection stage).

3.3.4 PAR cycle 6: connecting older radio show hosts at a Radio Festival

In October 2019, with the aim to connect the different teams and to explore the potential for future collaboration, my collaborators and I collectively decided to host a Radio Festival for older adults in Newcastle as part of a planning stage of the PAR cycle 6 (Figure 3.6). This idea was predominantly driven by Mervyn (Age Speaks) and Beena from Sonder Radio, who took the initiative in advancing the conversation about the Radio Festival and putting effort into its realisation. Hosting the Radio Festival required different administrative tasks, such as sorting out a space, agreeing on a programme, introducing experts from community radio and gerontology. By co-ordinating this closely with my collaborators, I was able to ensure that everybody's interests were represented at the Radio Festival. We incorporated the reflection stage of this specific PAR cycle as part of the festival, by providing adequate space and time for collaborative critical reflections at the end of the event.
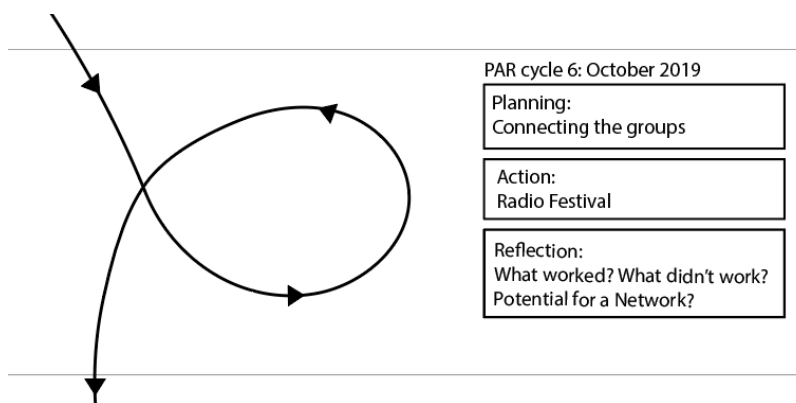
Figure 3.6: PAR cycle 6: the Radio Festival

3.3.5 *PAR cycle 7: Creating the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative*

At this reflection stage, the Radio Festival participants voiced the ambition to create an England-wide network of older content creators and age-friendly radio stations whose aim is to challenge ageist narratives within the mainstream media by providing talk-based content created by older adults. This idea was taken forward in the final cycle of the PAR (Figure 3.7) and resulted in the creation of what started as the Later Life Audio and Radio Network (LLARN) and later became the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC).

PAR cycle 7: from October 2019 onward

Planning:
taking the network forward

Action:
establishing the LLARC, creating governance, creating workflows

Reflection:
My role in the LLARC, ending fieldwork
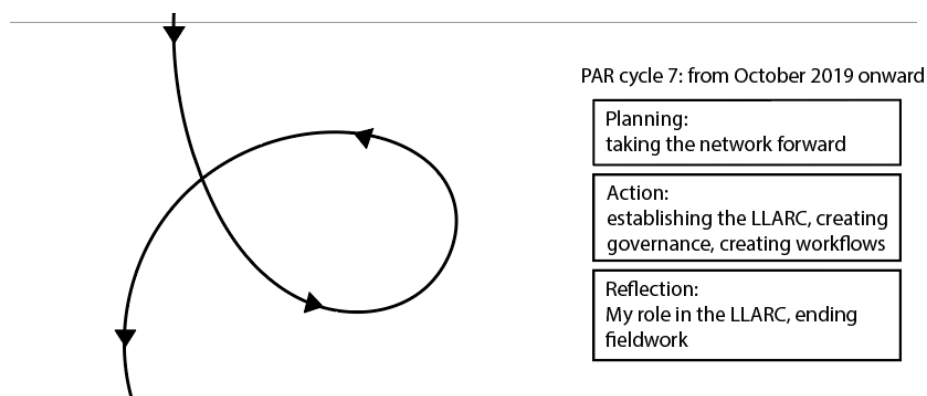
Figure 3.7: PAR cycle 7: creating the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative

The action stage of taking the network forward spanned nearly an entire year. Collaboratively, the LLARC partners worked on establishing a co-operative governance structure for the organisation, as well as working on creating audio and radio content that would promote the voices of older adults. As described in section 3.2.1, the process of PAR might be without a clear end point. It was up to me and my collaborators to determine the end point of my research involvement in LLARC. I prepared for my own easing out of the doctoral research collaboration by setting a date from which I would mainly focus on writing up my PhD thesis and announcing it to my collaborators six months in advance. This helped to co-ordinate and share tasks, which I had previously taken on, between the stakeholders, such as the facilitation of the production working group. Up to the point of writing (October 2021), LLARC is still thriving and continuously growing. I continue to be involved as a LLARC member with some of its ongoing projects, such as the realisation of the Telling Tales of Engagement grant, which we were awarded by the UK's Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council in April 2021.

Regarding sharing the results of this research, my collaborators and I continuously engaged with different forms of research dissemination. With the aim of making the research widely accessible, we co-presented the research in both academic and non-academic spaces, such as

public panels and on radio shows. Mervyn (Age Speaks) and I also co-presented an interactive poster of the complete PAR process at the British Society of Gerontology (BSG) conference in 2020 as a way of communicating research in an easily accessible format. This poster, awarded the BSG's Stirling Prize for the best poster submission at conference, is available to browse online (here). At this conference occasion, one of the LLARC members, Gerry, a retired TV journalist, was invited to moderate a keynote panel discussion. Regarding academic dissemination of my PhD work, there is one publication specifically on the work of LLARC, considering radio as a technology to promote citizen dialogue in later life (Reuter and Liddle, 2020). Additionally, we have reported on the impact of content creation on older adults' digital participation in general (Reuter, Scharf and Smeddinck, 2020) and the relevance of considering content creation as a digital activity in age-friendly cities (Reuter, Liddle and Scharf, 2020). All publications were double checked and all interpretations approved by and discussed with my collaborators. As a reflection, I have the future ambition to include the collaborators of this PAR in the publication process more closely. This would entail involving collaborators as co-authors with regard to the actual writing of papers and reports, but more importantly engaging my collaborators more actively in the analysis stage of the work. However, achieving this level of participatory collaboration was beyond the time scale of this PhD work.

To summarise, in this section I presented the PAR cycles of this PhD project with a focus of the different stages on planning, action and reflection. Weaving together different insights and collaborations, I reviewed how the PAR cycles built on each other and contrasted this process with the 'neat' theoretical PAR spiral.

3.4 Data Collection

Aligned with the PAR philosophy, we aimed for this project to be adaptive and responsive to the circumstances of the research collaboration, thus enabling me and my collaborators to be creative and flexible in our data collection depending on what we wanted to achieve. Responding to my research questions that address how older adults engage with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices (RQ1) and scope the potential for age-friendly communities to better exploit digital technologies and community media to support older people's civic participation (RQ2), I collected data using four complementary methods:

1) Embedded research;
2) Interviews;

3) Workshops; and

4) Research through Design.

To avoid unnecessary repetition, I will justify the choice of methods and discuss the methodological frameworks that guided my choice of methods in the following sections, with a more detailed description of the methods in practice following in the associated findings chapters (Chapters 4 and 5). Locating the methods in practice in these later chapters provides a more meaningful opportunity to reflect on how the methods were developed and implemented as a response to the PAR process.

Some methods I chose, such as interviews, are traditionally used in qualitative research because of the "power of language to illuminate meaning" (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003, p.138) and their potential to produce knowledge as part of a normal human interaction (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003). Others, such as workshops, were inspired by Participatory Design methods (Tomitsch and Wrigley, 2018) and allowed me to collect in-depth data rigorously, whilst at the same time creating tangible and visual outcomes that were of use for my collaborators' interpretations of the research and their advocacy work (e.g. improving a newsletter). Using at least three methods in PAR has been shown to produce more effective problem-solving, as multiple methods reduce the limitations of each individual method (Streubert and Carpenter, 1995 in MacDonald, 2012). Additionally, I found that engaging with different types of data collection allowed me to be responsive to the development of the PAR and the collaborators' needs and strengths, whilst ensuring rigorous and appropriate data collection through the use of both novel, and traditional research methods. In the following sections I discuss the justifications of the methods used for data collection throughout this project and review how engaging with these different methods led to the collection of three types of data, namely transcripts of audio recordings, detailed field notes and tangible materials created by the collaborators.

3.4.1 Embedded Research

The term 'embedded research' emerged as a conceptual and practical label, which describes a specific way of undertaking collaborative research as a "mutually beneficial relationship between academics and their host organizations whether they are public, private or third sector" (McGinity and Salokangas, 2014, p.1). The notion of 'embeddedness' in research has many meanings, most often describing the embedding of individual researchers in service delivery settings or organisations as part of a dual affiliation, or describing the efficient embedding of

research itself within practice or policy processes (Varallyay *et al.*, 2020). A main goal of embedded research is to observe, and to learn or share knowledge, ideas and practices (McGinity and Salokangas, 2014) and co-produce knowledge with the collaborating organisation (Vindrola-Padros *et al.*, 2017). Embedded researchers collaborate "with teams of an organisation to identify, design and conduct research studies and share findings which respond to the needs of the organisation, and accord with the organisation's unique context and culture" (Vindrola-Padros *et al.*, 2017, p.70). Used often within the healthcare context, embedded research is characterised by similar features as PAR, such as researcher reflexivity, the goal to inform practice or capacity building, but focuses on organisations rather than community settings more broadly (Vindrola-Padros *et al.*, 2017). Embedded research is underpinned by the researcher's observations on being part of the collaborating organisation. It therefore differs from ethnographic observations or organisational ethnography, in which researchers study an organisational context as opposed to carrying out collaborative research with the organisation's members (Gaggiotti, Kostera and Krzyworzeka, 2017; Cheetham *et al.*, 2018). This distinction led me to choose the term 'embedded research' to describe my own engagement and data collected through observations and impressions within the collaborating organisations as part of the wider PAR. Even though my main affiliation remained with Newcastle University, the method of embedded research captures the intention of conducting PAR together with my collaborators. It reflects that all my observations throughout this project are informed and shaped by being part of a team, rather than viewing myself as an external researcher. This is best reflected in my engagement with the Age Voice's radio team, where I had my own tasks during broadcasts, but also featured in my subsequent work as a member of LLARC with full responsibilities.

Data from this embedded research was captured in the form of field notes, which were taken continuously throughout and after interactions with my collaborators. I used a digital research diary ("Day One" software) to store and organise my field notes by making use of the tagging function to be able to organise the complexity of PAR with its various engagements with different collaborators. My field notes reflect various layers of the embedded research. More descriptive notes captured the content of meetings, such as a meeting structure of topics that were talked about and potential action points. Additionally, I noted down observations of interpersonal dynamics, for example writing down if there was agreement on or arguments about certain topics, and who advocated for which opinion. These interpersonal dynamics sometimes included a more interpretative dimension regarding power hierarchies within meetings, looking for example at how conflicts were resolved or if somebody dominated a

discussion. Some of my field notes also captured direct quotes that related directly to one of my research questions. Additionally, I added my personal reflections on being a PAR researcher as part of my field notes, reflecting on my own role as part of being embedded in the collaborating groups and how these interactions shaped my own thinking as a researcher.

3.4.2 Interviews

Interviews are a common data collection strategy in PAR, as they allow participants to express their ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words and allow for a reciprocal learning process throughout the interview for both researcher and interviewee (MacDonald, 2012). Indeed, a literature review on key principles of conducting PAR with older people found that interviews were an often-used method in PAR studies involving older adults and that the interview process can facilitate co-learning between researchers and older participants (Blair and Minkler, 2009). This emphasis of the interview as a joint experience is reflected in Kvale's 'traveller metaphor' as described in Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003). Assuming that knowledge is created and negotiated collaboratively, Kvale positions the interviewer as a traveller, who interprets the interviewee's stories. This approach emphasises the collaborative approach of constructing knowledge and highlights the active role of the researcher in the generation of data and meaning (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003), something that is inherent to the philosophy of PAR (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007). Legard *et al.* (2003) distinguish between a wide variety of in-depth interviews, which in turn lead to different priorities and practices. Creative interviews emphasise free expression and often take place in the interviewee's everyday environment. Dialectical interviews focus on transformation through the interview process, by highlighting discrepancies and potential for action. In heuristic interviews, the interview process is characterised by a collaborative reflection. Feminist approaches prioritise reflexive, interactive, reciprocal and non-hierarchical interviewing techniques. Lastly, biographical, narrative, life and oral history approaches focus on understanding the cultural world through personal narratives (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003). Regarding the interview process, most in-depth interview techniques are defined by certain key features: combining structure and flexibility, interactivity, achieving depth through probing, prompting exploration and explanation, and generating new knowledge or thoughts (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003). Often, interviews are audio recorded in order to preserve a naturalistic setting and the interviewer might use a topic guide to ensure that the interview achieves breadth of coverage across key issues as well as depth of coverage within each (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003). However, Corrado and colleagues (2020) highlight that one limitation of the use of interviews in PAR with older adults can be a power imbalance arising from the researcher

administering the interview according to a closed interview schedule, giving little opportunity to their older interviewees to "guide the data collection process for co-construction or dialogue" (p.421).

Based on these considerations, I carried out interviews with my collaborators and other stakeholders at various stages throughout the project. As a relatively inexperienced researcher with a disciplinary background in quantitative and experimental psychology, this was my first experience of conducting qualitative research interviews. In the first attempts I noticed that my interview strategy most closely resembled a psychological therapy setting in that I was allowing the participant to guide the interview process. Having recognised the limitations of this approach, I decided to practice being rather more active in facilitating a direction of the research. I learned that bringing an interview schedule acted as a helpful reminder of the research aims, even if on occasion not all of the questions included in the schedule were addressed during the course of the interview. I therefore designed my interviews in a semi-structured way, allowing the freedom to let the conversation flow to explore a certain topic space openly, whilst at the same time honing in on aspects that were of direct relevance to my research questions. The interview schedules (Appendix B) covered a range of topics: personal experiences, technical questions about production workflows or conceptual questions about digital participation or civic activism. However, reflecting Corrado's point on interview schedules as causes of power imbalances between researcher and interviewee, I treated these topics as guidelines and endeavoured to give space to exploration and elaboration on what was most relevant to the interviewee. As many of my collaborators were active radio show hosts, they were experienced with the nature of interviews and interviewing and showed agency in driving the conversation towards topics that they felt were important. All interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. While most of the interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service, I transcribed one longer interview myself. Whilst the transcription from the professional service allowed me to focus on analysing the interviews and was time efficient for me as a non-native English speaker, spending time on transcribing one longer interview myself served as a valuable experience, giving me the opportunity to process the data differently. Working with a professional transcript meant that I lost some of the contextual information, such as tone of voice, compared to listening back to a recording myself and making notes of my impressions alongside it.

3.4.3 Workshops

Another part of my data collection consisted of workshops, which were mainly inspired by methods used in HCI and specifically participatory design (Tomitsch and Wrigley, 2018). Interaction design, a synonym of participatory design, is "the practice of designing interactive digital products, environments, systems, and services" (Cooper, Reimann and Cronin, 2007) and therefore an integral part of the discipline of HCI. The use of workshops is often located within the approach of participatory design (PD), rather than PAR. However, engaging older adults in workshops has been shown to support the co-creation of knowledge, whilst at the same time exploring design spaces. For example, Leong and Robertson (2016) used participatory design workshops to support older adults in articulating their values in the use and design of technologies, as opposed to capturing values through thought or speech. As part of an in-depth one-day workshop, the older participants engaged with different workshop methods such as collectively reflecting on technological artefacts or 'selling' emerging technologies, such as robot pets, to each other in order to explore their values and attitudes towards these technologies. The authors found workshops to be an effective way of producing deeply contextualised data that gives insight into older people's everyday lives and therefore has the potential to positively influence the design of new technologies (Leong and Robertson, 2016). Another project at the intersection of HCI and gerontology by Liddle *et al.* (2020) explored the design potential for optimising social connections in a local area as part of a workshop which built on previous interviews. Despite the research team's interest in the links between technology and connectedness as part of age-friendly communities, they argue for adjusting design processes to emphasise a bottom-up engagement of local older adults that precedes the design of technological interfaces as 'solutions' to a problem. As part of their workshop, the researchers used traditional interaction design methods such as 'reverse brainstorming' or 'group passing' outside of a technological focus, but rather to understand context-specific characteristics of a local community. Similar to Leong *et al.*'s (2016) call to include older people's values in the design of new technologies, Liddle *et al.* (2020) highlight the need to ground age-friendly approaches and the development of technologies in a local context. Another study by Fang *et al.* (2016) engaged older people in participatory community workshops to explore their experiences with place and identify ways to co-create place-based solutions between older people and service providers of housing developments. Using these workshops as a way to co-create knowledge about ageing-in-place, there was a strong emphasis on creating action and change (Fang *et al.*, 2016), highlighting the potential of using workshops as part of an overarching PAR approach. All of these examples (Fang *et al.*, 2016; Leong and Robertson, 2016; Liddle *et al.*, 2020) used workshops as a method to engage older people with

local issues. The workshops created opportunities to listen to older people's experiences in-depth, whilst also focusing on the participatory and creative potential of co-creating knowledge as a community. Due to the participatory and local nature of my own project, I chose to conduct workshops at various points throughout the project, as a method to respond to my research questions to gain insight into older people's civic use of digital content creation activities within an age-friendly context. In the following, I distinguish between three types of workshop: 1) the media landscape workshop, 2) newsletter design workshops, and 3) workshops as part of the Radio Festival. Similar to Liddle *et al.* (2020), my workshops were focused on the experiences of my collaborators, rather than pushing for a design of a specific technology. Another inherent purpose of conducting workshops was to explore the dynamics within the collaborating teams and to create a positive collaborative experience. Indeed, shaping a collaborative experience was one of the main goals of hosting a Radio Festival for older adults. I discovered that throughout the project, the workshops were also an interesting opportunity for the workshop participants to connect with each other and to reflect on workflows and future action as part of the PAR cycles.

Media Landscape Workshop

For my workshops I modified classic Interaction Design activities and adapted them to suit the organisational context of my collaborators. I incorporated activities such as card sorting (a method to re-design existing services) and elements from user journey mapping and user scenarios (methods that help to understand audiences) (Tomitsch and Wrigley, 2018). The first workshop of my PhD was of an exploratory nature as part of the planning and reflection stage in the PAR cycle. It was conducted at the beginning of the PAR with five members of Age Voice. As stated in our collaboration agreement, this workshop was carried out in order to explore the current media workflows of the organisation. Using visual media cards that I created for this workshop, we collaboratively mapped the organisation's media landscape and reflected on the effectiveness of the workflows. The workshop was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Additional sources of data deriving from this workshop included field notes, which were taken contemporaneously, and the media landscape map itself as a tangible outcome. This workshop and its outcomes will be described and discussed in more depth in Chapter 4.

Newsletter design workshops

Throughout the PAR project, I also conducted several design workshops, which aimed to facilitate the re-design of the organisation's e-mail newsletter. These workshops were part of the action stage of the PAR. They were conducted with different activities that either facilitated

the design of the newsletter (e.g. co-creating specific sections on paper) or open discussions. Beyond the visual design, workshop participants also devoted their time to evaluating technical aspects of the newsletter and I was able to provide some technical support with the online platform. At these design meetings, I collected data in the form of contemporaneously written field notes in my research diary. Throughout the development of the new electronic newsletter, the Age Voice members also collected a range of relevant statistical data. This included information about the number of times newsletters had been opened and click rates associated with weblinks. This strand of work and its research outcomes will be analysed and discussed in Chapter 4.

The Radio Festival

A novel methodology and highlight of my PhD data collection was the Radio Festival for older adults, representing an extended two-day workshop on the topic of community radio production in later life. The Radio Festival was hosted in October 2019 in Newcastle as a way to facilitate connections and conversations between older content creators, radio stations, researchers and third sector organisations. The festival programme included talks, hands-on production workshops and discussion sessions. One workshop, led by my research collaborators at Sonder Radio, addressed multiple aspects of radio production, such as the structure of broadcasts and included a live broadcast from the festival. Festival participants also collectively explored the radio.garden website as part of a second workshop led by researchers and co-developers of radio.garden, Dr Caroline Mitchell and Professor Peter Lewis. Radio Garden allows users to search for and listen to community radio stations across the world. The discussions were open spaces to explore ideas about forming a special interest network as an exchange point for topics related to later life and audio/radio production. In order to facilitate the direction of the discussions, I worked with Daniel Parry, a content creator in Open Lab, to prepare visual materials as prompts, inspired by the card sorting technique (Tomitsch and Wrigley, 2018). These cards depicted different digital organisation and communication tools (e.g. WhatsApp, Trello, Slack). We asked the discussion groups to think of ways in which these technologies could be useful for the communication and organisation of a future radio network. At the end of the dedicated discussion time, the groups shared their ideas and views with the plenary. A more detailed description of the materials and structure of the discussions will be presented in chapter 5. Throughout the Radio Festival, I collected data in the form of transcripts, which I transcribed verbatim based on audio recordings, contemporaneously written field notes, and tangible materials created by the Radio Festival participants.

3.4.4   Research through Design

A small part of this project, indicated as a dead-end PAR cycle in Figure 3.4, concerned the use of digital audio statements in the local covered market. This cycle was inspired by a Research through Design (RtD) approach. The interdisciplinary nature of HCI research has given rise to RtD, which aims to connect research and design in a meaningful way. It stems from the contradiction that "research contributions must be novel, but not necessarily good. Design contributions, however, must be good but not necessarily novel" (Zimmerman and Forlizzi, 2014 p.167). As an approach, RtD sets out to conduct research that uses design practices with the intention of generating knowledge. RtD follows an explicit and systematic process of continuous reinterpretation and reframing of a problem by using artefacts that function as a proposed solution in that design space and therefore support the production of new knowledge (Zimmerman and Forlizzi, 2014). As part of the age-friendly city, Age Voice had been given a monthly unit in the local market as a way of promoting their organisation. As a one-off activity, I collaborated with the Age Voice communications team on designing a digital interaction and engagement strategy, using provocative audio statements about ageing, in order to capture older citizens' opinions on ageing in Newcastle. Throughout the design and ideation stage, data were collected in the form of written field notes. At the market, data were collected in the form of postcards filled out by passers-by and my written field notes. This activity and its outcomes are discussed in Chapter 4.

3.5   Data Analysis

Using the three methods discussed above, I derived three sources of data: 1) transcripts, 2) field notes, and 3) tangible materials, such as the media landscape or mind-maps created at the Radio Festival. Appendix C gives an overview of the data and its origins as part of the PAR cycles. I conducted data analyses at various stages throughout the PAR process. Following the PAR model, the reflection phase is an opportunity to consider the outcome of a certain action and reflect on it. It also includes a more formal, often quick 'in the moment', analysis of the data, in order to locate initial findings alongside personal reflections and subsequently inform the next PAR cycles. For my project, this meant reading and re-reading the data on a regular basis to provide feedback to my collaborators and to assist with the next planning and action stages. Additionally, specific sections of data were analysed at particular points in time, for example in the course of preparing a journal publication.

3.5.1   Thematic Analysis

I analysed the transcripts and field notes using reflexive thematic analysis (TA) (Braun and Clarke, 2019), and will present a more detailed examples of this process in the next chapter (Chapter 4). Due to the flexibility of TA in terms of allowing the researcher to focus on the data from many different angles rather than being grounded in one particular theoretical framework, it is a well-suited method to analyse data in participatory research such as PAR (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Additionally, I was not looking to generate or replicate theory from the data, but chose thematic analysis as an approach that can depict highly contextualised knowledge due to its ability to capture situated explanations (Braun and Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke, TA "is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (2006, p.79). These themes are stories about particular patterns of shared meaning within a set of data. Themes do not necessarily reflect the quantifiable prevalence of data items, but their selection rather depends on the researcher's judgement if a particular theme captures an important explanation regarding the research question. Underpinning the themes is a central organising or core concept, which emphasises a uniting idea. In thematic analysis, this uniting idea refers to shared meaning, rather than a shared topic (Braun and Clarke, 2018, 2019). Themes can capture semantic or latent meaning, depending on the level of interpretation given by the researcher, and may depend on how the data were coded. The coding process should be consistent and systematic across the data set and can be inductive (data driven), deductive (theory driven) or a combination of both. Braun and Clarke highlight that no data set is without contradiction and that it is not the role of the researcher to "smooth out or ignore the tensions and inconsistencies within and across data items" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.89).

The process of conducting TA usually follows six defined stages (Braun and Clarke, 2006):

1. Familiarising yourself (e.g. transcribing, reading)
2. Generating initial codes (coding the data set and collating data relevant to codes)
3. Searching for themes (collating codes into potential themes)
4. Reviewing themes (checking if the themes work on the code level and the entire data set)
5. Defining and naming (analysis to refine the stories of the themes)
6. Producing the report (final analysis and selection of examples)

Throughout all these stages, TA acknowledges the active role of the researcher in identifying, selecting and reporting themes from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This process requires reflexivity from the researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2018), in order to skilfully and responsibly

navigate power imbalances in the analysis of data and the selection of themes. Thus, a collaborative approach to data analysis is desirable in PAR projects (Chen *et al.*, 2010).

My analysis is philosophically underpinned by a critical realist perspective, which acknowledges the participatory nature of PAR in which knowledge is co-constructed between researchers and communities, whilst at the same time acknowledging the external and structural circumstances that shape my collaborators' experiences (for example, external policies on ageing and digital participation or the age-friendliness of environments) (Houston, 2010). I carried out each analysis in two stages: generating codes and creating themes. First, I generated codes using NVivo 12 software (released March 2018, QSR international). The first stage of coding was carried out inductively to explore the transcripts and field notes in their entirety. In stage two, I repeated the coding process with a deductive focus to hone in on digital and civic aspects and check that I had not missed any data that related to my research questions. I then created themes from the entity of inductive and deductive codes. These selected themes were regularly discussed with my collaborators as part of the reflection stages of PAR and themes were sense-checked and approved by my collaborators ahead of publications. We also collaboratively worked on projects that disseminated the research in an accessible format, such as through the media of podcasts and video clips. I will return to the analytical process in the findings chapters that follow by giving a more detailed overview of data, example codes and the derived themes.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Conducting research requires consideration of how to engage in the most respectful and ethical way. The World Health Organization defines research ethics as the standards of conduct for researchers, which are established and reviewed in order to "protect the dignity, rights and welfare of research participants" (World Health Organization, no date). Ethical principles support researchers in determining 'right action'. Manzo and Brightbill (2007) outline commonly understood basic principles as:

1) respect for persons, thus treating everyone as autonomous agents and protecting people with 'diminished autonomy' (e.g. children or people with psychological disorders);

2) beneficence: to not only minimise harm, but instead maximise the beneficial outcomes of the research; and

3) justice: treating everybody as equals and a fair distribution of research risks and benefits, thus not being exploitative (Manzo and Brightbill, 2007).

These ethical principles are often formalised within guidelines adopted by professional organisations and learned societies. Gerontology research engages with older people in different life situations regarding such issues as their health and wellbeing, housing circumstances or social care needs. The ethical guidelines of the British Society of Gerontology suggest that researchers need to reflect on how their research could impact (both positively and negatively) on the lives of involved participants. Researchers should also be fully transparent about the research process and prioritise participants' well-being. Other general ethical considerations might involve incentives or research payments, risks of exploitation if participation is voluntary, and an adequate dissemination of the research findings (British Society of Gerontology, 2012).

Regarding HCI research, the ethical implications of technology design and deployment have been subject to increased attention over recent years, highlighting issues ranging from data privacy and data capitalism (West, 2017) to questions of design justice (Dombrowski, Harmon and Fox, 2016). Even though the ethical code of conduct of the Association for Computing Machinery outlines general ethical considerations (e.g. non-discrimination, privacy and confidentiality) and professional responsibilities (e.g. competence, security of systems) (Association for Computing Machinery, 2018), more detailed discussions of ethical challenges in HCI research have recently occurred at conferences as part of town halls or workshops (Hodge *et al.*, 2020), recognising the importance of addressing ethical issues in Computing.

3.6.1   Ethical Considerations for PAR

Some of the ethical considerations outlined above are particularly relevant in PAR, working closely and embedded in communities and therefore being subject to a variety of ethical values as well as challenges that are not typically encountered in more traditional research approaches (Manzo and Brightbill, 2007). As outlined by Manzo and Brightbill, the first problem that some PAR researchers might face is the need to fully outline a research project before being granted ethical approval, thus making it harder to share control of the project with participants and reducing the needed flexibility of the project with regard to interpersonal dynamics and changing needs. Additionally, the principle of beneficence is inherent to PAR, actively seeking to make an impact and to create benefits for the participants. However, this dimension of the principle often falls short in ethical considerations compared to the no-harm dimension, which can lead researchers to believe that they behaved ethically if they created no negative or perceivable impact. In contrast, PAR is rooted in an understanding of social justice, which

actively encourages participants to generate benefits for themselves. Another ethical challenge for PAR researchers might be related to privacy and the need to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity. Whilst best ethical practice often recommends anonymity for research participants, this can lead to an exaggeration of the researcher's narrative, muting the voice of research participants. Manzo and Brightbill (2007) therefore suggest an approach towards a participatory ethics, which takes into account the specific characteristics of PAR. These additional ethical principles include: 1) the active representation in and the shaping of research by research participants themselves as opposed to the researcher; 2) a broader accountability of researchers to not only ethical review boards but also community stakeholders; 3) social responsiveness to the needs and perspectives of the participants and thus a heightened flexibility in the PAR process; 4) the participants' agency to initiate change and the need for ethical behaviour not just from the researcher, but all stakeholders involved; and 5) the need to facilitate reflexivity of participants, for example by involving them in a constant and ongoing ethical review which reflects the PAR process as opposed to a one-off ethical review. Adopting these additional ethical paradigms creates opportunities for wider social discussions on ethical behaviour through research (Manzo and Brightbill, 2007).

3.6.2   Ethics in practice for my PAR project

In order to address the tensions between the need for ethical approval at the beginning of this PAR project and granting it a necessary flexibility throughout the process, this PhD project received ethical approval from the Newcastle University ethics committee at several stages throughout the process (Ref: 8659/2018, Ref: 13807/2018, Ref: 14663/2018) (Ref 8659/2018 in Appendix D). Overall, I sought to conduct my research in alignment with the ethical guidelines of the British Society of Gerontology (British Society of Gerontology, 2012), valuing my collaborators' experiences and knowledge. This was of particular importance to me when using PAR as an embedded researcher, especially when working with communities of people who are often erroneously viewed as digitally excluded. I also placed importance on providing a transparent research setting, which meant that informed consent was sought from all collaborators (Appendix E). Throughout the process I learned that receiving consent for a longer-lasting PAR project is always an individual conversation. While for some people the prospect of being a research collaborator can be exciting, for others it can present a change within an initial relationship from friendly to suspicious, as soon as a signature was required. I learned to always take time to explain and talk about the research in order to establish a mutual understanding about the research process. Consent was renewed throughout the project at various stages ahead of more formal data collection opportunities, such as interviews,

workshops, and the Radio Festival. This served as a reminder of the research project's purpose, but also as an opportunity to re-negotiate consent if needed. Even though I adapted the consent forms aligned with the purpose of each specific data collection activity, and initiated a conversation, not one of my collaborators expressed the wish to renegotiate their consent. Indeed, I perceived some collaborators to be slightly annoyed at the number of signatures required. Looking back, I should have drawn on learnings from other longitudinal research projects and used this as an opportunity to expand the conversation on ethics more thoroughly and to engage my collaborators on this topic in a different way. If I could repeat the process at this stage of my learning, I would have opened up a round of questions and answers and a general discussion on shaping the ongoing ethics of the project in a more collaborative way.

The challenge of maintaining anonymity of participants in PAR became very clear throughout my project. Many collaborators were justifiably proud of their work as content creators and explicitly wished, for example, to be named in publications resulting from this project. This opened up questions about how to navigate anonymity when reporting on organisational insights, whilst honouring the wish of some collaborators to be associated with a publication. I chose to base decisions about naming collaborators on the nature of the findings. If the content of the publication involved critical organisational reflections, or reported on work that represented an organisation's effort, I chose to refer to everybody involved by pseudonyms and discussed this choice with those who initially wished to be named. If my reflections served the purpose of a wider outreach, then I followed the explicit wish to be named. For this thesis, everybody involved with the Age Voice's work as an organisation was pseudonymised, in order to highlight the organisation's efforts as a whole, rather than focusing on individual opinions. I report on the other content creators and organisations using their real names. As part of this research project, I worked with diverse groups of older adults and individuals. In order to locate the socio-cultural context of people involved in this research, I will now give an overview of several aspects of diversity I encountered as part of this research. Being mindful of the Age Voice members' anonymity, I focus this description of the socio-cultural context on broader factors of diversity rather than individual circumstances. Additionally, I hone in on the intersectionality, or interconnectedness, of those different factors and explore critically how they are shaped and constructed by the wider social context. Regarding the geographical location, most of my collaborators were based in the North of England (Newcastle and Manchester) and two in London. Regional effects of inequalities in health or employment, visible in the North-South divide (Möller *et al.*, 2013), shape the advocacy work of my collaborating organisations in the North of England. Their work is centred around supporting

their members, who might be disproportionately affected by inequalities than people of a similar age living in the South. This in turn is reflected in their members' socio-cultural backgrounds. With regard to Sonder Radio, the leadership team consists of younger, highly educated people, who aim to support a diverse group of older adults in their civic expression. Some of their older radio presenters had to face unemployment in later life or poverty. In these cases, the radio workshops are used to support the acquisition of new skills and to build confidence. One of the station's older presenters identifies as trans, highlighting issues the trans community faces and advocating for older members of the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, Sonder Radio represents ethnically diverse older radio show hosts and their communities in Manchester. Those shows in particular highlight the intersectionality between age and ethnicity, sexual orientation or employment history. Regarding the Age Voice organisation in Newcastle, the advocacy work is done by older adults themselves. Even though their work is mainly driven by volunteers with a higher educational background, some of the organisation's members come from a working class background and only became active members of the Age Voice team in later life. I had a personal conversation with one member of the Age Voice, who shared her story and learning trajectory about taking on an active, civic and representative Age Voice role in retirement. Her working class background informs her civic ambition of advocating for inclusivity and equality in later life and she is able to draw on her own experiences of inequality across the life course. Perhaps remarkably, most Age Voice volunteers I collaborated with are women. Formal and political civic participation activities in later life are often characterised by a gender effect and dominated by men (Serrat and Villar, 2020). However the Age Voice's leadership team consists entirely of women. This highlights the Age Voice's efforts to represent older women as active digital citizens. Additionally, from my work as an embedded researcher, I learned that the Age Voice communications team continuously worked on reaching older members of their community who experienced the impact of inequalities or isolation. Particular care was also taken to hold events at accessible locations, in order to be inclusive of disabled members. In contrast to some Age Voice members who started participating civically later in life, my collaborator in London has a life-course trajectory of being an advocate for older adults working in a range of public sector roles. This professional background is reflected in his radio show, which highlights mainly research and policy issues related to ageing. Coming together as the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC), these three groups bring diverse approaches and opinions to the co-operative and therefore support LLARC's overarching goal to represent diversity in later life through audio and radio broadcasts.

Whilst PAR can be an empowering way of conducting research of relevance for the communities involved, it can also present social challenges that require special ethical consideration. A core feature of PAR involves working closely with people in a community, something that depends on good personal and working relationships. However, this is something that cannot always be guaranteed and can prove challenging at times. Throughout the research process I was confronted with a series of challenges. One particular challenge was to navigate the death of a collaborator, Beth, and grieving for her collectively as a team. At the time shortly before she died, we had used a photograph of Beth in the radio studio for a public Open Lab research output. Following her death, we amended the publication by adding words to acknowledge Beth and we also sent the booklet to Beth's family together with a letter and a bouquet of flowers. We still distributed the publications as Beth set an example for lifelong civic engagement and to honour her active contributions to a radio show despite facing health challenges and restricted mobility.

Other challenges that I faced throughout the PAR process were dynamics within the organisation as well as interpersonal difficulties. These had to be either resolved or considered carefully as part of my research ethics in practice. Some of these conflicts arose between different stakeholders and required patience as well as the spirit of democratic research with the option of giving everybody the opportunity to voice their opinions. Other conflicts happened on an interpersonal and intergenerational level. Whilst I highly value our intergenerational research context and feel grateful to have been able to learn together, some difficulties emerged primarily as a result of an age difference. In several instances, I experienced patronising or disrespectful responses that I interpreted as arising from the (power) dynamics between me, a female researcher in her 20s, and other collaborators who were older and male. These difficulties were a space for me to reflect and to value the skills that everybody contributed to the project, to stand up for myself as a researcher and also to appreciate that these conflicts were a rare occurrence, with an overall friendly, supportive, and honest working relationship that I established together with my collaborators. These personal relationships involved caring for each other, a care that I as a researcher received for example in the form of Christmas and birthday wishes or by being invited to events that were of significance to my collaborators, such as to attend one collaborator's graduation as a city tour guide. I also received support when I went through a personally challenging time in the second year of my PhD, highlighting the strong personal relationships that were built on time and care throughout the four-year long PAR process. For me, the care for my collaborators' organisation sometimes manifested in providing overall support with the organisation's technological ambitions and other projects as

much as I could. I realised that it is important to me to see the organisation thrive and succeed not just because of the PAR goals of creating benefit for the community, but also on a personal level.

In the second year of my PhD, the COVID-19 pandemic affected everybody's lives, but it was particularly challenging for older adults. Declared as a homogenous risk group by the UK government, we witnessed a change in how older adults were treated and observed a notable rise in ageist public discourse (Ayalon *et al.*, 2020). As part of their work as community radio show hosts, my collaborators have spoken out against age-discrimination associated with COVID-19 policies and highlighted diversity in later life (Later Life Audio and radio co-operative, no date). On a personal level, the pandemic strengthened my connection with some collaborators, who I knew experienced high levels of loneliness or frustration. I made it a regular habit to check in for informal catch ups via phone or e-mail and socially distanced walks later on in 2020. This reflects that the care in PAR projects does not only entail care of the research collaboration itself, but also caring about the well-being of the individuals involved. Even though the pandemic heavily disrupted existing workflows for my collaborators and myself, it also opened up windows of opportunity. With many of my collaborators still isolating at home, we shifted the research process entirely online, which allowed for new insights on PAR on the topics of ageing and digitalisation, which I will reflect on in Chapter 5.

As a PAR researcher, I tried to regularly evaluate the research collaboration, and therefore my ethics in practice depending on the dynamics of the research process. The success of this project was based on a mutual understanding of care between me and my collaborators and good personal and working relationships that were sustained and nourished by both parties over the course of the four years.

3.7   Chapter summary

In this chapter I elucidate the methodology and methods used as a response to my research questions investigating how older adults engage with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices (RQ1) and how age-friendly communities can better exploit digital technologies and community media to support older people's civic participation (RQ2). Using an overall approach of PAR, I described how these research questions developed as part of the research process. I located my specific approach to PAR alongside other applications of PAR in gerontology and HCI research. Even though PAR projects are increasing in both fields, there is still a lack of PAR research especially at the intersection of gerontology and HCI.

Sharing insights from my own PAR research process, I contrast the very neat theoretical approach to a PAR cycle with the messiness of a real-life PAR approach. With regard to the data collection process, I engaged with methods that were aligned with PAR's key characteristics (e.g. activist, collaborative and democratic, context-specific), namely interviews, workshops, and research through design. Using thematic analysis as a well-suited and reflexive approach to analysing PAR data, I define in more detail my own data analysis using a combination of inductive and deductive coding. As part of PAR's commitment to change, I critically reviewed ethical considerations in gerontology, HCI and ethics in practice for my own project. Touching on key aspects such as power relations and unforeseen circumstances, I reflect on my learning experiences of consent, interpersonal and intergenerational conflict and care. The next chapter, in which I present findings from my collaboration with the Age Voice organisation in Newcastle upon Tyne, is the first of two findings chapters that respond to my overarching research questions.

Chapter 4:

Findings: the contribution of content creation and digital communications to civic participation in later life

4.1 Introduction

As argued in earlier chapters, the growing digitalisation of public services and the ubiquity of digital technologies in daily life increasingly demands that older adults are digitally literate in order to maximise their opportunities for civic participation. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this process, highlighting the need for citizens to engage with digital technologies in order to stay socially and civically included (Milenkova and Lendzhova, 2021; Weil *et al.*, 2021). However, this chapter refers to research carried out before the COVID-19 pandemic. The issues explored throughout this chapter relate to my overarching research questions, by exploring a digital dimension within current frameworks of later life civic participation and contextualising content creation activities within the WHO age-friendly domains. I focus in particular on collective social participation as one type of later life civic participation, as proposed by Serrat *et al.* (2019) in the framework described in Chapter 2. I respond to my research questions by presenting findings from ongoing embedded research and four PAR cycles that shed light on how older adults engage with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices (RQ1) and indicate pathways for age-friendly communities to better exploit digital technologies and community media to support older people's civic participation (RQ2). The work presented in this chapter represents my analysis of the process and outcomes of conducting participatory action research (PAR) with the Age Voice, an older people's organisation in Newcastle upon Tyne. Drawing on four methods (embedded research, workshops, interviews, and research through design), and reflecting the messy nature of PAR described in Chapter 3, I present findings relating to my collaboration with the Age Voice communications team. First, I provide a detailed overview of my collaborating organisation, Age Voice. Second, I present four stages as part of a processual overview, that demonstrates the development of my and my collaborators' conceptual understanding across the PAR. Third, I present methods, analysis, findings and a summary from each individual PAR cycle. Fourth, drawing on interviews conducted alongside the PAR process, I critically review overarching themes that highlight Age Voice's priorities with regard to their communications. Finally, I position my findings in the wider literature and practice, discussing their implication with regard to the collective social dimension of Serrat *et al.*'s (2019) later life civic participation framework and the WHO age-friendly cities framework (World Health Organization, 2007).

4.2 The Age Voice of Newcastle

I briefly introduced the Age Voice organisation in Chapter 3. In this section, I elaborate on the key features of the organisation and my collaboration with the organisation's communications team, with the intention to further contextualise the content creation and digital communications

activities carried out by Age Voice. This more detailed overview supports the understanding of how the organisation and its members engage with digital content creation and online communications as part of their civic participation (RQ1) and exploit digital communications as part of their role as an age-friendly city stakeholder (RQ2).

Established in 2001 and mainly funded by the local council, Age Voice is a local organisation of older adults, whose volunteers are heavily involved in shaping social, cultural and political discourses around age and ageing in Newcastle upon Tyne. According to the organisation's website, the group is run by older people for older people and works towards "making Newcastle a great city in which to grow old". Its members engage with a variety of activities, ranging from "peer research, arts projects, focus groups and regular meetings with service providers and policymakers". The organisation is a registered charity, with a chair, a board of trustees and free membership for local older people. As of December 2020, the organisation had around 1,300 members. In addition to its civic work advocating for older people's rights, Age Voice offers members the opportunity to participate in four working groups addressing the topics of active older citizens, urban development and transport, housing and care, and information and communication. In focusing on the domain of information and communication, the communications group is responsible for creating Age Voice's various digital and non-digital communications outputs, such as the organisation's radio show, its printed magazine and a digital newsletter, as described in section 4.4. Age Voice has been a key stakeholder organisation in the city's age-friendly city group since the group was established and has continuously promoted an age-friendly agenda in Newcastle. The organisation's chair and trustees, along with a part-time Executive Officer funded by the City Council, represent Age Voice members within a range of local, regional and national bodies, including the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities.

I previously collaborated with the Age Voice radio team as part of my MRes research (see Chapters 3 and 5 for more details), forming a strong research collaboration that set the foundation for my PhD project focusing on digital citizenship, which I collaborated closely on with the organisation's communications team. Table 4.1 presents an overview of the six collaborators in the communications team (using pseudonyms), their roles within the organisation and which media output they were responsible for as part of the communications team. It also indicates which parts of the PAR each person was involved in (the exploration of the organisation's media landscape, the re-design of the newsletter or the research through design approach of working with digital audio statements). As noted in Chapter 3, all Age Voice

participants gave consent to be included and referred to by pseudonyms in this thesis, which was negotiated as part of the ethical consent procedure.

Pseudonym	Organisational role	Communications responsibility	Collaboration
Ada	Chair	Newsletter, Social Media	Media Landscape, Digital Newsletter
Edith	Head of communications	Newsletter, Social Media, Magazine	Media Landscape, Digital Newsletter, Digital Audio
Greta	Executive officer	Website, Social Media	Media Landscape, Digital Audio
Martha	Former administrator	Website	Media Landscape
Rose	Member	Radio	Media Landscape
Victor	Communications member	Radio, Magazine	Communications planning meeting

Table 4.1: Overview of the collaborators for the organisation's communications

My doctoral work encompassed four PAR cycles of collaboration with Age Voice's communications team (Figure 4.1) and ongoing data collection in embedded research and interviews. Over the course of this chapter, I demonstrate the trajectory of collaborating with Age Voice on the direction of this PAR project. As reflected in the previous chapter, the process of conducting PAR in practice is not as straightforward as presented in theoretical frameworks. When writing this chapter, I was faced with the challenge of presenting the findings from a 'messy' PAR process, within which several PAR cycles overlapped or had dead ends, in a coherent way. I therefore decided to start by giving an overview of the entirety of this PAR to develop a processual understanding based on my embedded research. This overview is based on a retrospective analysis of data after the end of the field work. I identified four stages that represent key stages of the Age Voice PAR. Subsequently, I move on to analyse each PAR cycle in depth, to identify findings specific to those individual cycles of research activity. This includes an in-depth exploration and visualisation of the Age Voice media landscape in PAR

cycle 1, insights from the re-design process of the organisation's digital newsletter in PAR cycles 2 and 4, and findings from research through design, working with digital audio as a way to strengthen engagement with Age Voice in the local market in PAR cycle 3. For each cycle I present methods, analysis, findings and a summary. To examine more deeply the meanings and themes that cut across the PAR process, I then present findings from interviews with the Age Voice communications volunteers, highlighting their multifaceted experiences of engaging with content creation activities, elaborating on their relationship with their audience, and addressing how the organisation showcases age-friendly city information.

Ongoing embedded research and Interviews

PAR cycle 1

Beginning 2019:
Exploring the Age Voice media landscape

PAR cycle 2

Feb 2019 - Sept 2019
Designing an improved newsletter

PAR cycle 4

October 2019
Launching newsletter

Follow up engagement

March & April 2019:
Older people's voices in the local market
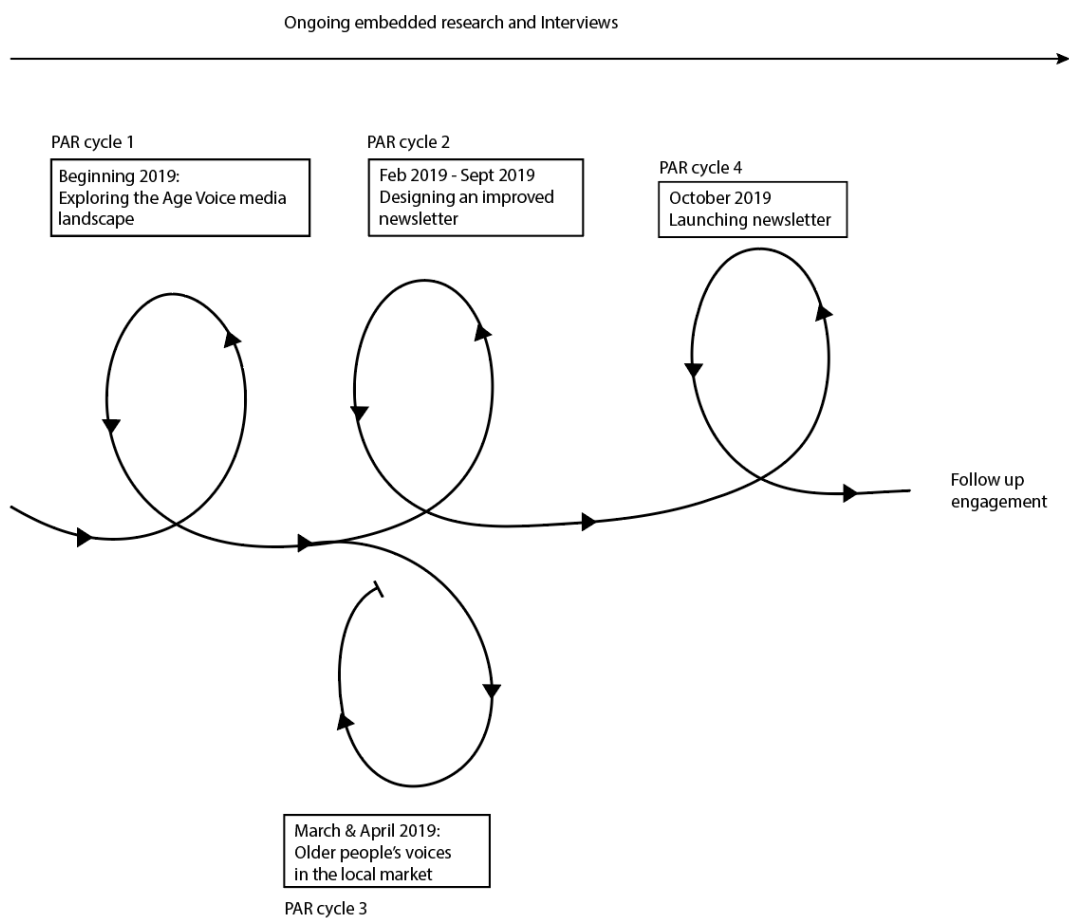
PAR cycle 3

Figure 4.1: PAR cycles from collaboration with Age Voice's communications group

4.3 Developing processual understanding

In this section I report on findings from my embedded research with the Age Voice communications team across the entirety of the PAR process. From the analysis of field notes from eight representative meetings as part of my embedded research, I created four stages that represent a processual trajectory of how understanding is co-created and changed as part of this PAR with the Age Voice communications team. By starting this chapter with an overview of the overall PAR trajectory and its associated stages of knowledge development, I wish to

highlight the ability of PAR to change the team's perceptions of their work as part of the research process and give an indication at which stage of conceptual thinking each of the following individual PAR cycles can be located. The four stages outlined in this section draw attention to a deeper analysis of the development of the communications team's work priorities and understanding of their own work over the course of the PAR, from focusing inward on internal issues, towards widening the lens to a broader context perspective of the team's position within the city. Stages 1 (Defining the communications group's structure, membership and strategy) and 2 (Creating efficient workflows) at the beginning of the PAR reflect the team's initial introspection on being concerned with the structure, goals and workflows of the communications group. Stage 3 (Strengthening digital participation) expands the team's thinking towards considering their audience and towards recognising the potential of using digital communications as a means of engaging more older adults. Finally, stage 4 (Positioning the Age Voice communications within the age-friendly city) is focused externally on the role of the communications team's work within the age-friendly city context. I will elaborate on each stage by examining its deeper conceptual meaning. Despite visually locating these stages alongside the PAR cycles (red text in Figure 4.2), they procedurally describe an overarching, evolving and chronological trajectory of how my and my collaborators' shared understanding about the communications shifted over time, rather than being associated with one specific PAR cycle.
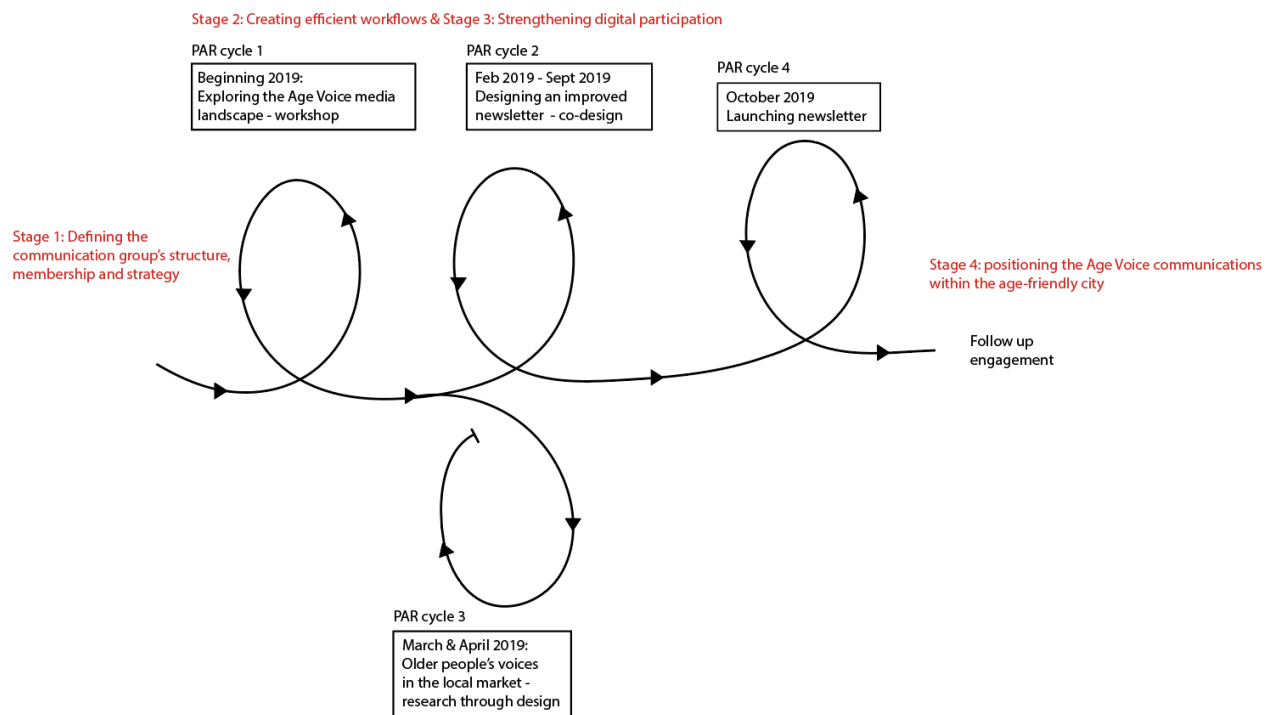
Figure 4.2: Location of stages alongside the PAR cycles

4.3.1   *Method: drawing on insights from embedded research*

As an ongoing method throughout the doctoral PAR process, I continuously embedded myself within the Age Voice's communications group by attending and observing team meetings and writing field notes and reflections. I have described my approach to field note writing in Chapter 3. As part of this embedded research, I was privileged to be able to observe first hand the organisation's efforts regarding their digital strategy and associated content creation workflows, the organisation's digital and civic participatory practices, as well as interpersonal dynamics between the content creators. This section of the chapter demonstrates a trajectory, in which the communications workflows themselves and our joint understanding about the communications in a wider context changed throughout the PAR. For the purpose of demonstrating this trajectory, after the end of field work I identified eight key meetings for my analysis, out of an overall 17 meetings which I took part in. Based on reading and re-reading my field notes and reflections, I consider these meetings milestones with regard to the Age Voice content creation activities and digital engagement strategy, which reflects their relevance to be considered in response to my research questions. I labelled each meeting with a topic (Table 4.2) that captures the intention and outcome of each engagement. These topics demonstrate the range of activities which I was involved in as an embedded researcher. Table 4.2 gives an overview of the meetings that I considered for this analysis in chronological order.

Meeting	Participants	Meeting topic
1 (October 2018)	Greta, Victor	Defining overarching communications questions collaboration strategy
2 (November 2018)	Ada, Edith, Greta, Martha	Communications administration: Facebook and newsletter
3 (December 2018)	Edith, Martha	Technical and conceptual support
4 (February 2019)	Entire communications group	Full communications group meeting
5 (February 2019)	Greta	Communication challenges and dreams
6 (July 2019)	Entire organisation	Age Voice AGM: Re-thinking the "Digital" in the organisation
7 (September 2019)	Ada, Edith, Greta	Increasing digital participation of older adults in the city
8 (October 2019)	Ada, Edith, Greta, 2 researchers	A "digital age-friendly city"

Table 4.2: Overview of key meetings attended as an embedded researcher

In my role as an embedded researcher, I collected data at all meetings in the form of contemporaneously written field notes in my digital research diary (Section 3.4.1). These field notes covered a range of topics, from more informational notes regarding the content of a meeting to describing people's interactions which each other or their perceptions and attitudes towards specific concepts related to my research questions, namely digital and civic participation and content creation. The field notes sit alongside my personal reflections on being an embedded PAR researcher in each meeting. Depending on the engagement activity, the quantity of the field notes differed, with more in-depth notes taken at meetings that were less technical and more discussion heavy.

4.3.2 Analysis: conceptualising thematic stages

As outlined in Chapter 3 and reflecting an approach that is often used in PAR, I analysed the field notes from the eight meetings specified above in NVivo using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019). For the analysis of the overall PAR trajectory, I considered seven pages of text, part bullet points and part fully written sentences. Some of the notes that were initially taken as bullet points contained small gaps which required some retrospective interpretation ahead of the analysis, which I added as annotations in NVivo. Since the analysis was carried out retrospectively after the end of my field work, I created targeted deductive codes that were representative of the organisation's conceptualisation of their digital engagement at the time of the meeting. The codes I applied reflect the focus of my field notes, which considered practical elements related to the research questions, such as 'communications workflows' or 'encouraging digital participation', interpersonal interactions, such as 'different personal viewpoints' and the PAR process itself 'PAR action idea'. Figure 4.3 shows an example of my field notes and coding practice.
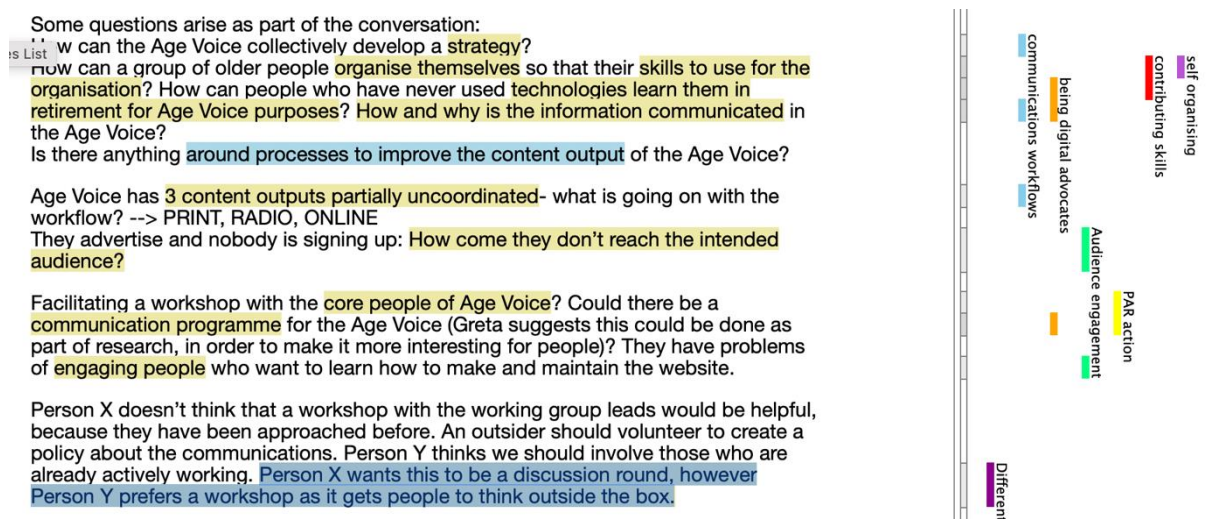
Figure 4.3: Example field notes from embedded research and applied codes

Overall, I created 19 codes, which I subsequently grouped by similar meaning. As a result, I created four thematic stages that reflect steps in the process of the PAR and appropriately characterise the trajectory of the organisation's conceptual thinking and shaping of their communications strategy. For example, the codes 'communication team members', 'contributing skills' and 'self-organising' were grouped as stage 1, defining the communications group's structure, membership and strategy. Subsequent stages are stage 2, creating efficient content workflows, stage 3 strengthening digital participation, and stage 4 positioning the organisation within the age-friendly city. Responding to my research questions, these stages address the ways, in which the organisation made use of content creation activities for their civic participation (RQ1), and explore the meaning of the organisation's digital interactions and their meaning for age-friendly communities in response to RQ2. I present findings from each stage in the following section.

4.3.3   Findings: developing understanding along a PAR trajectory

In this section I highlight insights from each conceptual stage developed in my analysis in more detail, to demonstrate the trajectory of my PAR and explore how this processual understanding shaped my collaboration with the Age Voice communications team.

Stage 1: Defining the communications group's structure, membership and strategy

At the beginning of the research process, the Age Voice communications team and I decided to establish an overview of the existing communications, workflows and stakeholders within the team, which is reflected in my findings on stage 1. These findings are grounded in data collected at the beginning of our collaboration, where I was invited to observe the status-quo of the organisation's communications and we subsequently discussed our impressions of how the communications group operated. This first stage responds to RQ1 by highlighting how the Age Voice communications team engaged with digital content creation activities at the beginning of the PAR process with regard to the team's structure, membership and strategy.

Considering the group's structure and membership, Victor noted that *"everyone who is somehow involved with any communications of the Age Voice is automatically part of the communications group" (Field notes, meeting 4).* This statement highlighted the team's efforts to be inclusive, yet also reveals different understandings of what 'involvement' with Age Voice communications entailed. Perceptions of involvement in the communications group ranged from being involved with an isolated aspect of the communications (e.g. being a member of the radio team), to active involvement with the communications group as a whole and having

oversight of the structure as part of the regular communications meetings. This lack of a collaborative structure and defined membership criteria also impacted the team's strategy. One of my collaborators elaborated that *"a communications group doesn't exist, but rather many separate communications efforts feeding back to each other" (Field notes, meeting 5)*. Indeed, we explored that this lack of an overarching group identity sometimes led to a lack of intentionally created content rather than pursuing a specific content creation strategy, a recurring feature of the early phase of my collaboration with the Age Voice communications group: "*For the moment, [our digital engagement] is very hidden [from the membership]. I put [a post] out and wait for people to tell us what they think" (Edith, meeting 2).* This approach of waiting for people to comment on content rather than engaging people more actively with the organisation's communications, often impacted on the volunteers' motivations and I observed occasional frustrations in working without a specific strategy. In this context, Rose identified that the group relied on feedback to guide their decisions and commented that *"everybody is putting in so much effort, but if you don't get the feedback, you don't know what the people really want" (meeting 4).* Instead of working to a co-ordinated communications strategy based on their audience's interests and highlighting the organisation's value, the team posted about their own interests because *"[they] wanted to be noticed" (Ada, meeting 2)*. This reflects a tension between individual volunteers' dedication to represent the organisation through their communications and wish to be acknowledged locally as part of their community, and the need to implement a co-ordinated communications strategy that represented the organisation's goals.

By engaging my collaborators to critically reflect on their work as part of this embedded research process, we defined key issues from this initial stage related to the communications team's structure, membership and strategy. Identifying the team's lack of defined membership criteria, team structure and a resulting lack of strategy prompted discussions on envisioning a trajectory that would allow the team to create more efficient content workflows (stage 2).

Stage 2: Creating efficient content workflows
Over the course of the next few meetings, the organisation's wish for a more efficient and digitalised external communications strategy became central to most communications meetings. The communications team repeatedly voiced their frustration with barriers that slowed down the process. Two examples of these barriers were financial restrictions, due to the limited budget of the charity, and power structures within the communications team, which meant that different opinions with regard to innovation had to be deliberated on. In order to

work around these structural and personal challenges and to make better use of the collaborators' time, we decided that my research on the digital aspects of the organisation's communications was to be addressed with a smaller group of three collaborators, Ada, Edith and Greta. All three collaborators were regular attendees of the communications group meetings and directly involved with the Age Voice's digital media output. As shown in Table 4.2, all meetings I took part in, apart from my observations at the organisation's AGM, were in collaboration with the three women.

Working on developing efficient digital content creation workflows, we addressed two central and recurring questions posed by the communications team members at the beginning of the research process:

> *How can the Age Voice communications workflows be improved?*
> *How and why is information communicated by the Age Voice?*
> *(both field notes, meeting 1).*

Based on my collaborators' initial wish that the communications content should *"focus on impact and what the Age Voice actually does, rather than reporting information" (Field notes, meeting 4),* we collaboratively reflected more in-depth on how a digital communications strategy could achieve higher impact whilst supporting existing workflows, such as the team's rota regarding the distribution of content. The team recognised the need to establish new, specific workflows, for example *sending out prompts for feedback to the different working groups after meetings (field notes, meeting 5)* in order to leverage the wealth of information created by the organisation and convert it into more public communications content. By *"making it easier and more collaborative, so that confidence can be built, and content can be re-used across different media outputs" (Field notes, meeting 5)*, the team hoped to encourage more members to proactively take part in the organisation's digital content creation activities by simplifying their workflows and making them more accessible to more volunteers. This reflection of including more older members of the organisation with the creation of its digital communications marked the beginning of a more in-depth understanding of the team's role in heightening their members' digital participation, as outlined in the following stage 3.

Overall, this stage of discussing how to create efficient content workflows emphasised a change in the communications team's thinking from reflecting on the static situation of their existing workflows, towards creating change and moving into the action of changing deeply entrenched

structures. In terms of the PAR timeline (Figure 4.2) these conceptual changes were accompanied by more explicit actions of establishing new digital content creation workflows (e.g. the re-design of the Age Voice newsletter, described later in this chapter).

Stage 3: Strengthening digital participation

Despite investing considerable time and energy in producing a variety of communications, the communications volunteers reported a disconnect between the organisation and their members. In this stage, I report on how the organisation's understanding evolved from being concerned with their internal structures and workflows, towards a deeper consideration of the communication team's engagement with their audience and members. Greta summarised the disconnection in an especially insightful way when she noted that *"[Age Voice] advertise, but nobody is signing up" (Greta, meeting 1)*. This lack of engagement with new members is also reflected in the team's wish to include more members in the creation of their digital communications, as established in stage 2. Indeed, throughout my embedded research, nobody was willing to get involved with supporting the organisation's digital content creation. Recognition of the disconnect prompted Greta to raise two fundamental questions to be tackled by the Age Voice communications team:

> *Why does the organisation not reach its intended audience?*
>
> *How can the team engage more people in the creation of the organisation's communications?*
>
> *(Field notes, meeting 1)*

Both questions had particular relevance in relation to the organisation's Facebook audience at that particular time. Despite the volunteers' best efforts to increase the level of digital engagement by using social media prior to engaging with the PAR, the number of online followers, at that point approximately 70, had remained largely static for a long period of time. One outcome of the group's deliberations was, therefore, the suggestion to set specific engagement targets and to invite the organisation's existing, and potentially new, Facebook followers to *"help Age Voice increase their followers and reach their target" (Field notes, meeting 4)*. Rather than trying to reach an unknown audience, Edith suggested starting in a rather more pragmatic way by attempting to *"boost the information to your own friends first" (Field notes, meeting 4)*. Whilst these measures were working and, over time, the organisation reported that they managed to increase their online audience, for example increasing their Facebook followers to approximately 200, members of the communications group still harboured the ambition to *"think about the audience in a more sophisticated way" (Field notes, meeting 5)*. As mentioned earlier in relation to the second theme, a lack of digital confidence

might have been one factor that prevented Age Voice members from engaging with the organisation's online communications. Being entirely self-taught, even the communications volunteers themselves struggled with occasional digital challenges. I noted in my field notes:

> *Greta is asked to upload information given to her by other organisations to the Age Voice Facebook, but doesn't know how (Field notes, meeting 2)*

This meant that the problems arising from a lack of strategy were multiplied by problems arising from a lack of digital skills. Because of their personal learning process of engaging with unfamiliar digital technologies, the Age Voice digital communications team recognised their digital content as an important part of their communications strategy. Over the course of several meetings, Age Voice developed the aim to position themselves as an organisation which supports their members in learning digital skills. By offering volunteering opportunities to create content for the organisation, the communications team hoped for new members to support their team, whilst at the same time advocating for the importance of being digitally active in later life. This point of the PAR reflects a shift in the team's understanding of digital participation as something of benefit to themselves, but equally as a topic that they should advocate for in their membership. Focussing specifically on digital skills associated with active content creation, we collectively recognised the concept as a main motivation in this PAR project. This led to a desire to be more proactive in raising the emerging issues from our discussions with the wider Age Voice membership. As a result, at the Age Voice annual general meeting (Meeting 6), the communications team were able to dedicate a short discussion session to the topic of the organisation's communications. Meeting face-to-face, the session set out to collect feedback about what topics the Age Voice members (as the intended audience of the communications group) would like to hear about and to raise awareness for the digital content that is provided by the organisation.

In summary, my account of this stage captures how, as part of the collective reflections in the PAR process, our conceptual thinking on strengthening digital participation in the communications team itself and the membership more widely advanced. It also reflects Age Voice's communications efforts in thinking about their audience more strategically and reaching out as part of a more participatory approach to their content creation activities.

Stage 4: Positioning Age Voice within the age-friendly city context

The fourth stage I created in the analysis of my embedded research describes the point of PAR at which we took into account Age Voice's reputation as a key stakeholder within the overall age-friendly city initiative. In the overall trajectory of the PAR, this stage is located nearer the

end of our collaboration (see Figure 4.2). It represents the transformation of our collaboration from considering Age Voice's communications at an internal level to considering their relevance as part of the wider age-friendly Newcastle initiative. The team viewed it as crucial to be *"perceived as part of the framework of ageing in the city" (Edith, Field notes, Meeting 4),* and therefore aimed to produce digital communications that reflected the age-friendly city efforts. At the discussion group I attended as part of the annual general meeting, I also observed a keen interest to promote Age Voice *"in local newspapers, GP surgeries or in general their digital aspects" (Field notes, Meeting 6)*, in order to be recognised as the central older people's organisation within the city. In response to RQ1, these observations highlight that the organisation's content creation activities were perceived by the Age Voice communications team to be of value in raising awareness for the organisation's civic and advocacy work. Additionally, I observed that the members of the Age Voice digital communications team were enthusiastic about ideas of creating a digital age-friendly city hub that could connect older adults to age-friendly projects (Meetings 6,7), a project that even at the time of writing has yet to be realised. As a member of the age-friendly initiative in Newcastle, the organisation is in a regular exchange with other age-friendly stakeholders across the city. Over the course of the PAR, I was invited on two occasions to present emerging insights from our work on the Age Voice digital engagement at the quarterly age-friendly city group meetings. Age Voice placed importance on being in close communication with other age-friendly city projects. Over the trajectory of the PAR, these efforts were reflected in the team's strategic way of working with communications, as they chose to not only promote their own projects but serve the wider age-friendly initiative by communicating content produced by other age-friendly city stakeholders. In response to RQ2, this stage sheds light on how older adults use digital communications as a source of information within age-friendly communities.

In summary, stage 4 of the PAR trajectory positions Age Voice's communications efforts as part of the wider age-friendly initiative in the city of Newcastle. This demonstrates an extended understanding of their work as not only relevant to the organisation itself, but also to be of benefit for the age-friendly city initiative.

4.3.4   *Summary: exploring different levels of engagement throughout the PAR*

In this section I presented an overall trajectory of the development of my PAR with the Age Voice communications team. By capturing these unique processual insights from the PAR, rather than focusing solely on the individual PAR cycles, I demonstrate how the process of the collaboration impacted our understanding of different aspects of the organisation's

communications work. To summarise, based on the analysis of my field notes taken throughout my embedded research with the Age Voice communications team, I derived four thematic stages that each represent a certain point of conceptual thinking about Age Voice communications over time. The first stage captured our initial understanding of the collaboration as an exploration of a status-quo regarding the communications team's structure, membership and strategy. We then moved on to consider different ways to create more efficient and inclusive content creation workflows, which could support the team in engaging more members with their work. In turn, this led to a deeper consideration of the concept of digital participation, as described in stage 3. Lastly, stage 4 reflects the later parts of our PAR, at which the team was able to expand the internal focus of delivering information to the organisation's members, towards positioning themselves as a key stakeholder of the distribution of age-friendly information across the city.

In the following section, I will move on to present each individual PAR cycle in depth, moving through the PAR process represented in Figure 4.1 in order to refer to the processual and conceptual understanding as established in this section. Each of the following cycles represents a specific PAR action, which informed the thematic stages discussed above. For each cycle, I therefore present methods, analysis and findings and locate the overall contribution as part of the processual overview.

4.4   The Age Voice media landscape

This section describes the first PAR working cycle conducted in collaboration with Age Voice to explore their communications in-depth. This approach allowed us to explore collaboratively how older adults make civic use of content creation activities in response to RQ1. At the same time, participants and I were able to identify potential for change. The main activity that this PAR cycle centred around was a workshop aimed at exploring the organisation's media landscape (Figure 4.4). We decided that the first PAR cycle should establish an overview of their existing communications, workflows and stakeholders. The decision to conduct a workshop as a method in this first cycle of the PAR was predominantly driven by the Age Voice communications team, who previously had good experiences with research workshops. I agreed that a workshop was a suitable format to offer the opportunity for a focussed exploration of the team's communications, whilst at the same time strengthening the collective experience of conducting research together. Based on my previous experience with conducting research workshops, the communications team asked me to design and facilitate this workshop.
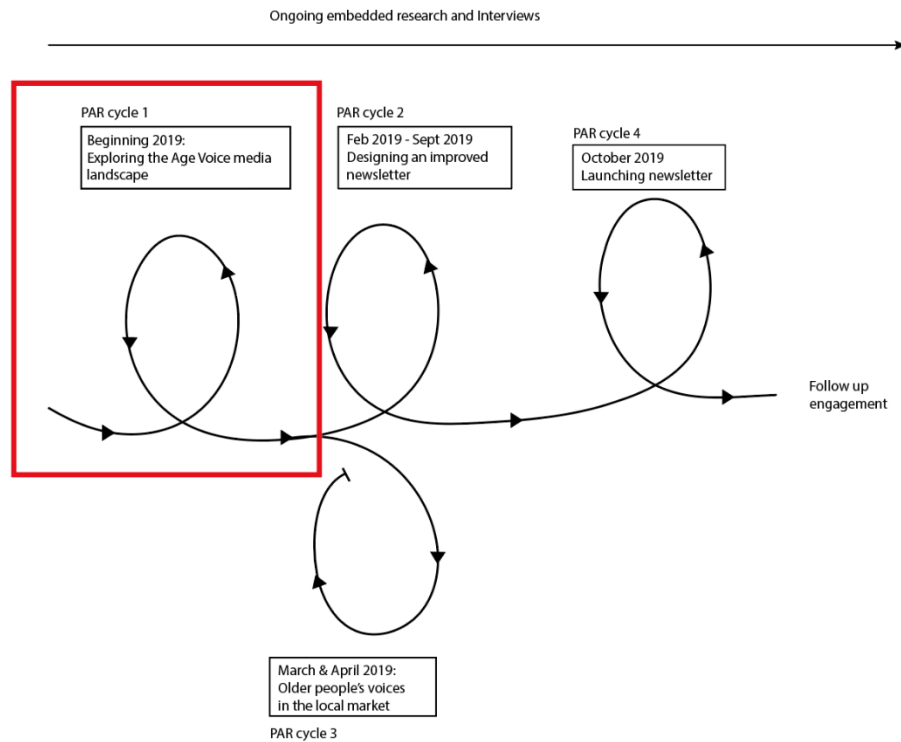
Figure 4.4: PAR cycle 1: the media landscape workshop

4.4.1   Method: media landscape workshop

I conducted a three-hour exploratory workshop at Newcastle University with five members of Age Voice's communications team (as specified in Table 4.1). All six collaborators specified in Table 4.1 were invited to take part in the workshop, however, only five chose to attend based on their direct involvement with the team's digital communications, as opposed to the creation of non-digital content. The workshop was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. I based the facilitation of this workshop on Interaction Design techniques, which are often used in relation to developing media technologies and conceptualise design and visualisations as a way of thinking (Tomitsch and Wrigley, 2018). This visual way of working with media workflows as part of an Interaction Design process supported me in elucidating the organisation's media interests and in building a visual representation of their media workflows.

The first activity was inspired by a card sorting activity originally designed as a way of visualising structures (Tomitsch and Wrigley, 2018, p.34). I created 14 paper cards that depicted a wide range of media channels and technologies (such as social media, print media, video or audio) (Figure 4.5). These cards were based on communication modes that I knew the organisation was already using, representing their current structures. Additionally, I added some of my own ideas on communications that I knew Age Voice members were not using at

the time. This was done in order to open up a discussion around Age Voice's media interests more generally and to see how they envisioned the organisation's scope for innovation as part of the PAR.

Figure 4.5: Three cards for card sorting activity (front and back)

I asked the team to classify the media cards into three categories: 1) media they were already using; 2) media they would like to use in the future; and 3) media they did not want to use (Figure 4.6). Taking turns, each team member selected a card from the pile and placed it into one of the categories.

Figure 4.6: First workshop activity – card sorting

Additionally, I asked them to share their thoughts on: why they selected their card, who might be a typical producer of the chosen media within the organisational setting, the target audience, the timescale associated with the media, and whether this specific medium served the organisation well at the point in time. This activity of categorising media and sharing thoughts on different formats prompted wider discussions on the media types within the group, as the

participants naturally developed conversations around how they perceived the role of each media within the organisation's communications. Through this activity, we were able to extract initial information about the types of media the communications team produced and the perceived value of specific types of content formats. This gave a first insight into the first part of RQ1, exploring "how older adults engage with digital content creation activities".

To deepen our understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation's current media outputs, the second workshop activity aimed to map out the Age Voice's media landscape (Figure 4.7). This involved taking the cards that were selected in the previous activity as category one (media participants were already using) and placing them on a board. The team added information about members who were in charge of those content creation activities and how the different types of content production linked together. This resulted in the development of a visual media landscape that represented the organisational media workflows through the visualisation itself, but also through the discussions that accompanied the creation process. Once the current landscape visualisation was complete, we added to the media landscape a few remaining cards from the category two card pile (media the communications team would like to use in the future) in order to look at potential ways of repurposing existing content for new media output channels.
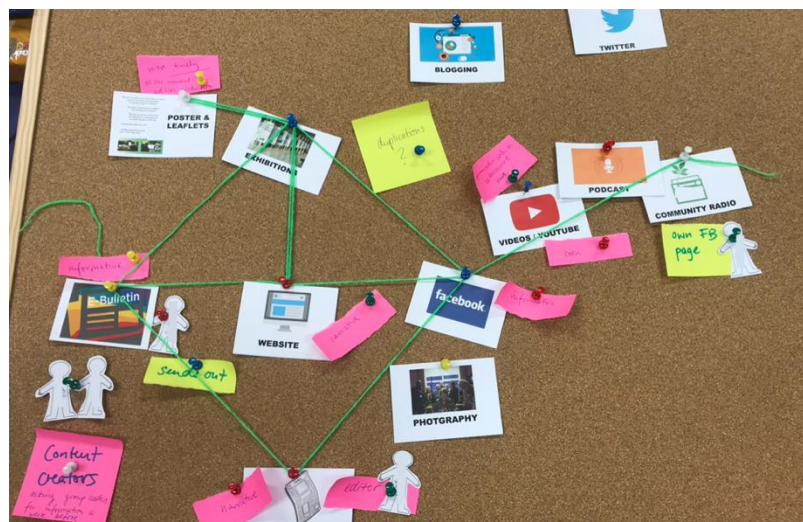
Figure 4.7: Second workshop activity – mapping the media landscape

4.4.2   Analysis: visually and thematically

The mapping workshop generated two types of data that were analysed in order to generate a better understanding of the different features of the Age Voice's media landscape. First, the tangible media landscape created at the workshop lent itself to a quick visual analysis immediately at the workshop. This visual analysis was a brief collective discussion on the visual

media landscape and involved a classification of types of content that are produced and inferring how these relate to the different media outputs, for example narrative or informational content, and workflows describing the repurposing of content or the responsibilities of individual members. This ad hoc analysis at the workshop was important to quickly progress through this PAR cycle and maintain the momentum of using our insights to create a subsequent PAR cycle, rather than delaying PAR activities/actions by pausing to complete a deeper analysis. I later conducted a deeper analysis in the weeks after the workshop, analysing the transcripts of audio recordings of the discussion at the workshop using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Using a combination of inductive and deductive coding on the transcript as described in section 3.5.1, I developed 26 codes that reflected the main points of the workshops, and two main themes, namely 'a wealth of communications efforts' and 'internal fragmentation'. The development of the two themes from the transcript is presented in Table 4.3, regarding example codes and data. Additionally, these main themes are also visually identifiable as part of the tangible media landscape and were, in fact, identified as part of the ad hoc collaborative visual analysis in the workshop.

Theme	Example Codes	Data
A wealth of communications efforts	Repurposing content	*"I think we've got to concentrate on what we have. Because we interviewed so many wonderful people." (Rose)*
	Providing digital and non-digital content	*"We know that some people who read the magazine don't access that kind of [digital] media, but there are people who do [...] so we provide it." (Greta)*
Internal fragmentation	Independent sub-groups	*"[The media] are all fragmented and that's really sad. Because the potential is there." (Rose)* *"There is another facebook page … the [Age Voice radio] page… and they are not really talking to each other." (Greta)* *"It took a long time for [us] to see what should be going in [the communications]. Basically what Age Voice is doing. But it's difficult to find that out. At least now the [other teams] have agreed to give us their minutes."*
	Lack of overarching communications strategy	*"It's completely ad hoc. A lot of it is kind of ad hoc." (Edith)*

Table 4.3: Workshop themes, example codes and data

4.4.3   Findings: a wealth of fragmented communications

In this section I present the findings from the Age Voice's media landscape workshop, with a focus on the two main themes: a wealth of communications efforts within the organisation and an internal fragmentation of the communications workflows.

A wealth of communications efforts

As depicted in Figure 4.7, the team created a depiction of a broad organisational media landscape consisting of four main media outputs comprising: a printed magazine, an e-newsletter, a monthly radio show broadcast (also uploaded on YouTube) and social media posts (Facebook). As shown in Figure 4.7, the team also allocated an additional three media outputs into their media landscape, depicting visually the wealth of communications produced by the organisation. These included printed promotional material in the form of posters and leaflets, exhibitions and advertising stalls at a range of events, which were useful ways of maintaining a direct contact with the organisation's membership, older people in the city of Newcastle. The communications team also voiced their ambitions to extend their social media output to include Twitter in the future. Indeed, these different types of media reflect a wide range of digital and non-digital content. Greta shared that *"we know that some people who read the magazine don't access that kind of [digital] media, but there are people who do […] so we provide it"*, highlighting the communication team's efforts to reach their membership through diverse types of media. As part of the discussion on the organisation's diverse and rich media landscape, Rose pointed out that *"we've got to concentrate on what we have. Because we interviewed so many wonderful people".* Not only does her statement reflect that there is an existing wealth of communications, but it also implies that there is potential to repurpose some of the existing content in various formats. Indeed, the team positioned the organisation's website at the centre of the media landscape, representing its ideal role as a communications hub that showcases the organisation's engagement and connects its different media outputs. However, from previous conversations as part of my embedded engagement I knew that the website was not functional as a hub in the way the team wanted it to be. This was echoed by Greta in the workshop who noted: *"The big hole for me is the website. It is not coherent with telling a narrative of what the organisation does."* This was mainly due to its lack of simplicity and functionality, which made it difficult for the volunteers to access and update the website on their own terms.

Overall, the visualisation of the organisation's media landscape revealed for the first time the considerable diversity of the media output that volunteers were involved in generating. The output encompassed different forms of narrative and informative content directed towards

keeping the Age Voice members informed in a variety of digital and non-digital ways. However, the visualisation exercise also drew attention to various aspects of disconnect in the organisation's communications, which is reflected in the second theme 'fragmentation of communication workflows'.

Fragmentation of communication workflows

The media landscape created in the workshop helped the team visualise a lack of internal communication within the voluntary organisation and between the different parts of the media team. Visually, this was reflected by members of the media team working largely independently of one another. One example, as visualised in the media landscape, was that the organisation was managing two separate Facebook pages. Greta said that *"there is another Facebook page ... the [Age Voice radio] page ... and they are not really talking to each other."* A page for the overall organisation sat alongside a different page for the organisation's radio team, with each page being managed separately by two independent volunteers. Based on this insight on their internal communications, the team identified a resulting lack of efficiency regarding their content creation workflows. Greta noted the limitations of this approach:

> *"[We] need to put in some quite extensive work now to say 'we've got this wealth of communications resources that we are working with, but actually we are not using them to best effect'. Because we're all kind of doing our own thing really. And we're not making it work for us in the way that we should."* (Greta).

Rose went further, acknowledging the variety of output that was being created by the communications team and the high potential to connect their workflows, whilst identifying the organisation's inefficient workflows: *"[they] are all fragmented and that's really sad. Because the potential is there!" (Rose).* Even though Age Voice aims to produce different media outputs that could draw on similar content, such as the printed magazine and the e-newsletter, there were rarely any overlaps between the production workflows for similar media outlets. Identifying this lack of shared communication led to a sense of frustration within the group, as the team recognised that, as a result, their media output fails to demonstrate the organisation's impact:

> *"[the communications] don't reflect all of the things that Age Voice is doing and it doesn't often show the impact. If there is an impact we can show. I know impact is often quite hard to do." (Edith).*

With this statement, Edith also revealed the immense dedication that the volunteers bring to their work and their intentions of reflecting their real-world impact through their media structure. This dedication was also reflected in the team's efforts to create a variety of

communications, similar to other organisations. A conversation between Edith and Martha reflects the friction between wanting to create a variety of professional output, whilst at the same time needing to improve their own digital skills and leading busy lives:

> Edith: "We kind of want it to be of a really high standard, but we are all amateurs."
> Martha: "Busy amateurs."
>
> Edith: "And that's the way the world is going. We are all expected to be super at everything. […] You have to do it and you have to be the expert. So where do we draw the line?"

This dialogue reflects the pressure that the volunteers feel to represent themselves as older people who actively and professionally participate in the digital sphere creating a diversity of media content.

4.4.4   Summary: exploring the organisation's communications in a media landscape

To summarise, the findings from the workshop give a deeper insight into the wealth of Age Voice's media output as well as the management of their media output regarding stakeholders and workflows. Additionally, the PAR encouraged my collaborators to critically engage with the visualisation of the media landscape. We identified a lack of internal communication within the communications team as a main challenge. This challenge was taken forward as a reflection to be addressed as part of the following PAR cycles, which looked more deeply at leveraging digital opportunities to improve the Age Voice's communication within the organisation, but also with their audience. Overall, the workshop represented a first step to support us in co-creating meaning with regard to RQ1, by understanding how the organisation intends to and actually utilises content creation activities as a way of supporting their civic impact in their local community.

4.5   Co-design workshops to re-design the Age Voice digital newsletter

Building on the critical evaluation of their communications in the media landscape workshop, we decided to focus the following PAR cycles 2 and 4 on re-designing the organisation's digital e-mail newsletter.
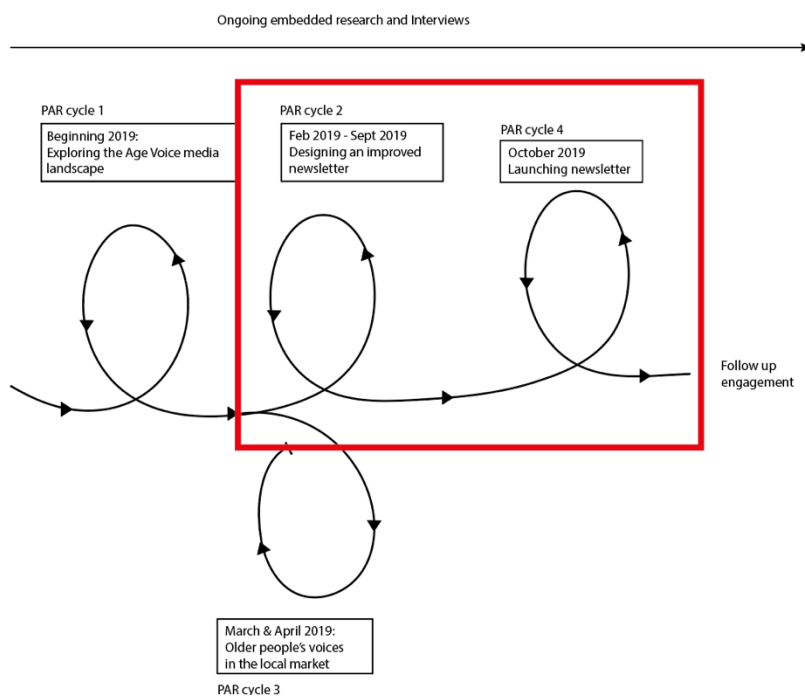
Figure 4.8: PAR cycles 2 and 4 of newsletter re-design

This initiative was predominantly carried forward by volunteer Edith, who showed a keen interest in changing the Age Voice e-mail newsletter in a way that allowed for more efficient and collaborative workflows and, therefore, challenged the previously identified isolated working structures of the communications team. As noted in my research diary, Edith had raised the possibility of using Mailchimp in one of our first meetings. Mailchimp is a digital marketing platform that allows content creators to manage mailing lists, newsletters and other digital content, whilst also providing users with insights into how content is accessed by its audience. We had discussed ethical considerations regarding the platform and whether this media tool could comply with the Age Voice privacy guidelines. This conversation reflects the Age Voice team's motivation and awareness to engage with a new technology as part of making their communications more impactful. As an integral part of their digital communications efforts, the organisation's e-mail newsletter was created fortnightly by Ada and Edith. The newsletter had previously been prepared using Microsoft Word and circulated as a portable document format (pdf) attached to an e-mail. This resulted in some subscribers not receiving the newsletter, as some e-mail providers classified the newsletter as spam. An additional challenge was that the organisation could not track audience interactions with their newsletter. This meant

that Age Voice could not engage with their audience in a way that was meaningful to both parties. In order to allow for a more collaborative workflow and, more importantly, gather, for the first time, statistical information about user engagement, Ada and Edith wished to shift their newsletter to the digital marketing platform Mailchimp instead. The work on re-designing the newsletter was carried out across two PAR cycles (Figure 4.8) with several iterations of each planning, action and reflection stage.

4.5.1 Method: co-design workshops

I worked alongside Ada and Edith on re-developing the Age Voice digital newsletter throughout a series of co-design workshops facilitated by myself and Open Lab's content creator Daniel. Over the course of a single year, I met with Ada and Edith at eight co-design workshops dedicated to the organisation's digital newsletter, which each lasted approximately one hour. Daniel was present at four workshops. Table 4.4 gives an overview on the different topics that we worked on in each workshop. For the design workshops themselves, I provided tangible design materials, such as paper and pens for the team to draw their ideas, however this offering was not used. The majority of time, we used a laptop plugged into a TV screen for Daniel and myself to demonstrate specific design ideas in the Mailchimp platform directly. The co-design workshops provided an opportunity to support the re-design of the organisation's e-mail newsletter in terms of content, functionality and layout. This design process was guided by Ada and Edith with regard to specific milestones that were important to the organisation (e.g. initiating a name change for the newsletter), and unstructured, as an open space for feedback, suggestions and ideas (e.g. personal challenges with the technology). Throughout the co-design process, we narrowed down from general newsletter ideas towards more specific aspects of the newsletter, such as choices about colour palettes and thematic priorities, and set up a Mailchimp template of the newsletter over time. The first newsletter in its new format was circulated after spending approximately eight months on the re-design, whilst simultaneously continuing to produce the newsletter in its original format in order to avoid a gap in communications to members.

Date	Topic
Meeting 1: February 2019	General ideas for the newsletter layout
Meeting 2: February 2019	Developing Mailchimp concept to be approved by the wider organisation
Meeting 3: March 2019	Setting up Mailchimp account
Meeting 4: March 2019	Setting up template and agreeing content layout
Meeting 5: April 2019	Selecting cover stories & deciding newsletter name
Meeting 6: May 2019	Re-designing newsletter in Mailchimp
Meeting 7: September 2019	Creating mailing list and Mailchimp campaign
First digital newsletter in October 2019	
Meeting 8: December 2019	Increasing audience engagement

Table 4.4: Design meetings timeline and thematic focus

Through the PAR process, I learned about the value of informal interactions. These interactions invited me to rethink my ideas about having to create many tangible results in a short period of time, by showing me the vast amount of knowledge that can be shared through investing time in the more subtle interpersonal moments. To me, this seems especially important in an intergenerational research setting, in which different values about technologies arise and allow us to co-create new meanings. My co-design sessions with Ada and Edith presented regular opportunities for me to engage with this slower pace of a PAR action phase. I acknowledged that attending regular meetings at a university was a big step for some of my collaborators. I purposely offered refreshments to put my collaborators at ease and I also put time aside for general technical support. This effort was reciprocated by Ada and Edith who brought along treats as an acknowledgement of the support they received with the organisation's digital communications. At all co-design workshops I collected data in the form of field notes taken contemporaneously in bullet points at each session and I regularly added further and more detailed observations to my digital research diary after each session.

4.5.2 *Analysis of field notes from co-design workshops*

Over the course of the co-design process, I took approximately five pages of field notes in my digital research diary, mainly covering my observations on the co-design workflows (e.g. which aspects were of relevance at which point) and reflections on the co-design process. The quantity

and quality of the field notes differed between the meetings. A strength of my field notes was that they clearly defined action points that were to be taken forward in each subsequent co-design workshop. However, I also identified weaknesses in some of the field notes, especially regarding the more technical meetings 3 and 7, which were not reflective enough and provided a more factual overview of what happened instead. Additionally, I noticed a change in my field notes over time, which became more focused on the research questions rather than capturing every observation of the workshops. Instead of creating themes as in previous sections, I analysed these field notes exploring specifically RQ1 by examining how older adults make use of digital communications as part of their civic participation. This encompassed capturing those characteristics of the newsletter design, which were a priority for the team, and therefore indicated in my field notes by the duration in which we worked on a specific issue, or by depth of discussion around this issue. As such I distinguish between design characteristics, like colour and layout choices, and content characteristics, for example which topics to prioritise in the newsletter. Additionally, I analysed the processual development of launching the newsletter and its integration as an independent workflow managed by the team itself. I did this by extracting all field notes related to the launch of the newsletter, and then grouping them into broader categories that described the process of launching, such as technical problems and time constraints. In the next section, I present the findings with regard to the newsletter characteristics and the process of launching the newsletter.

4.5.3   Findings from the co-design process: design characteristics and newsletter launch

In this section I describe the process of re-designing the e-mail newsletter on the Mailchimp platform, based on my analysis of the field notes taken throughout the co-design workshops. Building on the overall impression on how Age Voice team members engage with digital content creation as part of their civic participation (RQ1), this section focuses in more detail on specific considerations that underlie the creation of the digital newsletter with regard to design and content characteristics. Additionally, I describe findings from launching the newsletter, thus transferring the co-design process from a research setting into an independent and sustainable workflow managed by Ada and Edith themselves.

Newsletter characteristics

Throughout the design workshops we explored what the volunteers Ada and Edith envisioned for the re-design of the newsletter. At the beginning of the process, the team voiced their ambition for the co-design workshops. They hoped that working on the Mailchimp together would address three of their main concerns, strengthening their digital skills by learning new

techniques as part of the PAR, whilst at the same time feeling a sense of community and giving appropriate time to the development process. Before the first workshop, Ada and Edith had already given thought to the priorities they wanted to work on, such as design choices and a colour palette *("using boxed text to direct the eye"* or *"green as a brand colour" – field notes, meeting 1)*, as well as changing the name of the newsletter. In addition to these design aspects, the team gave thought to the thematic priorities of the newsletter thinking strategically about *"what would attract people to read the newsletter?" (Field notes, Design meeting 1)*. It was decided that *"the first two pages need to be understandable at a glance and therefore need to hold the important information" (Field notes, Design meeting 1)*. Even though this prioritisation of content took a few discussions throughout the workshops, it became clear that the content labelled *"What the Age Voice does" and "Age Voice dates for your diary"* was regarded as the most important information and therefore placed higher up in the newsletter (Field notes, design meeting 3). By informing their audience on how the organisation engages locally and highlighting opportunities for participation, these categories have a high civic value for the organisation's members. In response to my research question, I observed that even though the team did not specifically label this content as 'civic', placing these categories at the top of their newsletter, above shared content from other events in the city, highlighted an intention of wanting to be perceived as a stakeholder in the community at first glance.

Process of launching the newsletter

Despite using a Mailchimp template to mock up the volunteers' ideas throughout all design meetings, the team only started using the template on their own at the sixth session after we produced one full newsletter as an example. I noted in my field notes from this session:

> *"We talked about the Mailchimp and the problems of getting it started. It seems like it is easier for the volunteers to continue the newsletter in a way that is known and familiar to them, rather than committing to a new workflow straight away (and potentially failing). Integrating new workflows while old ones still need to be in place is time consuming and frustrating for the volunteers." (Field notes, design meeting 6)*

In addition to facing technical problems, such as getting accustomed to differences between a Microsoft Word interface compared to the new Mailchimp tools, the team felt constrained in their time as they had to keep up the production of the old newsletter, whilst at the same time learning new digital skills on Mailchimp. These considerations of technological barriers and the pressure to adhere to an established communications schedule shed light onto the deeper underlying factors that may impact on older adults' content creation activities, but might also apply to other groups that experience forms of digital exclusion or time constraints due to being

volunteer-led. I will elaborate on these considerations further in my analysis of the interviews in section 4.7. As a last step before launching the team's first Mailchimp newsletter, we collaboratively migrated the organisation's mailing list, which the team used as an opportunity to review their readership. As part of meeting 7, I visited the organisation in their office, at which the mailing lists are stored on the computer. First, I supported the technicality of transferring the mailing lists into Mailchimp. Then the team, together with the executive officer, updated the list by removing those e-mail addresses, which were no longer active. After familiarising themselves with the process of sending out the newsletter, namely creating a test version to review first and then include the entire mailing list, the team then began to send out a newsletter every fortnight, using Mailchimp. One of the main perceived benefits of transitioning the Age Voice newsletter onto the Mailchimp platform was to gain more detailed audience insights, for example opening and click rates of the newsletter. At meeting 8 we accessed the newsletter's audience statistics and the team shared enthusiastically that they were continuously tracking the insights and were motivated by their high opening and click rates. Even though we were all pleased with the look of the re-designed newsletter, I refrain from showing a picture in this thesis in order to protect the anonymity of the organisation.

4.5.4   Summary newsletter co-design

To summarise, a priority, identified in the PAR process was to improve digital communications and to reach a wider audience, therefore strengthening the organisation's civic goals as a stakeholder in the local area. The digital newsletter was key to achieving this. The participatory process of co-design workshops allowed me to collect data that could respond to RQ1, by examining the more underlying characteristics of older people's content creation activities. We focused on different aspects, such as design features and adjusting their content strategy with the aim to increase the reach and relevance of this civic activity. Despite initial difficulties of balancing two newsletter production workflows simultaneously, Ada and Edith embraced the process and ultimately transitioned the newsletter to the Mailchimp platform, gaining more detailed insights into their audience's engagement.

4.6   Research through Design using digital audio

A further PAR cycle (3) conducted parallel to the ongoing work with the digital newsletter (Figure 4.9) aimed to explore the potential of promoting the organisation's information in the public realm and strengthening their civic outreach as a stakeholder in the age-friendly city (AFC). This PAR cycle specifically responds to RQ2, as we deliberately worked more closely with digital audio in the AFC as part of a research through design (RtD) approach. As described

in Chapter [3], RtD is a method that aims to connect research and design in a meaningful way. As an advocacy organisation, Age Voice is continuously working on finding creative and innovative ways of involving local older adults civically and presenting the organisation's work to the wider public.
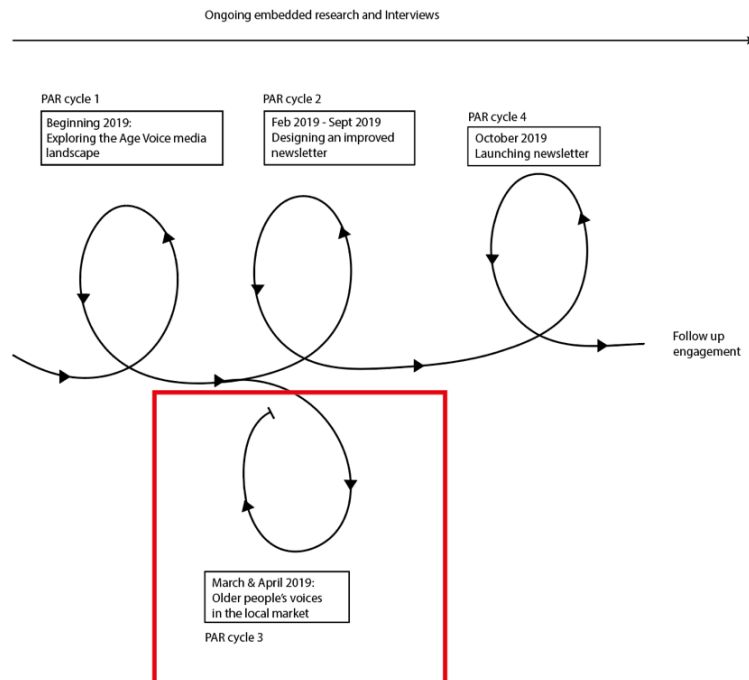
Figure 4.9: PAR cycle 3 – research through design approach

4.6.1 Method: using digital audio in research through design

Throughout the year 2019, Age Voice had been offered free of charge a unit in the centrally-located historic market on one day per month, in order to highlight their work and promote the organisation. The market is a popular destination for shopping and a space for intergenerational encounters. Because the organisation's first few exhibition days generated only a low level of public interest, Greta, the organisation's executive officer, approached me soon afterwards to explore the potential to increase public engagement with the organisation's work. Two exploratory meetings were conducted as a combination of informal discussions and a more structured approach to generating ideas on this topic. Using a 'user scenarios' approach (Tomitsch, 2019) as a technique to develop ideas, Greta and I co-designed a digital engagement strategy with the aim to generate interactions in the market. User scenarios are traditionally used in Interaction Design as a technique to understand a user's motivations, needs and barriers to engage with a design. We applied this technique to questioning novel interactions at the local market, by talking through different imaginary user scenarios, such as "What do people think when they pass the market unit?", "Why would people want to give their opinion?" or "How

can we attract the interest of older people who are shopping in the market?". As part of a previous project, Age Voice had completed a listening exercise in which they sought older people's opinions on various issues across the city, presenting the results as a written report. Talking through the user scenario questions, and especially reflecting on how to attract the interest of older people, Greta voiced an interest in replicating this previous listening exercise in a digital form. We decided to use digital audio as part of a RtD approach as a way of trying to heighten the organisation's civic participation in the local market, and therefore raising awareness for the AFC more generally, which directly responds to RQ2. This research approach appealed to Greta, who felt that it would support their civic efforts of being perceived as digital advocates for older adults in the city. Additionally, Greta perceived using audio as an interesting and privacy-aware way of engaging people through technology, as well as capturing voices on a range of age-friendly topics. Despite wanting to create a more tangible evidence base on how older people respond to certain topics, the organisation wanted the audio to predominantly *"spark discussions, rather than being too rigorous or methodological" (Greta)*, emphasising the relevance of using technology-based designs as a scoping tool to elicit topics of interest. As a topic for their listening exercise, Greta was especially keen to explore opinions on intergenerational cohesion within the city. This idea was linked to Age Voice's longstanding concerns about a lack of contact between people of different ages, concerns about the status of the intergenerational contract (Walker, 2013), and perceived tensions between a large student population and older residents in the city of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Through iterations of the user scenarios approach described above, we developed the idea to collaboratively create recordings of intergenerational provocative discussion starters to be used in the market day in April 2019. Six younger people (students) recruited by myself in Open Lab and six older people, members of the Age Voice, were invited to respond instinctively to statements such as "I am proud of my generation", "I am grateful to the older generation" or "I am annoyed with my generation because ...". The responses were audio recorded. Some examples were:

- *I thank [the older generation] for building a lot of things, physically and in the society over the decades. We wouldn't be where we are today without that. But I also... I get angry occasionally with a certain inflexibility and stiffness to new ideas and new developments... that I frequently observe with older people. (Student statement)*
- *I'm proud of older people for valuing politeness and teaching us how we should speak to each other in a respectful way. (Student statement)*

- *I'm pleased that my generation saw the end of deference. (Older person's statement)*
- *I am ashamed of the state of the world that we are leaving to future generations. We have not paid attention to all the warnings about global warming and other environmental disasters and that makes me ashamed. I'm proud that socially we do seem to have advanced. Racism, sexism, ageism are on the way. I'm not saying they have disappeared, but they are on the way. (Older person's statement).*

We used the organisation's iPad to play these provocative statements in the market. Even though we planned to use the audio-recordings at the market as a playful way to engage people in discussions, we also wanted to provide a non-digital option to gather feedback. As an alternative for people who would prefer not to be audio recorded, I created small postcards that would encourage people to express their opinions in written form (Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10: Postcards to collect written feedback as part of the RtD

4.6.2 Analysis: themes from design research

As part of this RtD approach, I collected data in the form of contemporaneously written field notes at the initial stage of planning the project and throughout the engagement at the market. These field notes included my observations on ideas, captured some of Greta's opinions as quotes and reflected on our interactions in the local market. Together with Greta, I also reviewed the postcards that were returned to us by older people in the market. I analysed the field notes from the ideation meetings using reflexive thematic analysis as outlined previously, implementing a combination of inductive and deductive coding and focusing on the organisation's strategic communications and digital engagement. Table 4.5 gives an overview of how two themes, engaging citizens and demonstrating impact, were derived based on example codes and data. The field notes from the market engagement were used to contextualise and evaluate the success of this RtD approach.

Theme	Example Code	Data
Engaging citizens	Reaching different age groups	*Why is it [that people] are not interested?* *I'm sure they are but we're certainly not reaching them. The younger cohort. People in their 60s. (Greta)*
	Inviting public feedback	*Using digital media in public spaces to collect feedback on what the Age Voice is doing well or should be doing (Field notes)*
Demonstrating impact	Creating digital evidence	*Digital technologies are a creative way of evidencing work that had been done. (Field notes)*
	Tracking audience engagement	*Engaging digitally offers the opportunity to diagnose trends and be more responsive to the audience. (Field notes)*

Table 4.5: RtD: derived themes, example codes, and data from the thematic analysis

4.6.3   Findings: digital audio statements to engage older adults in the local market

In this section, I present findings from using digital audio within a RtD approach. I describe two themes (see Table 4.5), which outline why the organisation chose to experiment with digital audio as a way of heightening their civic impact: (1) The opportunity to engage citizens more widely, and (2) as a way to demonstrate the impact. I then report on findings from the activity of using digital audio in the local market hall.

Throughout the meetings with Greta, I explored the motivations for Age Voice to use a technology-based interaction as a way to engage older citizens on age-friendly and civic issues in the local market hall. As the first few exhibition days in the market unit were characterised by a notable lack of interest from passers-by, Greta reflected that the issue lay in the way they were trying to reach their audience:

"Why is it [that people] are not interested? I'm sure they are, but we're certainly not reaching them. The younger cohort. People in their 60s." (Greta)

She perceived, in particular, younger cohorts of older adults as being more tech-savvy, concluding that it was important to use digital channels in order to promote the organisation's political and civic work. Using digital audio as a way to capture people's attention in the market unit and to invite feedback was seen as an opportunity to engage passers-by in deeper discussions (as opposed to paper-based leaflets that are handed out) and to learn more about residents' opinions, in order to reflect them in their activist work. Technology was also seen as a novel and interesting way to attract people to visit the unit, in particular, people who might not previously have heard about the Age Voice organisation.

The second reason that underlay the organisation's motivation to engage with digital audio was the possibility of demonstrating the organisation's impact. As a third sector organisation, the group is partly dependent on external funding for their projects. As an advocacy organisation, "evidence" is often deemed necessary to have an influence on policy development. Presenting more tangible and creative insights into older residents' experiences in a digital format compared to a written report could potentially provide a starting point for discussions on age-friendliness in more formal political settings. Viewing digital audio as a tool within age-friendly cities and communities that supports bottom-up citizen engagement, Greta hoped that the organisation could use digital audio as a way of being more responsive to older citizens. Using digital audio within the local market was seen as an opportunity to capture diverse opinions from older local citizens in a creative way. Over a duration of four hours, members of the organisation used an iPad to play the pre-recorded statements by older and younger people to passers-by (Figure 4.11). My field notes recorded that *"many members of the organisation joined the team on the day, eager to promote their organisation's work"*. The setup of the iPad with the headphones caught many people's interest as they were passing by. The organisation's members actively approached and prompted people in the market to join them and listen to the recordings. Indeed, over the course of the morning, around 15 people listened and engaged with the group as a response. However, despite this heightened level of interest, only four people were willing to record their own responses. These responses were on average 1.26 minutes long and, despite our prompts to share opinions on intergenerational cohesion or raise local issues, the responses addressed a variety of topics: Food banks and social inequalities within the city; personal health issues; history of the city; and a general political critique. Indeed, many of the people who chose not to be recorded were triggered by the intergenerational provocations to voice their concerns about or agreement with national issues. The experience showed that

despite prompting for a certain topic, using audio sparked highly emotive discussions on a variety of topics and, in particular, on the wider political landscape. As an evaluation, Greta and I jointly agreed that the approach of using audio as a way to collect evidence on a specific topic in a public space had its limitations. These were mainly due to people's concerns or shyness about being recorded and the wide variety of unanticipated topics raised by members of the public. We concluded that the pre-recorded statements needed to be refined and made less provocative, in order to generate responses on topics that are relevant to the organisation and that can be used specifically for advocating for age-friendly work within the city. However, the intervention was not followed up directly, as the organisation decided to pursue a different strategy for their market unit in the subsequent months.

Figure 4.11: Using digital audio in the local market

Most people who engaged with the organisation's members at the market unit also filled out the non-digital postcards we prepared in advance (see Figure 4.10). Approximately 15 postcards were collected, outlining different issues of relevance to age-friendly issues, such as parks and green spaces, historic tours and personal health issues. Overall, Greta and I questioned if our activity tried to engage people in too many things at once (listening to audio, handing out leaflets, and filling in postcards), which led to a loss of focus on the information that the organisation wanted to capture. Nonetheless, the range of formats provided numerous opportunities for engagement and resulted in an overall heightened engagement and interest compared to the organisation's initial experience at the market.

4.6.4   *Summary: an RtD PAR cycle with a dead end*

To summarise, I have described a RtD approach of using digital audio provocations as a way to spark discussion on intergenerational cohesion and to capture older residents' voices on age-friendly topics. The findings presented in this section reflect directly RQ2, by highlighting how age-friendly communities can better exploit digital technologies, in this case digital audio, to support older people's civic participation. The RtD approach was perceived by the Age Voice as an opportunity to strengthen their digital citizenship in the city, whilst also strengthening the civic participation of local older adults by encouraging them to share their voices. Additionally, the Age Voice aimed to use this exercise as an opportunity to get feedback for their work. The use of the very basic digital technology (iPad with audio) proved to be an effective way to engage people and attract people's attention to the Age Voice's market unit. However, the project also provoked discussions on a wide range of topics, not necessarily reflecting age-friendliness or age-activism, but nonetheless giving an opportunity to older adults to share with the Age Voice what was going on in their lives. In addition, Greta and I underestimated privacy concerns and the shyness of many people in our design, resulting in an unwillingness of members of the public to be audio recorded. I conclude that, due to those reasons, audio might be a way to spark discussions, but despite its benefits to promote civic participation, it might not be the optimal route to capturing age-friendly interests in contexts such as the market setting.

4.7   Interviews

Alongside the PAR cycles described above, I conducted four semi-structured interviews with members of the Age Voice communications team (overview in Table 4.6). These interviews were an opportunity to focus on specific aspects of the organisation's digital communications that reflected my research questions, such as exploring the team members' digital citizenship in more depth or focusing on the role of digital media within age-friendly cities. Even though the interviews were co-located alongside the PAR cycles, they were not intended as part of the PAR cycles' specific data collection, but rather conducted to capture the overarching critical understanding of relevant broader themes that mattered to the communications team. I chose to present an overarching analysis across all interviews in order to weave together the main points that arose at each stage of the research process. By doing this, I aim to elaborate on both of my research questions in depth, highlighting nuances in how individual collaborators engaged with the process of creating civically relevant digital content (RQ1) and perceived the organisation's engagement with digital technologies as part of their work as an age-friendly city stakeholder (RQ2).

4.7.1 Method: conducting semi-structured interviews

I carried out all interviews guided by semi-structured interview schedules (Appendix B), which I created as a support to help me think conceptually about my reflections and learnings from the participatory process, such as linking my findings to the wider literature (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003; Corrado *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, these interviews allowed me to explore in-depth those aspects that I still wanted to critically engage with, such as moments where I had made assumptions about "efficient" workflows, which seemed feasible to me but did not serve the needs of the Age Voice team. I learned that these in-depth interviews were an opportunity for myself and the collaborators to reflect more critically on the work we carried out. The interviews were usually followed by small moments of celebration, allowing us to mark how far we had progressed in our collaboration. Interviews 1 and 3 were carried out with Ada and Edith and were co-located in time alongside the process of redesigning the digital newsletter. Interview 2 was carried out with the three core members responsible for the Age Voice's digital communications (Ada, Edith and Greta) and explored the implementation of digital communications workflows. Interview 4 was conducted with Greta, because she has been a founding members of the AFC in Newcastle. In this fourth interview, I addressed the role of the Age Voice digital communications more widely within the age-friendly city framework, as a stakeholder of the local age-friendly city group. As mentioned above, I now present an analysis across these interviews in order to hone in on those themes and priorities, that were continuously relevant over the course of the PAR.

Time	Participants	Topic
1) February 2019	Ada, Edith	Visions for the Age Voice digital communications
2) May 2019	Ada, Edith, Greta	Implementing digital communications
3) February 2020	Ada, Edith	Evaluating the newsletter
4) February 2020	Greta	Digital communications within the age-friendly city

Table 4.6: Interview overview

4.7.2 Analysis: creating themes characterising the Age Voice's communications work

All interviews lasted between 21-52 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. I analysed the interviews using reflexive thematic analysis, using NVivo to organise

and label the data with codes, and create themes by grouping codes together by shared meaning. I adopted a combination of inductive and deductive coding. First, I coded the interviews inductively, resulting in practical semantic codes such as "double checking links". Then I coded the interview transcripts deductively relating to the organisation's digital work more widely, resulting in more latent codes such as "expanding the comms" or "audience engagement and statistics". Figure 4.12 shows an example of my coding practice using Nvivo 12.

Edith
I would know how to do it, but the next thing's going to be something other. You know, it's going to be Instagram or Twitter or Snapchat, isn't it?

Ada
I'm not going anywhere near Instagram or Snapchat, but Twitter, I would do.

expanding the comms

Ada
I think she more checks that the links are working because we always go, "Please check the links, just in case."

Edith
I check the links. No, I never ask her that. I tell her I've done them all.

double checking links

Edith
We'd still be doing it the same way and still repining the fact that we don't know who's doing what, reading it or we don't know how many people have opened it. We wouldn't know any of that. I mean, the bit of information we have got is interesting and it's good to know that actually, half the people who get it actually do open it and at least, if nothing else, skim though it.

I do have a problem. It's an ongoing problem and I haven't quite resolved

audience engagement and statistics

Figure 4.12: Example of coding in Nvivo

As the collaboration with Age Voice spanned nearly two years, I had completed some initial coding of the transcripts immediately after the data collection. This light-touch analysis was an important step in evaluating the impact of my research swiftly and informing the next steps of the PAR as part of the planning and reflection stages. In addition, I analysed the transcripts in more depth ahead of publications, drawing conclusions from various sets of data focussed on particular topics. Ahead of writing up my thesis, I had therefore already carried out two types of analyses: 1) directly after the collection/transcription process, and 2) ahead of publications. I conducted another broad thematic analysis ahead of writing this thesis in order to integrate the findings from all transcripts with my current knowledge of the work. This entailed re-reading the transcripts to sense-check if the original codes were still relevant and accurate based

on the knowledge that I had acquired at this later point in the process. An advantage of this process was that I was able to add further codes to the data, emphasising in particular the connections between transcripts that had not been analysed previously as part of the same set (e.g. for publications). One example of such additional code is the 'digital capacity issue', which explains similar codes that were applied in three interviews which were previously not analysed in the same set of data (Interviews 1, 3 and 4), namely: 'lack of digital volunteers' and 'overwhelming responsibilities'. As a last step, I reviewed the previously derived themes and how they represented the dataset as a whole since I added the additional codes. From this process of analysis, I derived three themes (Table 4.7) that shed light on my research aim of exploring digital content creation as a way to support civic participation in later life (RQ1) and my focus on opportunities within age-friendly communities to leverage digital technologies and community media to support older adults' digital citizenship (RQ2). The first theme reviews the multifaceted experiences of engaging with content creation activities in later life. The second theme addresses a challenge identified throughout the PAR, namely the wish to connect with and reach wider audiences in order to strengthen the organisation's civic impact both digitally and non-digitally. The third theme responds directly to RQ2 by addressing the age-friendly dimension in this research. Table 4.7 provides exemplar codes and data that underlie the derived themes.

Theme	Example Codes	Data
Multifaceted experiences of engaging with content creation activities	Improving digital skills	*"I've definitely improved my skills. I think I keep looking at it, just talking about the things..."(Edith, Interview 2)*
	Learning from each other	*"I'm going round in circled and I'm getting nowhere at all, but if you're sitting with two or three other people, then they're probably not getting in the same circular path that you are in and might be able to actually give you the point that you need." (Edith, Interview 1)*
	Engaging with Age Voice	*"Not just improve your IT skills, but learn more about the organisation, what it's doing and why." (Ada, Interview 2)*
	Facing challenges	*"People are just not in the habit [to provide information to the communications team]. Well, we know. They're not, even despite pleading." (Greta, Interview 2)*
Connecting with the audience	Retrieving audience statistics	*"It went out to 569 people, had a 45% open rate and an 8.3% click rate." (Ada, Interview 4)*
	Getting personal feedback	*"We do ask for comments and Greta is starting to get more people writing in to her." (Ada, Interview 2)*
	Connecting socially and reaching out	*"We like face-to-face, we like paper, we like all of that, we've got to have, but, actually, we also need this other dimension, which is both about trying to get broader engagement, but, also, about how we present ourselves to the world." (Greta, Interview 4)*
	Delivering online and offline information	*"You can go on the website and you can find one there, but actually, have one delivered to you too." (Edith, Interview 4)*
Showcasing age-friendly collaborations digitally	Networking organisations	*"So that we do know now that we're actually getting that information that we're putting out there to a lot of people and it's being used by a lot of organisations to go to their people." (Edith, Interview 3)*
	Strategically distributing information between AFC members	*"I send quite a bit [into the communications]. Other people put quite a bit in, but organisations, I mean, I pick up a lot from other organisations. So some of it is cyclical." (Ada, Interview 3)*

Table 4.7: Overview of derived themes, exemplar codes and data

4.7.3 Findings: exploring overarching themes which shape Age Voice communications

Theme 1: multifaceted experiences of engagement with content creation activities

The first theme concerns the motivations and challenges that underlie the Age Voice volunteers' content creation activities. Throughout this section I elaborate on social, personal and civic motivations, and discuss time constraints and barriers to creating professional content as challenges faced by the volunteers.

As reviewed in Chapter 2, multiple factors can encourage older adults to become content creators. These are often grounded in a desire to be socially connected. Even though the production of Age Voice communications represented a team effort, the volunteers also shared their personal intrinsic motivations to create content, such as "improving digital skills". Content creation was regarded by some team members as a means of developing a skill and learning about a new topic. Edith, who identifies as a self-taught content creator, emphasised her motivation to learn about using media as an opportunity for personal development:

> *"I think that from my point of view, as a person who kind of creates, I've learnt a lot about media and how to use media. So that's been really good for me and that's a personal thing." (Edith, Interview 1)*

In addition to learning new digital skills, Edith highlights that the work as an Age Voice communications volunteer enriches her life due to the opportunity to have a creative outlet for her inspirations. Whilst some volunteers, like Edith, viewed the learning process as a positive personal experience, others also demonstrated an understanding of the learning process as a social experience. Greta suggested "improving one's digital skills" as an incentive to recruit new members for the Age Voice's communications team:

> *"This is about learning [...], you know, it is about older people wanting to learn. So, it's about us wanting to learn, and that's, I think, really… but the other thing, if only, and I know we've tried, [...] what would be great is if we had put something, say, in this [newsletter] going out [...] I tried to put in a little advertisement again for somebody." (Greta, Interview, 1)*

This collaborative approach characterising Age Voice communications was seen as an additional benefit for the team. The volunteers recognised that improving digital skills was not only an individual learning process, but that by honouring one another's individual skills, the team could learn from each other and also have the opportunity to share their own skills:

> *"Yes, and it's like anything. You know, somebody knows how to do something that the other person doesn't. So, something that I find really difficult and Martha will just, kind of, do without thinking and then something that she may not… you know, isn't it? It's just different people pick up different things." (Greta, Interview 1)*

Close collaboration between volunteers was perceived to be an essential aspect of volunteering for the Age Voice communications team. Indeed, such collaboration was also identified as one of the factors that could improve the organisation's communications output more generally. The team reported that they would like to represent information that was given to them by their members directly. However, according to Greta in interview 2, their members were not in a habit of providing information to the communications team. This resulted in an increased time effort for the communications volunteers, who had to actively remind people to provide updates and information. In addition, being a self-taught volunteer working towards a communications deadline could become a struggle. Often, time commitments prevented the volunteers from engaging with the learning process, as they were obliged to prioritise an "easier option" in order to get the communications published on time:

> *"I was saying to Ada, I've probably said it before here as well, I'd really like to try and use Mailchimp, but when I get… it's like when I was trying to think about using Canva, you know, the design thing, it's so much - both when I'm doing the bulletin and when I set out to look at the magazine, it is just so much easier to use the tools I know. It just is, obviously, isn't it? It just is easier." (Edith, Interview 2)*

Indeed, time constraints were a recurring struggle for the Age Voice communications volunteers, as previously noted in Section 4.5. In Edith's view, Mailchimp represented a tool that could increase the efficiency of the organisation's newsletter production, due to its user-friendly interface. However, when it came to launching the newsletter, the team was challenged by the doubled workload of sticking to their usual newsletter timeline, whilst learning how to adjust to the new workflow on Mailchimp. In order to have a more consistent learning progress, Ada and Edith decided to take the newsletter production in turns, each of them producing four newsletters in a row. Ada outlined different reasons, such as a time constraints and different interests, that prevented the two volunteers from working more closely together:

> *"From my point of view, the commitment with that is quite different because, if you were both doing it at the same time, you're not actually having a break from it. I mean, I might put something in, or Edith might put something in and I might go, "That's not suitable. Take it out." So, there's the different interest, different . . . and Greta could come along and do something completely different. I'm happy with doing it two, four, however many issues and then having a break and it gives you time to think of other things as well and to read it when somebody else has done it and see, pick up different things." (Ada, Interview 3)*

This reflects the considerable time commitment that is associated with digital communications as a main challenge. Additionally, it shows that whilst the Age Voice team value collaboration highly as a social motivation to create content, being independent in the editorial process is

equally important. It also emphasises the production of the digital content as a process that reflects the busy nature of the organisation's team of volunteers, who are learning new digital skills in order to advocate online for their organisation.

Whilst improving digital skills and heightened confidence online have been widely recognised as motivating factors for older adults to engage in content creation (Harley and Fitzpatrick, 2009; Ferreira, Sayago and Blat, 2017), the data arising from interviews with the Age Voice members additionally exposed civic and professional goals that motivated the volunteers to engage with content creation. Ada, for example, highlighted as one benefit of being a content creator for Age Voice's digital newsletter being more engaged as part of the organisation in general:

> *"Not just improve your IT skills, but learn more about the organisation, what it's doing and why." (Ada, Interview 2)*

Being a volunteer requires a degree of dedication to a specific cause or organisation in the first place. Creating content for the organisation's communication team was seen by Ada as a way of engaging more deeply with the goals of the organisation, learning about what the organisation has been working on and subsequently communicating this to a wider audience. Age Voice's online work itself was viewed by the volunteers as a means of being digital advocates for local older people more widely, therefore strengthening Age Voice's civic activism across the city. Edith expressed her passion for working with the organisation and, in particular, her efforts directed towards increasing the organisation's reach:

> *"I suppose it's success for the organisation too, because the reason that we do it, apart from our own learning experience, is we want to actually improve the reach of Age Voice because we think that a lot of the work that Age Voice does is of benefit to older people." (Edith, Interview 1)*

Indeed, the team's commitment to civic participation represented one of the main drivers of their digital engagement strategy. The creation of the digital newsletter represents a key aspect of Age Voice's civic participatory activities, supporting their work as advocates for older adults by providing relevant information to older residents. This civic purpose is rooted in connecting and informing a community about a broad range of topics that could be of interest to older adults and to raise awareness about specific topics related to ageing, as part of their responsibility as key stakeholders in the age-friendly city. Locating these activities in Serrat *et al.*'s (2019) framework on later life civic participation, Age Voice communications highlight the importance of creating content collectively for social purposes, whilst at the same time sharing information with a political purpose. These findings also provide compelling evidence

that Age Voice members are acutely aware of the impact of digitalisation on their community and of the importance of making use of digital media to reach a wider audience. The team emphasised the importance of using online communications in order to reach older adults, in particular people in their 50s. By being digital advocates themselves and advocating for digital participation for older people, the team could be seen to be working civically on counteracting ageist stereotypes. This dedication to digital information is a longstanding commitment of the organisation. In 2006 the organisation was involved in developing an online platform to provide information for older adults, something that is now managed by the local council. Greta and other members of Age Voice advocated for the platform to be developed digitally at the time:

> *"Now, when we [created the digital platform] back in 2006, 2007, we got a huge amount of flak because people said that older people don't go online. Thanks very much to a colleague of mine, who really said, 'No, we've got to do this as a digital platform, this has got to be online', we really stuck to our guns. So, [the website] is a key information resource for people in the city, but alongside that, we then tried in a small way, I guess, to create opportunities for older people to improve their digital skills." (Greta, Interview 4)*

The struggle that Greta and other older people's advocates faced when suggesting a digital platform highlights the lack of awareness relating to the topics of technology and ageing at that particular time.

Overall, this first theme explored motivations and challenges to create digital communications in later life. My findings respond to the research questions by suggesting that a complex dynamic of personal, social and civic motivations impacts older people's motivations to create digital content, such as increasing digital skills, working collaboratively as a team and being advocates for older people in general. On the other hand, time constraints or perceptions of having to create highly professional content whilst still learning about digital skills, were identified as challenges by the team. The findings emphasise the importance of focusing on digital communications and position the Age Voice organisation as digital advocates for older people in their city. In the next theme, I will elaborate on the connection between the organisation and its membership.

Theme 2: Connecting with the audience through digital and non-digital interactions
The digital newsletter is Age Voice's main media output to inform people across the city about a broad range of current age-related topics and events. One of the main reasons to re-design the

original newsletter to a Mailchimp format was that the Age Voice volunteers wished to increase their marketing effectiveness by engaging more closely with their audience, whilst at the same time expanding their audience to include a more diverse range of older people across the city. This was something that they were previously unable to do, as the newsletter was prepared using Microsoft Word and circulated as an e-mail attachment with no insight on audience statistics. Mailchimp, as a platform, merges design tools with audience management, and therefore allows for more detailed information about the recipients of the content and their choices to interact with it. Indeed, within a few months following the format shift, the organisation gained feedback as to how their newsletter was received by the public:

> Edith: "We also know, from looking at the analysis, what's happening with it, which we didn't know from Word. We knew nothing from Word at all, we just knew how many people were getting it. So, it's about a 50% opening rate."
>
> Ada: "I can give you the facts and figures. The first one we did was on 4th October and it went out to 569 people, had a 45% open rate and an 8.3% click rate." (Interview 3)

This dialogue demonstrates both Edith and Ada's desire to stay updated about their audience statistics, tracking their opening rates and trying to understand user experience and engagement with the distributed content. The organisation uses the free version of Mailchimp rather than the paid options, which would allow for more detailed statistical insights. However, for the time being, having at least some limited insights proved to be more useful for the team than having none, as was the case when producing the newsletter in its original format. However, the team continued to be interested in establishing connections between specific topics addressed in the newsletters and user engagement:

> "Because it would be helpful if we knew what was in the highest rating clicks, rather than look at the ones where . . . you know, so we don't have to do every one, but if we get a really positive reaction to a particular [newsletter], what was it in that [newsletter] that really attracted people's attention. That would be valuable." (Ada, Interview 3)

The wish to have thematic insights on the audience engagement statistics highlights the group's intention to tailor the content of the digital newsletter to the audience's interests and to further analyse the impact of their civic activism. It represents their dedication to provide meaningful information and communications to local older people as part of their civic participatory efforts. These findings also shed light on my research questions on how older people engage with digital communications for civic purposes with regard to more technical aspects of content planning. It shows that a reciprocal connection between the content creators and audience is highly

valued, a factor that had previously been identified by Brewer and Piper (2016). Indeed, the Age Voice team had also received personal feedback from one of their members:

> *"[A reader] thoroughly enjoyed reading the magazine and gave a donation. I mean, that was really quite emotional to have that response." (Ada, Interview 2)*

This transaction highlights the personal connection that the communications team managed to establish with their members. Indeed, the team advocates for their members to be digitally included. Edith recognised the importance of receiving digital information, highlighting that:

> *"if you are only getting information by print media you are becoming isolated from information by default, aren't you, because most of the information is coming electronically" (Edith).*

However, whilst the team tried to produce as much digital content as possible to encourage their members to go online, they were equally mindful of individual members who lacked internet access. As a way of keeping these individuals informed and prevent them from being further disadvantaged by a general shift to digital ways of communicating, the organisation continued to print a regular magazine, for which they were rewarded with the financial thank you by their reader. As advocates for digital inclusion, the Age Voice team were aware that *"there are many people who don't access anything by computer. We know that" (Ada, Interview 3).* In order to increase the digital literacy of their members and in return strengthen their ability to participate in society as digital citizens, Age Voice collaborates with a local university to offer IT drop-in sessions to older people and encourage people to attend these sessions by advertising them through their communications:

> *"...the programme that the Age Voice does with [a] University around an IT drop-in, "Come along. Is it your smartphone? Is it your iPad? What is it you need to know?" so trying to help people in that way. There's still work like that going on and, obviously, the picture has shifted enormously in that, at a very minimum, a lot of older people will have a smartphone. I mean, they might only use it to phone people and send messages, but that pattern is shifting and people's skill levels, and knowledge and all of that is changing." (Greta, Interview 4)*

Greta recognised these efforts of encouraging their community to go online as successful, by pointing out that more and more of their members use a smartphone. Still, with regard to their communications, the communications volunteers were balancing the delivery of digital and non-digital information to the Age Voice members in order to be as inclusive as possible. However, due to financial constraints and the effort involved in distributing hard copies of newsletters, the group strongly encouraged members to access the online newsletter option in the hope that more members would strengthen their digital skills.

Even though the volunteers recognised that the digital component in their communications strategy represented an important reflection of the organisation's external profile, they felt that some things still had to be done in person:

> *"So, some of it needs to be face-to-face, we still like that, we like face-to-face, we like paper, we like all of that, we've got to have, but, actually, we also need this other dimension, which is both about trying to get broader engagement, but, also, about how we present ourselves to the world." (Greta, Interview 4)*

At the point of the interviews, being connected physically was perceived as crucial for running the organisation. However, as will be shown in Chapter 5, this perspective changed dramatically within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the organisation was obliged to adopt a predominantly digital operational format.

Overall, this theme explored the value that lies in considering both digital and non-digital communications when attempting to connect and reach wider audiences of older adults. With regard to the research question, the findings presented in this theme highlight Age Voice's civic efforts of advocating for digital inclusion by encouraging older people to receive digital communications. At the same time, the findings highlight the organisation's work on ensuring that their members are not subject to disadvantage and exclusion due to a lack of digital skills. These efforts of promoting inclusivity can be located alongside the organisation's role as a stakeholder in the age-friendly city (AFC), an initiative that aims to build adequate conditions that support longevity. The next theme locates the role of Age Voice's digital communications within this AFC initiative and responds directly to RQ2 by looking at how age-friendly communities can better exploit digital technologies and community media to support older people's civic participation.

Theme 3: Showcasing age-friendly collaborations digitally

Despite originally aiming their communications at older individuals, the Age Voice team discovered that a number of local organisations were also making use of the information presented in the newsletter:

> *"We have picked up more people, but they're organisations, rather than individuals. So, we find a lot of organisations are using what we're putting out, which is an interesting thing." (Edith, Interview 3)*

This engagement with the newsletter outside of their own membership showed that, indeed, Age Voice were perceived to be leaders on age-friendly matters in their city, with other

organisations referring to their expertise and drawing on the information circulated by Age Voice. I first learned about Age Voice's involvement as an AFC stakeholder through being invited to attend the AFC meetings while I was an embedded researcher in Age Voice. After working with the organisation's digital team for longer, I realised that by creating a cycle of information in which different AFC-affiliated organisations promote each other, age-friendly topics and events could gain much wider attention, thus strengthening the civic impact of age-friendly initiatives across a local city:

> *I've been at a meeting this morning and both the ladies that were there said*
> *'We read the articles and we share with our members' (Ada, Interview 3)*

Ada's communication with other AFC stakeholders shows that the AFC member organisations were trying to distribute age-friendly information to their respective memberships in a more strategic way. However, Greta, who had been involved with the AFC since its inception, pointed out that despite the best efforts, the AFC efforts lack an overarching communications strategy:

> *I mean, that would that would really be our joint plan around, actually, how do we communicate the good work that we're doing and how do we develop a framework and a mechanism for us to start to put on the map the stuff that we do and what resource do we need to support that? In some ways, with things like Twitter, you promote each other, don't you?[…] Once you've got the foundations of how and the, sort of, principles around how you would promote age-friendly, so that, actually, what you're promoting is a joint endeavour and not sole organisations, then we'd probably find more and more things that we're doing together that we could push out there, really. […] Because I don't think it's a lack of activity. […] From very small-level activity to more strategic level, there was just a huge amount of work going on. So, it's not lack of activity and it's not lack of commitment in some ways, but it's lack of giving it a proper profile. (Greta, Interview 4)*

As an experienced leader of the age-friendly movement in Newcastle, Greta highlights that the city might potentially be perceived as less age-friendly than other UK cities. Despite having a wealth of age-friendly projects, the absence of a strong digital profile could contribute to this perception. This implicates the importance of using digital communications, and an appropriate strategy, within a network of age-friendly city stakeholders. Throughout my research I recognised that most other AFC stakeholder organisations were represented by working professionals. In this network of age-friendly information and communications, Age Voice therefore occupied a unique position. The Age Voice volunteers assumed the role of local representatives of older people in Newcastle, promoting the voices of older people directly. Indeed, the Age Voice team anticipated that by circulating the digital newsletter and asking their readers for feedback, they could transform the reputation of the organisation from being

"inward looking to knowing what a range of older people in the city are actually interested in" *(Greta, Interview 4).* By listening to their members and other older residents in the city, the team hoped that they could make their own communications more relevant and impactful and in turn serve their membership better. From an empowerment perspective, this is an important step towards the inclusive representation of older people as Age Voice sought to ensure that older people's projects and opinions could be heard by a wide range of stakeholders across a city. On the other hand, for the AFC initiative, the Age Voice communications represent a regular opportunity to connect with older people's views, aligned with their ambitions of using a bottom-up approach of including older adults in the shaping of age-friendliness in their cities. Overall, the inclusion of older adults as active creators of content within AFCs can therefore strengthen the visibility of older people's voices across a city. In turn it can also heighten the recognition of older people as active stakeholders in an age-friendly city's digital communications. This demonstrates the potential of AFC initiatives to provide opportunities that strengthen both civic and digital participation in later life.

4.7.4   Summary of themes from interviews

To summarise, the findings from interviews carried out across the PAR as presented above, give rich insight on my research questions, by examining in-depth contextual and civic factors that impact on older adults' content creation activities (RQ1) and arguing for the potential of including older adults in age-friendly communications as part of AFCs (RQ2). The findings addressed the motivations that underlie older adults digital content creation activities, such as being digital advocates as part of the Age Voice's civic efforts. Additionally, the findings raised awareness of challenges that impacted on the creation of content, such as time constraints affecting the volunteers. Whilst the organisation tried to balance their digital and non-digital interactions in order to counteract exclusion for those members who were not online, they perceived their digital engagement as a way to connect to their audience and subsequently strengthen their civic impact. Lastly, Age Voice's communications are to be recognised as a unique effort within the AFC, since they are led entirely by older volunteers themselves and therefore represent older people's voices directly. Engaging older people in age-friendly communications can strengthen both their civic and digital participation. In the next section I discuss the findings presented in this chapter. I highlight how my research indicates new directions to re-envision digital forms of civic participation more generally and within the AFC context.

4.8   Discussion

In this chapter, I addressed the overall research questions of how older adults engage with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices (RQ1) and how age-friendly communities can better exploit digital technologies and community media to support older people's civic participation (RQ2). Working closely with Age Voice, the older people's forum in the city of Newcastle upon Tyne and stakeholder of the city's age-friendly initiative, we conducted four PAR cycles in response to these research questions. Due to our choice to implement four different methods, namely embedded research, (co-design) workshops, interviews and RtD, the findings presented in this chapter shed light on different perspectives that impact on older adults' digital citizenship. The first part of this chapter reviewed how our joint conceptual thinking on civic participation and digital content creation activities evolved: from focusing on internal aspects of the organisation's communications towards locating their efforts civically within the wider AFC agenda. Second, we mapped the organisation's media landscape, highlighting a wealth of content created by the volunteers as well as internal challenges, to maximise their workflow potential. Third, we engaged with a research through design approach to hone in on the potential of using digital technologies as part of the organisation's age-friendly efforts in the local market. Whilst the use of audio statements to capture older people's voices was not as effective as we had hoped, it was seen as a useful way of sparking citizen discussions. Last, based on the analysis of interviews, I highlighted three themes that are co-located with the conceptual trajectory as identified in the first part of the chapter: exploring the multifaceted experiences of engaging with Age Voice communications (internal focus), connecting with the audience in digital and non-digital interactions (member focus), and showcasing age-friendly work digitally (local strategic focus).

4.8.1   Re-imagining digital forms of civic participation

As a main contribution, this chapter highlights the importance of considering the intersection between digital content creation activities and social, collective forms of civic participation in later life as considered in the framework by Serrat *et al.* (2019). My research can be located within the context of increasing digitalisation of societies, which requires a consideration of digital skills as part of civic participatory activities (Theocharis, 2015). The findings presented in this chapter cast new light on the need to extend the existing narrow frameworks on civic participation, especially relating to later life, by highlighting the need to include a digital dimension. My findings challenge stereotypical assumptions that older adults do not use digital tools to further their civic goals, which leads me to argue that in order to consider older adults as digital citizens, we need to re-imagine the ways in which older adults participate civically

online. Locating my work in Serrat *et al.*'s framework of civic participation (Table 4.8), I argue that especially collective and social forms of civic participation (Type 2), such as Age Voice's communications work, need to be considered within digital spaces. Whilst these forms of civic participation are traditionally more reliant on in-person interactions, such as volunteering, it is important to reflect how these activities are impacted by the shift towards digital citizenship. Conceptualising civic participation as an activity, which aims to effect public good in one's local community, it is important to take into consideration how Type 2 civic participatory activities support older adults in their digital citizenship, as well as to consider digital technologies that can facilitate this process. The research reported in this chapter highlights the importance of having a "digital" voice in later life, as well as the need for older citizens to be adequately informed about age-friendly topics. Both are demonstrated in my analysis, which highlights the importance of considering older people as leading on digital communications within AFCs. I consider the Age Voice communications team as a unique example of a Type 2 civic participatory activity that shows how using communications and content creation can heighten digital participation for both, volunteers and the wider public. This is reflected in the themes derived from the thematic analysis, which show that the older volunteers' motivations ranged from wishing to heighten their own digital skills, to wanting to be digital advocates for their members.

| | **Civic participation** | |
	Social participation	Political participation
Individual forms	Type 1 Prosocial/helping/altruistic behaviours outside family Donation of money/in-kind supports to charities/NGOs	Type 3 Voting Contacting political representatives Donating money to political parties and organisations Signing petitions Writing letters/emails/blogs/articles with political content Boycotting and political consumption Other individual political manifestations
Collective forms	Type 2 Participation in volunteering, community, or charitable organisations ↓ Re-imagining new digital forms of engagement	Type 4 Running for or holding a public office Working on campaigns Participation in political organisations or forums Protest activities Participation in social movement organisations Other collective political manifestations

Table 4.8: Types of civic activity adapted from Serrat *et al.* 2019

Re-imagining digital points of engagement is crucial to ensure that older adults can maintain their role as stakeholders in society and participate in cultural and social activities (Hill, Betts and Gardner, 2015; Ferreira, Sayago and Blat, 2019), and I add to this body of knowledge by highlighting the civic value of content creation in later life and its potential to support older adults' societal and civic roles. Indeed, my analysis demonstrates that throughout all PAR cycles, the Age Voice team's activities were aimed at strengthening older people's digital citizenship. This idea of digital citizenship is reflected in different notions throughout the chapter, such as strengthening digital participation, engaging with the Age Voice and believing in the organisation, encouraging the Age Voice member to receive digital communications or engaging citizens as part of the RtD approach. By exploring in-depth how older volunteers use digital communications as self-taught content creators, my PAR with the Age Voice shows that being able to produce digital content can be a means for older adults to achieve civic expression by actively contributing to civic debates in later life. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the collaborators expressed a combination of internal and civic motivations to create content, ranging from wanting to increase digital skills to providing professional and informational content as representatives of an older people's organisation. However, this shift has become more apparent since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. I argue that acknowledging a more active civic contribution of older adults in online spaces has the potential to challenge ageism in relation to digitalisation and expand the diversity of online discourse by supporting different voices to be heard.

4.8.2   Digital participation within the age-friendly city

Civic participation is recognised by the WHO as a factor that contributes to active ageing and is therefore conceptualised as one of the domains within the WHO age-friendly city framework. However, despite the growing importance of digital technologies in our daily lives, the official age-friendly city framework does not yet consider a digital dimension. Responding in particular to RQ2, by exploring how age-friendly communities can better exploit digital technologies and community media to support older people's civic participation, the research presented in this chapter locates the Age Voice's digital citizenship efforts within the wider AFC initiative. I highlighted the importance of connecting age-friendly stakeholders digitally, as well as supporting older volunteers in leading on the creation and distribution of age-friendly information across their local communities, which in turn supports their civic participation. The work provides an example of how two domains of the AFC framework interact and overlap: 'communication and information' and 'civic participation'. Figure 4.13 shows the location of this chapter's research in the original WHO AFC framework. Additionally, my findings

represent a real-world example of Liddle *et al.*'s recent definition of age-friendliness, which reflects the crucial role of digital technologies as a facilitator of active ageing in age-friendly cities:

> *Underpinned by a commitment to respect and social inclusion, an age-friendly community is engaged in a strategic and ongoing process to facilitate active ageing by optimising the community's physical, social and digital environments and its supporting infrastructure (Liddle et al., 2020, p.19)*

By providing digital communication and information of civic relevance to other older adults in the city and experimenting with digital audio in order to engage older residents civically, the Age Voice's communications team are operationalising the age-friendly domains of communication and information and civic participation. Through the added digital dimension, the team contribute to the age-friendliness in their city according to Liddle *et al.*'s definition.
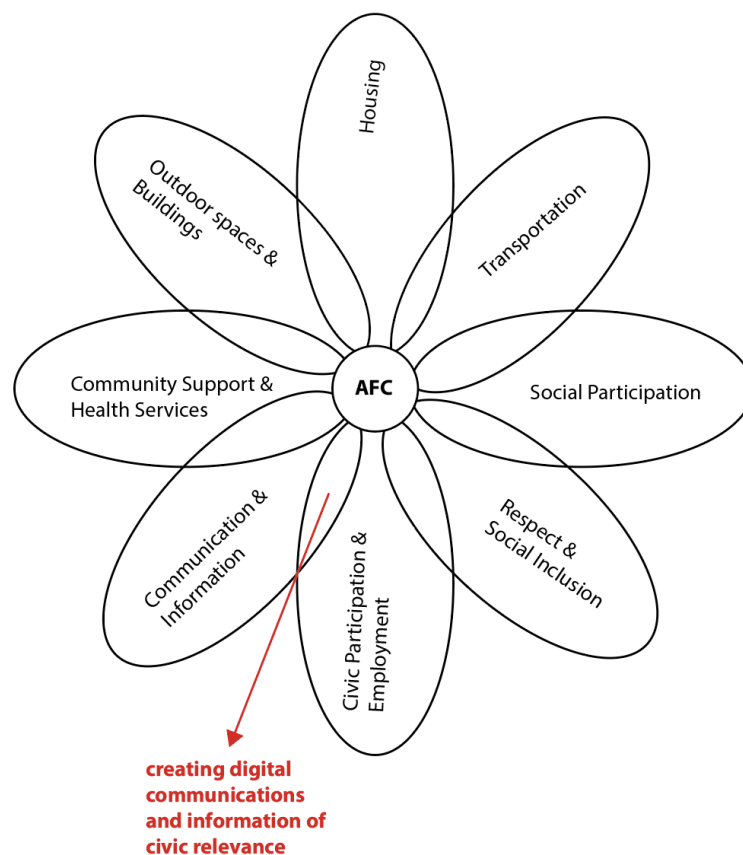
Figure 4.13: WHO age-friendly city framework with location of my research

Indeed, this research shows that the creation of digital content, for example through the digital newsletter, can be a means to achieve civic expression and a mechanism to contribute actively to civic debates in later life. Even though the use of digital audio to create evidence for political

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purposes was not entirely successful, we established that creative approaches to content creation activities can be useful as a conversational prompt to encourage intergenerational dialogue. This points to the potential of using digital audio as a creative way to engage people in discussions on age-friendly topics and to initiate the dialogue with older adults that is necessary to underpin the development of age-friendly policies and practices in the future. While the COVID-19 pandemic has been associated with an increase in older adults' visibility in online spaces, I suggest that age-friendly initiatives should prioritise activities that support older adults in becoming more active in digital civic activities. Using a combination of digital and non-digital tools, such as supporting offline efforts to encourage civic participation with digital media, can be a way of creating spaces for meaningful civic participation.

4.9 Chapter summary

The research presented in this chapter illustrates a local example of how one group of older volunteers conceptualises and engages with a wide range of digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices. It adds to key debates on digitalisation and ageing by highlighting the need to include a digital dimension in the discourse on civic participation in later life, in particular when looking at collective and social forms of civic participation. By working closely with one charitable organisation run by older volunteers, Age Voice, the findings presented in this chapter challenge ageist stereotypes by showing that older adults have the skills and motivation to be involved with an entire "media landscape" of different communication channels in order to be civically active in their community.

Throughout the chapter I addressed both of my research questions. I highlighted motivations and challenges that impacted on older adults' engagement with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices and explored in-depth their content creation workflows (RQ1). Additionally, the PAR reflected a trajectory of how our conceptual thinking developed and, as a result, we were able to expand our understanding about digital citizenship and content creation activities towards locating Age Voice's efforts within wider age-friendly efforts (RQ2). Based on my PAR in collaboration with older content creators themselves and a critical analysis of a wide range of data derived through various complementary methods as an example of methodological bricolage as conceptualised by Holstein and Minkler (2007), I have shown that whilst digital communications are crucial for informing the public about age-friendly work, older volunteers often face specific challenges in creating those communications. My collaboration with Age Voice also demonstrated that digital audio can be a creative way to engage local older adults in discussions on a range of

topics. These findings have implications for the delivery of age-friendly projects by similar organisations of older adults, in particular throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting a need to incorporate digital and non-digital elements in order to be as inclusive as possible. While this chapter sheds light on how older adults engage with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices based on an in-depth engagement with a local organisation in the age-friendly city of Newcastle upon Tyne, the next chapter addresses this question on a broader societal level by working with stakeholders across England.

Chapter 5:

Findings: promoting older adults' digital citizenship through community radio broadcasts

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I build on the findings presented in Chapter 4, by considering a broader societal context in response to my research questions. The previous chapter considered the research questions within a local context. In a first strand of PAR conducted with the Age Voice communications team as presented in Chapter 4, I reviewed how one organisation of older adults used digital communications locally to support expressions of digital citizenship in later life. My findings suggested considering a digital dimension in collective social forms of civic participation in later life. In particular, I argued that involving older adults in the creation of digital content can be of value in age-friendly cities and communities. In this chapter, I explore older adults' digital citizenship on a broader societal level, responding to RQ1 by assessing how older adults engage with content creation as part of their civic participation in community radio broadcasts and as part of the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC). LLARC is a growing network of older radio show hosts and age-friendly community radio stations with a civic purpose of promoting older people's voices in radio broadcasting. Collaborating with LLARC members across the UK, my findings also respond to RQ2 by exploring how age-friendly communities can better exploit digital technologies and community media, in this case community radio, to support older people's civic participation. The process of conducting this second, parallel strand of PAR is represented in red in Figure 5.1 locating it as part of the overall PhD PAR process.
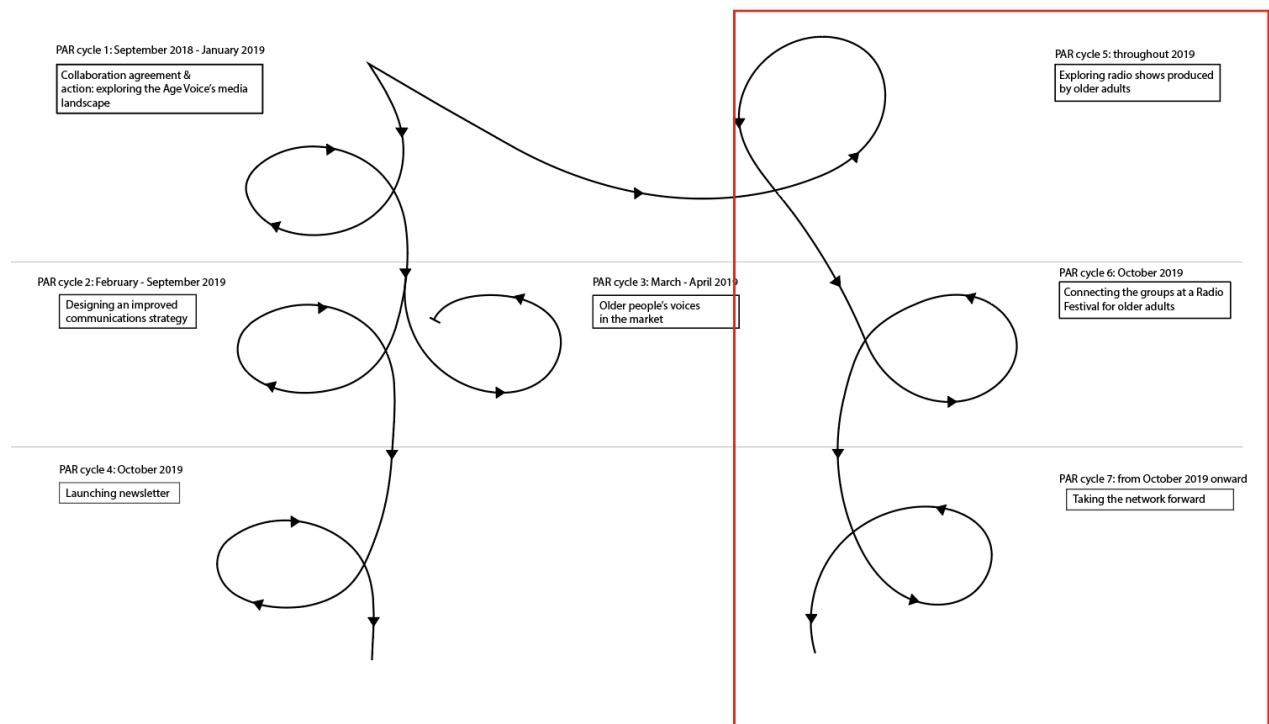
Figure 5.1: Second strand of my PAR process

Even though the medium of community radio might sometimes be referred to as an "old medium", it still plays a "significant role in fostering the expression of diverse voices and citizen participation in this digital era" (Guo, 2017, p.112). Whilst community radio in itself carries the notion of being a space for local communities to have a voice, there is an equal potential for community building. The production of community radio can generate communities of practice, often enhanced through the use of digital technologies and social media (Föllmer and Badenoch, 2018). Driven by the digitalisation of the sector, community radio producers now have the opportunity to expand their community engagement regionally, nationally or transnationally, as content can increasingly be accessed online (Föllmer and Badenoch, 2018; van Beek, 2018). However, in reality, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, online publishing practices within the community radio sector "remain[ed] patchy, […] and programming that could make valuable contributions to broader cultural and socio-political conversations has remained underutilized" (van Beek, 2018, p.223). The findings in this chapter are based on different models of engaging with community radio broadcasts in later life and explore the concepts of ageing and civic participation within a digitalised community radio context before and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. My findings focus broadly on two civic impacts of audio and community radio production in later life: 1) building a civic community network of older community radio broadcasters; and 2) making use of digital technologies within the network to support the members' digital citizenship.

In Chapter 4, I proposed a digital adaptation to Serrat *et al.*'s (2019) later life civic participation framework and emphasised the need for collective social civic activities to re-imagine forms of digital citizenship. In this chapter, I expand on this argument by demonstrating that a digital dimension to civic participatory activities in later life, in this case the production of digital community radio content, can strengthen not only the collective social, but also the collective political participation of older adults. My findings echo van Beek's (2018) point on strengthening socio-political conversations through online community radio content in general, by establishing that the creation of digital community radio content can facilitate a trajectory between social and political forms of later life civic participation.

I begin the next section of this chapter by introducing the multiple stakeholder individuals and organisations I engaged with as part of the community radio content creation element of my PAR programme. First, I briefly outline my collaboration with Age Voice's radio team, preceding the PhD as part of my MRes research. This collaboration formed a case study that laid the foundation for including community radio production as a central part of my PhD

research on civic participation and digital citizenship in later life. I then present my PhD research, starting with my extended engagement with different stakeholders across the UK, highlighting the many ways in which older adults can become active as radio creators at community radio stations. Bringing these different stakeholders together at a Radio Festival led to creation of LLARC, as a new community of practice for older radio creators. I present my analysis of discussions which reflect the attendees' civic efforts in creating this network as a representative body for older content creators. I critically assess how the network developed in a digital space, sharing insights on how the challenging context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the group's digital work by creating an online hub that showcases talk-based audio and radio content created by older adults. Reflecting on my research questions, I discuss the LLARC as an example of how collective social and collective political forms of civic participation can be bridged in digital spaces, highlighting the need to reconsider older adults' digital citizenship practices.
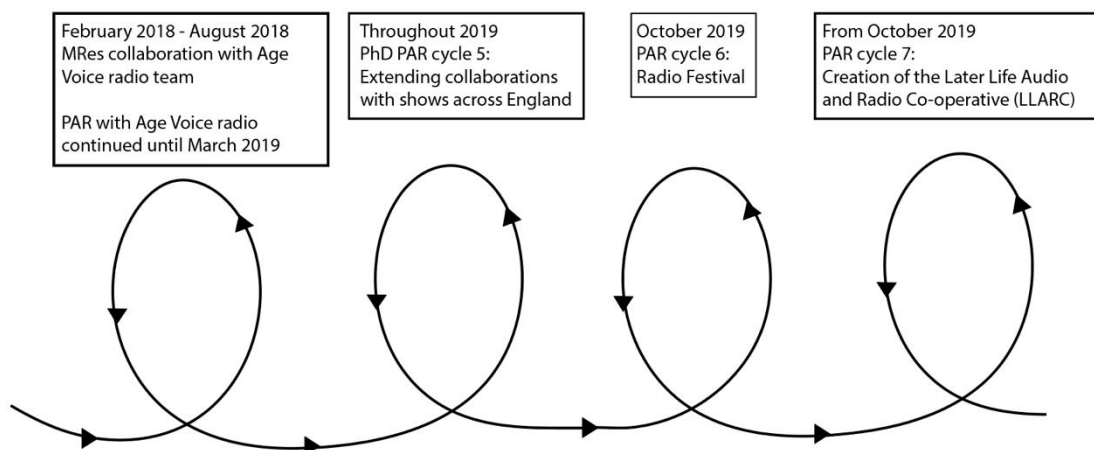
Figure 5.2: timeline of developing a research focus on community radio production

5.2   MRes research: the Age Voice Radio

In this section I briefly introduce my MRes collaboration with Age Voice's radio team. The collaboration reaches back to 2018 (Figure 5.3), preceding my PhD project, and formed a strong foundation for my PAR with Age Voice in general. In an earlier paper (Reuter *et al.*, 2019), I reported on key aspects of my collaboration with the Age Voice radio team as part of my MRes in detail. Here, I summarise the nature of the collaboration to illustrate how this foundational research led into my PhD work on examining how older adults engage with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participation (RQ1) and how age-friendly communities

can better exploit digital technologies and community media, specifically community radio, to support older adults' civic participation (RQ2).
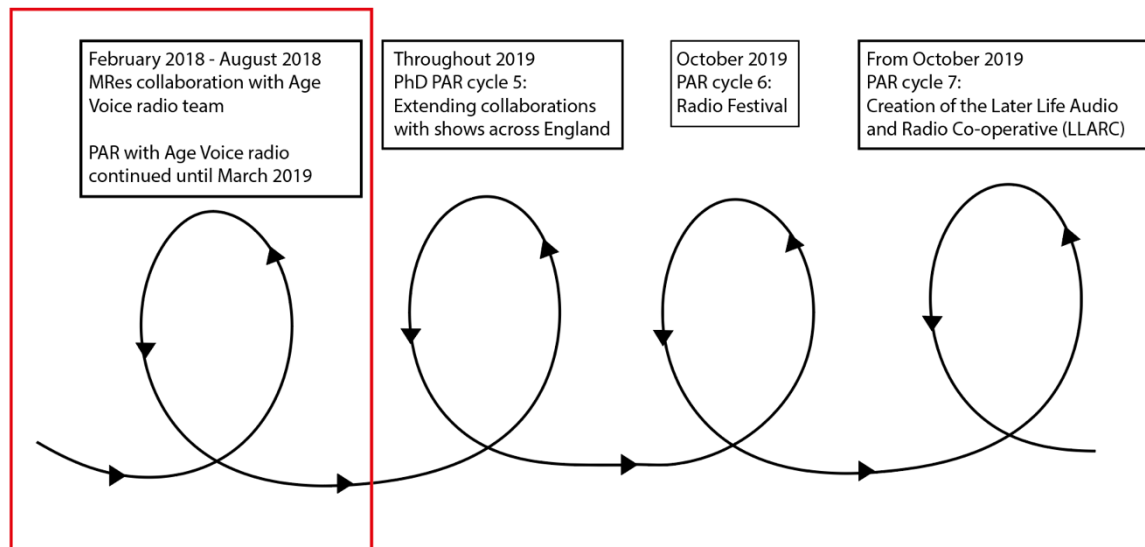
Figure 5.3: MRes collaboration with Age Voice radio team, preceding PhD PAR cycles

The Age Voice radio team has used the medium of community radio to discuss team members' interests and reach out to their community since 2007. The radio team and its show therefore represent an established aspect of the Age Voice communications and media landscape (Chapter 4). Broadcast on a local community radio station, according to the Age Voice website, the radio show "seeks to celebrate the older people of the region, discussing and highlighting issues that affect older residents, along with occasional music". Indeed, the team represents older adults as a diverse group with regard to age, gender, socioeconomic status and health. The production of Age Voice's community radio show has been an ongoing and enduring process, with the production environment remaining more or less unchanged until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Until March 2020, the team broadcast their two-hour show monthly and in-person from a community radio studio in Newcastle. During the course of the pandemic, the team were obliged to change fundamentally their way of working. This entailed shifting their production from a monthly to a fortnightly format broadcast live via Zoom and automatically captured in a digital format.

Joining the group as an embedded researcher over the course of two years before the COVID-19 pandemic, from early 2018 until late 2019, I attended most meetings and broadcasts, observing how this group of older adults self-produces a radio show from scratch including planning and broadcasting, interpersonal dynamics, and how the team coped with technical problems. Drawing on data collected in five interviews, one workshop with five members of

the radio team and observations throughout my embedded research over the course of six months, I conducted a thematic analysis on the interview transcripts and field notes. As key themes, the team described a lack of audience engagement and a resulting uncertainty about their listenership's demographic characteristics.

> *"Who, if anybody, is our audience? What is it that their expectation is? Why would they listen to it? More importantly, why would they get their friends to listen? Why would it matter to them? [...] I have no confidence at the moment that what we're doing is necessarily that important to people" (James).*

They also noted the lack of persistence of the radio show content. Content was broadcast once only and not archived in a public on-demand format, which the team perceived as *"such a shame, [because we've] had some brilliant interviews and they've just gone" (Mary).* These two issues raised questions regarding the programme's visibility for Age Voice's online community and exposed barriers around how to upload content online.

Figure 5.4: Age Voice radio broadcast

5.2.1 Digitalising radio content: The Radio Grabber and Facebook live stream

Prior to the pandemic and the resulting digitalisation of the radio team's workflow, my MRes PAR addressed the topic of digitalisation as a response to the challenges we identified throughout the project, namely a lack of audience engagement and the absence of a listen on-demand option in addition to the live broadcast. As part of the PAR action stage, this digitalisation was achieved in two ways: 1) a Facebook live stream of one radio broadcast, and 2) using the *Radio Grabber* software, a tool that supported the creation of an online archive of the team's radio content on YouTube. Focusing on the digitalisation of Age Voice's community radio content allowed us to strengthen the civic impact of the broadcasts by simultaneously having insight on the audience (e.g. click rates that indicate interests and in turn create more relevant content) and creating the opportunity for people to listen to the broadcasts in their own

time and engage with sharing of the content. The Facebook live stream was an opportunity to allow listeners to get an insight into the studio and to interact with the team by leaving comments. We video live streamed the broadcast from the studio via the team's existing Facebook page, thus making use of an already existing digital platform to strengthen the radio team's connection with their community. The live stream revealed and visualised for the first time that people were actually listening to the show and reacting to it. It also increased the show's followership on Facebook. However, this Facebook live video represented an experiment that did not endure beyond a first broadcast, suggesting that the Age Voice radio team valued the radio more than the video format at that point. This practice changed with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, since when all broadcasts have been video streamed live via Zoom. Being mindful of the team's existing workflows, we also developed and used the *Radio Grabber* software to digitalise segments of Age Voice radio shows. This software was custom-built to be non-intrusive, taking into account the team's existing production structures. As part of the co-design process of the software and due to the care with which the radio show had been put together by the Age Voice team prior to their digital engagement, the developers responded to the needs of the older radio show hosts. These needs encompassed incorporating the team's detailed running order as a basic function of the software and developing a simple digital workflow which could support the creation of a digital archive of their community radio show on YouTube, as a platform the Age Voice team was already familiar with. Due to the open-source nature of the Radio Grabber software, there was potential to adapt its uploading platform to a more suitable platform for audio files, such as Mixcloud or Soundcloud. Using the *Radio Grabber*, the team uploaded 46 chats covering different topics rather than uploading entire shows, with some of the conversations reaching up to 110 re-listens after being shared through social media.

Figure 5.5: Using the Radio Grabber software

5.2.2   Bridging MRes and PhD research

In this section I briefly describe how the MRes project transitioned into my PhD work over time. Despite their initial enthusiasm, the team stopped using the *Radio Grabber* after a year (approximately four months into my PhD), indicating that the use of the software might not have been as sustainable for the team as intended. Whilst the majority of the team believed it was important to digitalise the radio content, I was aware that some team members did not perceive it to be useful and preferred to continue in their traditional way of broadcasting live without an option for on-demand listening online. These underlying tensions and the hierarchical nature and power dynamics within the team reflect a challenge common to PAR projects such as mine (Burgess, 2006; Cook *et al.*, 2019). Negotiating consensus in groups and agreeing on a shared collective action, supported by all members and within an acceptable period of time, can prove elusive. In terms of my PAR, this decision to cease the use of the *Radio Grabber* reflected a natural end point of my collaboration with the Age Voice radio team. Instead, I decided to devote my energy to developing the PAR further as part of my PhD work with the wider Age Voice communications team, as described in chapter 4. My decision not to question the radio team's choice to abandon the *Radio Grabber* was based on my reflections on the scope of this research project and my own boundaries as a PAR researcher. An additional factor that might have prevented the sustainability of the software were staff changes within the community radio station, which occurred during 2019. These changes meant that, on occasion, some (entire) broadcasts were uploaded to the radio station's website by the new station manager, therefore reducing the need to use the *Radio Grabber*, despite its different functionality of uploading segments.

Overall, the MRes collaboration with Age Voice's radio team as described above laid the foundation for continuing my PhD PAR in the space of exploring (community) radio broadcasts within the context of later life digital citizenship. Findings from this MRes collaboration highlighted older adults' efforts to incorporate digital aspects in the production of community radio prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. By digitalising segments of their community radio show, the team hoped to strengthen their digital citizenship by extending the availability of their show to offer an on-demand option and, as a result, extend their audience engagement. Based on these initial insights, I set out to explore the work of other older (community) radio content creators. My aim was to learn from my experience with the Age Voice radio team and to identify whether similar experiences characterised the work of other content creators. In particular, I was keen to discover more about reasons for older adults' engagement with the production of

community radio content, their use of digital technologies in this context and to explore civic participatory perspectives.

5.3   Extending my engagement with older community radio content creators

This section presents the fifth PAR cycle of my PhD project, during which I explored further the civic aspects that underlie older adults' radio content creation by engaging with other stakeholders across England (Figure 5.6). Whilst working with the Age Voice radio team, I had become aware through social media (Twitter) and word of mouth of two other groups who were working in in the space of later life radio production: Age Speaks and Sonder Radio. As described in chapter 3, these stations explicitly wished to be named rather than anonymised in this thesis. First, I introduce the stations and review the contrasting ways in which older adults can engage with the production of community radio: in collaboration with a radio professional (Age Speaks) and through skills workshops (Sonder Radio). I respond to my research questions by highlighting civic motivations that underlie the creation of community radio in later life, and trajectories that lead from the production of community radio shows to increased digital citizenship in later life.
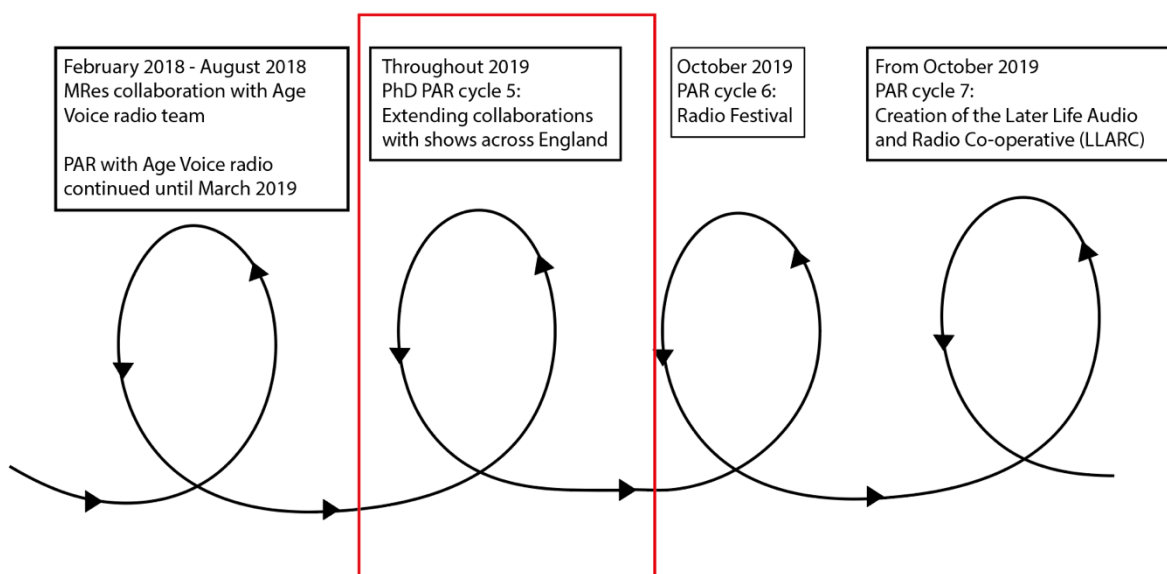
Figure 5.6: PhD PAR cycle 5 – extending the engagement with older radio content creators

5.3.1   Age Speaks

I first became aware of Mervyn, host of the radio show Age Speaks, via Twitter. Starting in 2016, Age Speaks has been broadcast daily on a community radio station in East London. Mervyn, a self-defining older person and activist, runs a co-operative organisation called Change AGEnts. He uses Twitter as a way to promote both his co-operative and his radio show.

The show's technical production aspects are managed by Ian, the radio station's director. Age Speaks therefore represents an example of a collaboration between an older radio show host and a professional radio producer. By using the medium of radio, as well as making the recording available online for on-demand listening and downloads, Mervyn and Ian hope to increase their activist messaging on age-related topics. They seek to enhance the show's visibility and promote their activity by using a variety of social media (with a main focus on Twitter). After I contacted Mervyn he subsequently invited me to appear as a guest on his show (https://www.mixcloud.com/EastLondonRadio/age-speaks-meet-arlind-reuter-mar19/).

5.3.2   Sonder Radio

To deepen my understanding of the research questions locating radio content creation as a civic activity, I sought out more opportunities to learn from older radio show hosts. This led me to contact Sonder Radio, a Manchester-based radio station for older people. Sonder Radio aims to promote wellbeing, reduce isolation and advocate for digital inclusion by running skills workshops to support older adults in creating radio content. No digital skills are required to participate and most of the station's radio show hosts could be described as computer novices. There are no rules concerning the content that is created on Sonder Radio. The intergenerational team seek actively to deconstruct traditional approaches to content creation, for example by not creating a running order and by using a portable studio, which supports creativity around what a radio show can look like. I visited the Sonder Radio studio for a day in order to interview two of the station's three directors, Beena and Rachel, and to locate Sonder Radio's work alongside my research questions on community radio and civic participation in later life. Subsequently, Sonder Radio visited Open Lab in Newcastle together with one of their older radio show hosts, Colin, to give a presentation at Open Lab and to be guests on Age Voice's radio programme. Sonder Radio reciprocated by recording audio content with the Age Voice's radio team.

5.3.3   Data collection and analysis: community radio in later life and digital citizenship

As part of my engagement with Age Speaks and Sonder Radio, I visited the stations and received one return visit from Sonder Radio. At each visit I conducted a semi-structured interview, making it three in total (Table 5.1). The first interview was conducted in London with the Age Speaks team, Mervyn and Ian. The second interview was conducted at my first visit to Sonder Radio in Manchester with the station's directors Beena and Rachel, both younger people. The third interview was conducted at Sonder Radio's visit to Newcastle, with one of Sonder Radio's older content creators, Colin together with Beena. I did not initially anticipate these interviews to be conducted with groups of two people. Due to the external and unforeseen

circumstances of securing meetings with two people, I approached the interviews with the same interview schedule. However, the experience required some adaptations in my interviewing strategy in order to allow both participants to answer each question but also ask follow-up questions as relevant. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim (Interview 1 and 3 by a professional transcription service, interview 2 by myself).

Interview	Participants	Association	Date	Duration
1	Mervyn	Radio show host (Age Speaks)	March 2019	50 mins
	Ian	Radio station director		
2	Beena	Radio station director (Sonder)	June 2019	90 mins
	Rachel	Radio station director (Sonder)		
3	Colin	Older radio show host	July 2019	30 mins
	Beena	Radio station director		

Table 5.1: Overview of interviews from extended engagement

Using reflexive thematic analysis following the process of inductive and deductive coding as described previously in Chapters 3 and 4, I developed two key themes with reference to my research questions: (1) exploring civic motivations to create community radio in later life; and (2) increased digital citizenship (Table 5.2).

Theme	Example Codes	Data
Exploring civic motivations to create community radio in later life	Becoming better at speaking out	*"But as you've experienced, I didn't use hardly any of the questions that I'd prepared today, which is fine, because it was going on quite naturally from one thing to the other"* *(Mervyn)*
	Enhancing activist goals	*"Age Speaks is talking about age issues [...]. It's actually getting people's stories, and views." (Mervyn)*
Increasing digital citizenship opportunities through enhanced digital skills	Intentional development of digital skills	*"I think that what we believe really strongly in is – you can't make a show until you've learned to edit." (Beena)*
	Developing digital skills as a by-product of radio production	*"We've got a website [...] that we advertise Age Speaks on. On that website, we had a blog that we were all blogging on." (Mervyn)*

Table 5.2: Development of themes with example codes and data – extended engagement

5.3.4 Findings: civic radio creation and digital citizenship opportunities

Theme 1: Exploring civic motivations to create community radio in later life

In Chapter 4, I reported on civic factors that played a role in older adults' decisions to engage with content creation activities, such as engaging with content creation as part of an older people's organisation or strategically distributing information to older people as part of the age-friendly city initiative. The findings presented in this section build on the previous insights by focusing specifically on older adults' civic motivations to engage with the production of community radio broadcasts as a form of content creation.

Community radio was identified by participants as a means of having a voice, which can be an empowering experience for older adults. When I asked Colin from Sonder Radio about what he enjoyed most about producing radio, he identified two factors. First, he expressed his delight in having the opportunity to share his personal passions with a wider audience. In Colin's case, the topic of his show was Jazz music and it was produced in collaboration with a younger person, James. This intergenerational broadcasting context was one way for Colin to engage with sharing information about Jazz music more publicly. Additionally, the creation of Colin's and James' show represents an overarching civic goal of deepening connections between generations through the radio production process. By attracting different generations of listeners as part of their intergenerational format, the show bridged possible intergenerational divides such as bringing Colin's experiences from listening to live Jazz concerts in the 1960s to younger listeners. Second, and of greater relevance in terms of a focus on civic participation, Colin took pleasure in developing his broadcasting skills. He explained how his broadcasting practice and his confidence in speaking out has developed over time:

> *"I like speaking down the microphone, normally and getting the right balance. Also, doing it ad lib, without stuttering as well. Because when you start, if you've got a script in front of you, you start reading it and you start bubbling a bit. It's no good. It just sounds like you're acting. I just like it to swing, to roll off my tongue." (Colin, Sonder Radio, Interview 3)*

This statement shows that community radio can be an environment which supports older adults to speak out actively and clearly about topics that matter to them. Becoming more confident in public speaking is in itself part of the concept of civic participation, which is described as active citizen participation, for example through actively addressing issues of public concern (Serrat *et al.*, 2019). Colin's case identifies radio broadcasts as an environment within which older people can develop their skills in public speaking over time. Mervyn recognised a similar development in his public broadcasting skills, when he was invited onto a *"... once a fortnight show that goes out around older people's issues. So they were interviewing me in relation to*

how we, and why we, started Age Speaks. And once I got over the initial nerves, I thought I was alright. But the two presenters said to me, "We can tell that you're actually quite used to this." Now, they couldn't have said that when I first started [radio broadcasting]" (Mervyn, Interview 1). This demonstrates his trajectory from developing his radio broadcasting skills over the course of time and using them as a tool to enhance his public speech. Indeed, Mervyn's own show Age Speaks is an overt example of how an older person engages civically with the production of community radio. Mervyn has a life-course commitment to advocacy on behalf of older people and other marginalised groups. Through his work within and beyond the co-operative sector, he has become a well-known activist in the UK for his ambitions in challenging stereotypical narratives on ageing. He uses his radio show as a medium to enhance his activist goals by raising public awareness of topics related to age and ageing and, in particular, the issue of ageism:

> *"Age Speaks [...] is about changing the narrative around age and ageing within and outside the co-op movement. [...] We always challenge ageism, always. So that's where we are." (Mervyn, Age Speaks, Interview 1)*

By using his radio platform, Mervyn reaches out to experts on specific topics and aims to bring to his audience information-rich conversations about a wide range of age-related issues. By contrast with the approach of Age Voice radio, the focus of Mervyn's engagement with radio production lies more in generating debate and in forming "online" communities around such debates than in engaging older adults in local discussions. The radio production of Age Speaks is specifically rooted in a civic purpose around community building and seeks to raise awareness about specific topics related to ageing.

Theme 2: Increasing digital citizenship opportunities through enhanced digital skills

This theme illustrates how the production of community radio content can enhance older adults' digital skills and, in turn, increase their digital citizenship opportunities online. I highlight two trajectories, namely the intentional development of digital skills with the aim to produce radio content and enhanced digital skills as a by-product of the radio production.

Sonder Radio provides an example of intentionally setting out to use radio as a creative approach to teaching digital skills. As part of its concept, the station provides "Let's Get Digital" workshops. These started in collaboration with local housing organisations:

> *"The housing associations would say to us 'Well we've got all these older people who want to learn how to use computer' so then we started doing really basic how you use computer programmes but evaluating them through radio. And then the residents were kind of like 'we really like this radio stuff,*

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what's that all about' and we were like 'Oh yeah, maybe we can do something there' so then we started doing [it]. We recorded their monthly newsletter so that people who are visually impaired could access it." (Rachel, Sonder Radio, Interview 2)

Sonder's work with local organisations demonstrates the importance of engaging directly with older people in order to understand their digital interests and needs. Paralleling my own PAR collaboration with Age Voice, the station also built credibility as a long-term collaborating partner by recording the housing organisation's digital newsletter. Additionally, this narrative of the inception of their training scheme shows the potential of using radio production as a foundation for the development of digital skills. Through the process of content creation, older people involved in radio production are able to acquire digital skills that allow them to pursue and achieve their civic goals. Colin, too, had attended several sessions where he had learned how to audio edit:

"I've been to this class at Sonder Radio, doing the sound balancing. I've done two lessons there. I'm just getting into the way of the technology that surrounds [laughter] radio." (Colin, Sonder Radio, Interview 3)

"Getting into the way of the technology" shows Colin's direct and active engagement with the technology needed to create a radio show. It also reflects his ambition to be able to create an entire show on his own without professional help. Indeed, Sonder Radio had succeeded in recruiting many highly motivated older volunteers who, over time, began to request specific workshops and expressed a wish to rely less on professionals to produce a show:

"So for some people who've never turned on a computer before or have very limited computer literacy and now wanting to learn how to edit which isn't the easiest of things to do. But they're willing to do it and that's great." (Beena, Sonder Radio, Interview 1)

From Beena's perspective, as station manager, the desire of older content creators to create radio shows independently of (mainly younger) professionals was a key motivation to improving their digital skills. Her work also showed that digital inclusion, with a focus on access and accessibility ("*never turned on a computer before*"), is not always a necessary pre-condition for digital participation, namely active and creative contributions to online spaces ("*wanting to learn how to edit*"). Sonder Radio's work shows that, if facilitated in a social context, older adults can strengthen their digital citizenship by increasing their digital skills with the aim to produce community radio shows.

Complementing this example of the intentional development of digital skills with the aim to produce radio content, Age Speaks provides an example of increasing digital skills as a by-product of the radio production. The show is created collaboratively between Mervyn, the

show's host, and Ian, the radio station's director and a professional producer. Through Ian's guidance, Mervyn improved his interviewing and broadcasting skills:

> Ian: "I think at first, I guided you a little bit. [...] I said 'oh that wasn't very good when you did that.'"
>
> Mervyn: "Yes you've not said that recently."
>
> Ian: "No I haven't. I used to take ages to edit his [Mervyn's] show sometimes, because they went on for hours. But now I just sit and listen to it for an hour and think, 'there's a bit there'."

In this specific case, the technical aspects of the production are entirely carried out by Ian, highlighting a potential power imbalance with regard to the actual production process. Even though Ian as a (younger) radio professional has the technical skills to potentially control the production process, the show only requires minimal editing efforts and does not disempower Mervyn (*"Ian can take out the noise and some of the flimflam that I might wallow about", Mervyn, Interview 1*). This development reflects the improvement of Mervyn's broadcasting skills as part of the process. Despite not engaging with technical production skills, I found that Mervyn became motivated to become engaged with other digital tools in order to promote his show online. He expanded his digital skill set by conveying his ideas in different formats, for example via social media on Twitter:

> "Yes, yes, so we've got some followers on the Age Speaks Twitter account. So I'll use my own account to advertise. I also use the Age Speaks account [...] and we can also be a bit humorous." (Mervyn)

By managing two Twitter accounts, Mervyn cross-promotes his show so that his discussions can reach a wider audience, thus strengthening the impact of his activist radio show. He also established a blog to promote Age Speaks further:

> "So I've just set up my own blog, so I'm just starting to blog. So I'll be blogging about Age Speaks, the history of Age Speaks, on my own blog. It's a very new blog, because I've only just set it up. [...] That gives me freedom to talk about absolutely anything." (Mervyn)

Blogging is, in itself, another digital skill that Mervyn was inspired to engage with in order to heighten the impact of his radio show. His approach of integrating different media in order to promote Age Speaks resembles a marketing strategy on its own and highlights the transferability of radio discourse to other digital spaces. Indeed, it shows that radio content creation can be a gateway for older adults to engage with other digital skills (e.g. using social media as a way to promote their radio show), thus widening their civic impact in digital spaces.

Overall, my findings from this section highlight that the production of radio content in later life is driven by civic motivations, such as having a voice in one's community and increasing the visibility of older adults in broadcasting, but also as a way of amplifying civic activist content. It can lead to a broader civic participation in later life by providing wider audiences with age-relevant content. Referring to Mossberger *et al.*'s (2007) definition of a digital citizen as somebody who uses the internet regularly and effectively, I argue that in the cases of both Sonder Radio and Age Speaks the production of a community radio show served as a catalyst to engage further with digital skills. This demonstrates an increase in the ability to strengthen digital citizenship in later life. These findings respond to my research questions by demonstrating how the production of community radio shows can represent a distinct pathway towards increased civic participation and digital citizenship in later life.

The next section reports on the next PAR cycle: hosting a Radio Festival for older adults, and subsequently the creation of what has become the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC).

5.4   The Radio Festival

As part of my scoping research visit to Age Speaks during the extended engagement in PAR cycle 5 (as described in section 5.3.1), Mervyn and I explored the role of community radio for civic participation in later life as part of a discussion, which led us to develop the idea to connect older radio content creators with each other. Leveraging the medium of community radio as a way to engage and empower older adults in their respective communities and across society, we considered that a group or a network of older content creators could potentially amplify the profile of older people's voices in public debates, by showing the diversity in radio content created by older adults themselves. This idea encapsulates my research questions with regard to exploring how older adults engage with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices (RQ1) across the UK, and to consider how age-friendly communities can better exploit digital technologies and community media, in this case community radio, to support older people's civic participation (RQ2). Bringing my collaborators (Age Voice, Sonder Radio, Age Speaks) together from across the UK was a natural step for the PAR to expand localised collaborations, small communities, towards a new community of practice. The term 'communities of practice' emphasises learning and the sharing of knowledge as a collaborative and situated action (Gherardi, 2009). Communities of practice are created around a shared interest and characterised by a commitment to develop expertise, skills and proficiency in this specific domain (Garfield, 2020). In the case of this PAR, community of practice refers

to older people who are interested in the creation of community radio as part of their civic participation. In this section I present how I brought my collaborators together at a Radio Festival for older adults (Figure 5.7), which formed the starting point for the creation of a community of practice, the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC).
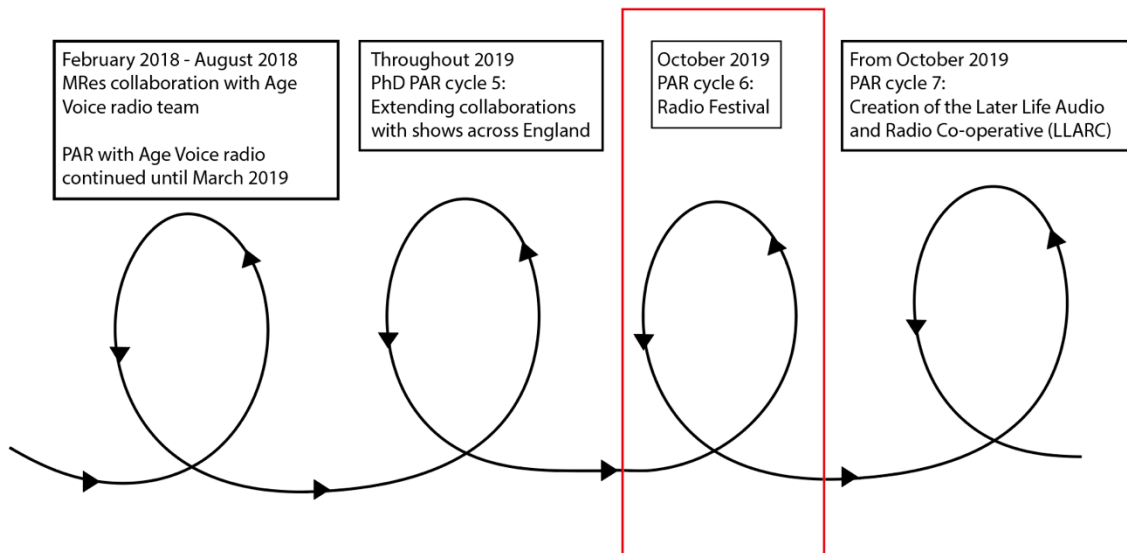
Figure 5.7: PAR cycle 6 – conducting a Radio Festival for older adults

The Radio Festival was conducted over two days in October 2019 at Open Lab's event space. I circulated an open invitation to my collaborators and additionally advertised an open signup form via Eventbrite to recruit participants who felt interested in the topic of community radio in later life without being part of my research project. This Eventbrite form was distributed publicly through my own and my collaborators' Twitter channels and e-mail networks, and additionally sent out in a targeted way to invite people we knew would be interested. Twenty-three participants registered for the event. Over the course of the two days, the Radio Festival team counted 15 participants who attended the entire two days and around 10 more people who participated in certain parts of the festival only. The attendees were predominantly older content creators, age-friendly radio station managers and radio professionals, third sector and local authority representatives, and academics working in the fields of gerontology or radio studies. By inviting researchers as well as practitioners, we sought to connect the disparate academic fields of gerontology, Human-Computer Interaction, and radio/media studies with each other as well as with current the current practice of community radio production. All participants gave their consent to be included as part of this research and are named using their real names or pseudonyms based on their preference. I start by summarising key features of the festival

and its main collaborative activities, as well as my data collection methods, before moving on to present findings based on my analysis of the data.

5.4.1 Key collaborative activities: talks and workshops

I put the Radio Festival programme together in agreement with my collaborators, who were in charge of some of the activities. It provided an opportunity to listen to several talks and keynote presentations delivered by participants from different backgrounds (Figure 5.8). Highlights included: 1) Mervyn's talk on the links between community radio and civic engagement from the perspective of an older activist, 2) a presentation on the history of establishing the community radio sector in the UK and conducting participatory research with community radio teams given by radio researchers Paul and Christine, who represented academics with a practitioner background, and 3) Ian's "question and answer" session as an open discussion on volunteering opportunities with community radio stations. Additionally, structured workshop sessions were offered, such as a hands-on session delivered by the Sonder Radio team based on their "Let's get digital" workshops. Participants were guided through playful activities about radio structuring towards broadcasting live from the building using the radio station's portable radio desk. A second workshop delivered by Paul and Christine demonstrated the use of the radio.garden platform, exploring community radio stations worldwide (www.radio.garden).

Thursday, 17th October 2019

Time	Activity
10	Registration
10.30	Welcome: Prof Dave Kirk (Open Lab) Prof Thomas Scharf (Institute for Ageing) Arlind Reuter (Open Lab)
11	Community Radio and Engagement Dr. Mervyn Eastman (Change AGEnts)
11.15	Radio Station Introductions
12	Lunch
1	Get Digital (Sonder Radio)
2.30	Collaborative Show Planning Rebecca Nicholson (Open Lab)
4	Space to Reflect
5 - Late	Optional Dinner (paid by participants)

Friday, 18th October 2019

Time	Activity
9	Registration
9.30	Community Radio Address Paul & Christine Researchers in radio studies
10.15	Community Radio Volunteering Landscape and Promoting Radio Ian
10.45	Discussion and Taking the Network forward
12	Lunch
1.30	Radio.Garden workshop
2.30	Closing remarks
3	Close

Figure 5.8: Radio Festival programme

5.4.2 Data collection at discussions

Whilst all these interactions successively shaped the PAR cycle by providing space for interactions and reflections, the findings presented in this chapter are predominantly based on data collected at two 45-minute discussions on the second day (indicated at 10.45 am in the programme). The first discussion took place in small groups and was then brought back to the plenary for a second, overarching discussion. The groups included older content creators (two female, three male), third sector and local authority representatives, researchers, and radio station representatives (one female, two male) as shown in Table 5.3. All group discussions and the subsequent plenary were audio recorded and later transcribed as part of my data collection.

Group	Name / Pseudonym	Estimated age group	Association
Group 1	Mervyn	60+	Radio show host (Age Speaks)
	Ian	50-60	Radio station director
	Elsa	50-60	Local authority
	Ada	60+	Third sector (Age Voice)
Group 2	Paul	60+	Researcher
	Victor	60+	Radio show host (Age Voice)
	Lila	30-40	Researcher
	Rose	60+	Radio show host (Age Voice)
Group 3	Rachel	30-40	Radio station director
	Dan	20-30	Radio station employee
	Anna	60+	Radio show host (Age Voice)
	Alex	60+	Radio show host (Age Voice)
	Christine	50+	Researcher

Table 5.3: Discussion round participants

Guided by my research questions, I suggested two discussion topics ahead of the festival and they were agreed by my collaborators (Age Voice radio team, Age Speaks and Sonder Radio). The discussions set out to explore the general value of a network for older radio content creators in relation to supporting civic participation in later life (RQ1) in an open format, whilst also exploring the practical facilitation of such a network in more detail using "technology cards" as a tool to direct the discussions. For this purpose, Open Lab's content creator Daniel and I had prepared paper "technology cards" inspired by the Interaction Design card sorting activity

(Tomitsch and Wrigley, 2018) used in my previous workshop with the Age Voice communications team (Chapter 4). Each card represented a digital communication technology (Evernote, Dropbox paper, mixcloud, WhatsApp, slack, YouTube, Mailchimp, Trello, Facebook groups, Basecamp) that we imagined could be used to organise a network (Figure 5.9). At the beginning of the group discussions, participants were asked to consider these technologies as a discussion prompt and then left to work with the cards as they pleased. Group 3 opted to work with the cards and discuss the proposed technologies, the other two groups chose to focus their discussion more freely on other aspects related to the creation of a radio network, such as finances and civic impact.

Figure 5.9: Technology cards

5.4.3 Analysis: ambitions to form a community of practice

I analysed all transcripts from the group discussions and the plenary shortly after the Radio Festival using reflexive thematic analysis with an inductive approach to my coding practice in order to stay open minded to things that were brought up as part of the discussions. I generated four themes from the data and present example codes and data in Table 5.4. The first three themes are based on the discussions of groups 1 and 2 and the subsequent plenary discussion. They represent ambitions and outcomes that drive the participants' engagement to create a community of practice for older radio content creators: challenging ageist assumptions, generating intergenerational cohesion, and radio as a technological tool that engages communities. The fourth theme was generated based entirely on the discussion of group 3, who

were the only discussion group that engaged with the technology cards. The theme 'inclusive communications and content sharing' represents the group's initial perceptions of the role of digital technologies within a potential network of older content creators.

Theme	Example Codes	Data
Challenging ageist assumptions	Democratising older people's voices	*"We had discussion around older people leading and volunteering and driving content in programming" (Elsa)*
	Speaking freely as an older person	*"And I think one of the most effective ways of doing that [challenging ageist assumptions] is older people themselves changing the narrative by talking about more positive attitudes" (Mervyn)*
Generating intergenerational cohesion	Older people driving programming	*"Who actually makes the decision in terms of what is allowed in the programming? And I think that for us, we are in control of the programming" (Mervyn)*
	Support across age groups	*"We have to remember that as we age, we might need younger people to come in and support us in whatever we're doing, whatever we're looking at, what we're talking about communicating." (Ada)*
Considering radio as a technology to engage new communities	Access of radio through fm and online	*"In terms of the network, it's about the network attracting both if you like ofcom regulated stations, but also attracting web-based." (Mervyn)*
	Accessibility to engage with radio broadcasts	*"What I'm learning here today is that it doesn't take much at all [to produce community radio] and I'm so excited." (Elsa)*
Inclusive communication channels and content sharing	Easy to use tools	*"Everybody's on e-mails, so that's good. And then we talked about WhatsApp, but not everybody has a smartphone again. So we didn't come to any solid conclusions. We were just kind of exploring what people were using and what could work on a bigger scale." (Rachel)*
	Privacy awareness	*"If there was a way in which I could be more confident in the safety aspects of using it." (Alex)*
	Widening the reach of content created by older adults	*"If you've got an amazing interview, you might want this to go as far as possible." (Rachel)*

Table 5.4: Themes, example codes and data – Radio Festival

5.4.4 Findings Themes 1-3: establishing the network's mission and use of digital technologies

In this section, I present the first three themes from the discussions at the Radio Festival, namely (1) using radio to challenging ageist assumptions, (2) advocating for intergenerational cohesion, and (3) considering radio as a technology to engage new communities. These themes relate to the research questions by considering in-depth motivations that inspire older radio show creators to come together as part of a community of practice and advocate civically for involving older adults in radio broadcasts.

Theme 1: Challenging ageist assumptions

One of the intentions voiced by the participants of the discussion groups was to use a potential network for older radio content creators as a tool to heighten awareness of what was viewed as deep-seated ageism in public discourse as well as within the broadcasting industry. Mervyn suggested that the creation of radio by older adults is in itself an act that can challenge ageism in wider society. He outlined that the medium of community radio allows older adults to contribute their opinions to public dialogue and showcase an active and engaged way of ageing that ultimately becomes a way of democratising older people's voices:

> *"When I talk about democratising older people's voices it already challenges existing stereotypes. And I think one of the most effective ways of doing that is older people themselves actually changing the narrative. [. . .] What is the vision and purpose of the network? For me it's about trying to change the existing narrative about how people think about growing older!" (Mervyn)*

Changing the existing narrative, along the lines suggested by Mervyn, does not necessarily require individuals to actively speak out against ageism. I interpreted his statement that simply being an older content creator who engages with technical production tools can highlight an active stance on ageing, contrasting with stereotypical views of the passive nature of later life. As noted by Rose, another benefit of hearing older people's voices and opinions in public debates is that they reflect the actual lived experience of a person, thus acknowledging personhood in later life:

> *"I think it's because we feel that we can express these issues better. Because we have actually experienced them as older people. [. . .] There is a lot more understanding between us." (Rose)*

Rose highlights that by letting older people express their own views through broadcasting, ageists assumptions made by younger radio show hosts can be avoided. In the opinion of Elsa and Mervyn, constructing this shared understanding between older adults in the context of creating a radio show could be an alternative and more representative way to facilitate citizen

dialogue. By taking part in radio shows, older adults can freely express themselves and share their experiences in ways which might not be represented in mainstream media broadcasts.

> Mervyn: "There are skill sets that you can develop that are very enjoyable."
>
> Elsa: "Absolutely"
>
> Mervyn: "Not just being in a studio, but being able to talk, being able to actually express what interests you."

All participants agreed that this opportunity of being able to talk openly as part of community radio broadcasts can support the creation of a more diverse representation of older adults in the public dialogue. Challenging ageist assumptions through promoting talk-based content created by older adults themselves was agreed as an integral part of what was to become the network's mission.

Theme 2: Advocating for intergenerational cohesion

The second theme generated from the discussion data captures the role of intergenerational relationships within the network. In the plenary discussion following the group discussions, it became clear that different participants had contrasting perceptions of who would take charge in co-ordinating the project:

> Victor: "Who would be in charge? We have respect for our academic colleagues, but older people should run the network themselves. And the co-ordinator should definitely be an older person."
>
> Lila: "I'm not nodding. It's not because I disagree and I thought about it when you said it. I'm not sure. I can understand the thinking behind it, but I'm also conscious that people who wouldn't fit into that group do have value to add and they themselves at some point will be older. And we are talking about the kind of fact that you will want to draw on experiences and older voices might be more reassuring to listeners. But I think there's room to exploring the value of the role of a younger person [within the network] and I wouldn't write it off."

After a longer discussion about the role of older people within a future network, it was agreed that a network should specifically focus on older adults as content creators and producers, in order to serve the organisation's purpose of enabling discussions of relevance that highlight a diversity of experiences in later life. In addition to ensuring that older people are driving the network, it was equally important to include an intergenerational dimension within the work. According to Mervyn, it was important for the network to avoid being ruled by older people alone as a gerontocracy, and focusing on ageing as a dynamic process rather than on old age alone:

"I think Radio is a way of enabling those discussions. People like us. Just chatting [...] Make the radio experience for older adults exciting and new. And draw on people's experiences. [. . .] So one of the fundamental purposes of the Network is to get older people in front and behind the mic. [...] We don't want a gerontocracy within the radio industry. What we want is for voices to be heard, to be expressed on both sides of the mic. And that the network captures that in some shape or form. [...] The issue we were talking about is fundamentally the network has to challenge and reinforce a different mindset and way of thinking about age and ageing. And that means that the programming. Who controls the programming? Who actually makes the decision in terms of what is allowed in the programming? And I think that for us, we are in control of the programming." (Mervyn)

Despite broad agreement that the network should predominantly showcase content developed and produced by older adults, most participants advocated for an intergenerational radio network that emphasises intergenerational cohesion and considers intergenerational content choices:

"The point of the network would be to share good practice, to learn from each other and perhaps testing models around how do you work together as a community. We had discussions around older people [...] leading and volunteering and driving content in programming. But why would the network just look at older people? Isn't that just reinforcing stereotypes that exist? Why wouldn't we be looking at something that was more intergenerational? [...] We want to try and find a way of expressing and cohesion that isn't proving of being divisive." (Elsa)

As Elsa outlined, intergenerational cohesion within the network was seen as an important factor not just in terms of membership, but also to reflect people's lived realities within communities. Additionally, as noted by Christine, the teams discussed the opportunities that lie within intergenerational learning and the mutual provision of support:

"One thing that the network can do is to give some of that informal but useful skills mentoring sometimes. I really like that." (Christine)

Indeed, mentoring and peer-support were seen as key reasons why a network might be useful and needed. Capturing older adults' voices at many stages across the life-course and using those different experiences as a catalyst for the network was perceived by Ada as being an important way to highlight diversity:

"We have to remember that as we age, we might need younger people to come in and support us [...] And I know some people have objections to 50, but if we don't capture people at that age, they aren't going to be there at later life to take over from us." (Ada)

Inviting older adults of different age groups to be part of the network was identified as important in challenging misconceptions about later life consisting of only one generation, whilst at the

same time ensuring that the network has a continuity and intergenerational dynamic. This view was expressed by Lila with reference to the need for succession planning:

> *"So it's about a constant flow of people coming in, it's kind of about succession planning in terms of people, but also if you've got ... it's about succession planning in terms of how technology changes." (Lila)*

Intergenerational expertise and exchange serves as a valuable tool in radio production that helps people to keep up to date with technological innovation, potentially contributing to increased digital citizenship (as outlined in section 5.3.4). Like the first theme (challenging ageism), advocating for intergenerational cohesion was also subsequently incorporated into the radio network's mission.

Theme 3: Considering radio as a technology to engage new communities

The third theme addresses the festival participants' ideas about using community radio as a tool to reach new communities. The discussion groups highlighted the necessity for the network to operate in digital as well as physical spaces, in order to be inclusive of people with and without digital skills: *"I'm excited about the online, but we also have to respect our members* [older people] *who might not use the internet" (Ada)*. In terms of the network's membership and potential audience, according to Mervyn, it was important to engage with radio stations that were regulated by Ofcom, the UK's communications regulator, as well as those that were unregulated and broadcasting on the internet. By broadcasting content created by older adults on both FM and digital broadcasting member stations of the network, participants suggested that the network could reach a wider audience from different backgrounds:

> *"to attract both if you like Ofcom regulated stations, but also attracting web-based. So therefore, one shouldn't exclude the other. It's an open network." (Mervyn)*

The discussions also revealed that appearing on the radio was seen as raising fewer privacy concerns than other digital technologies or tools, such as TV or social media. According to Elsa: *"a lot of people don't want to be filmed, but they don't mind their voices being heard"*. Additionally, the ubiquitous nature of industry broadcasters was depicted in stark contrast to community radio. Elsa appreciated the ability of community radio to capture a person's unique and individual experience and emotion and therefore allow for different types of engagement between presenter and listener beyond the mainstream narrative:

> *"But with Community Radio you hear the passion in their voice. [...] There are communities that have got things to say. I'm beginning to realise that I've been engrained in the world of the BBC. [...] it's so powerful and it's everywhere. But this is exciting that [community radio] is there." (Elsa)*

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As Elsa explained, the ubiquitous nature of the broadcasting industry dominates certain narratives, which might not necessarily include older adults' experiences (as outlined in Theme 1). Elsa's excitement about using community radio as a means of engaging and reaching out to communities was echoed by Mervyn:

> *"For me the thing about Radio is that it breaks across and into a whole range of different communities, which can be within but also very much without a geographical space. So it's around how does this network develop and acknowledge that community means belonging in whatever way? [...] It's about how do we develop programming that captures those various communities?" (Mervyn)*

Here, Mervyn emphasised the potential of community radio to reach a variety of audiences, alongside recognising a need for the network to strategically acknowledge different types of communities and consider how those communities might be engaged with diverse programming.

To summarise, the first three themes from the transcribed discussions encompassed the following: 1) a possibility to challenge ageist assumptions through involving older adults in community radio broadcasts, where they are free to express themselves as they wish and in turn represent more diverse narratives of ageing, 2) voicing the ambition to create a network that advocates for intergenerational cohesion and supports older adults in driving the programming, and 3) highlighting the potential of community radio as a technology to engage new communities of older adults due to its accessibility. In the next section I highlight a fourth theme, generated from a separate group discussion, exploring the role of digital technologies within a network of older radio creators as a community of practice.

5.4.5 *Theme 4: Inclusive communication channels and content sharing*

The fourth theme directly links to RQ2 by highlighting ways in which the emerging network can best exploit digital technologies within a community radio context to support its members' civic participation. I present findings based on the analysis of group 3's discussion, which examined the role of digital technologies within a network. The group (2 older radio show hosts, 2 radio professionals, 1 researcher) was the only discussion group that specifically used the technology cards that we had created (Figure 5.9), in order to generate ideas on the use of digital technologies within a network. As key concerns, the group highlighted the need for privacy-aware, easy-to-use communication and content-sharing tools. First, the team went through the cards in order to familiarise themselves with the selection of digital tools, and then went on to discuss specific technologies in more-depth.

Despite his openness to engage with new technologies, Alex, an older radio show host, voiced his concern of being overwhelmed with the diversity of unfamiliar technologies he was presented with from the cards:

> Alex: "How many of these things can you take up. And some things just get lost. I know I'm using that one and I hope we get better at it, but I've never heard of some of these other ones. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't use it. It can get a bit overwhelming."
>
> Anna: "Because computers can take over your life."
>
> Christine: "Well it's supposed to make life easier, but I know what you mean. There are so many choices. But sometimes one thing can make life very easy."

This conversation between the two older radio show hosts Anna and Alex, and Christine, a researcher, highlights that the initial process of engagement with new technologies can be overwhelming for a user, but they might yet be of benefit to a team. However, even though Alex voiced his willingness to engage with new technologies, the conversation also highlighted that a more efficient communication might be reached through the use of well-known communications tools. Facebook, as one such well-known social media platform with the function to organise groups, immediately captured the participants' attention. However, privacy concerns and the need to sign up to Facebook were perceived as barriers to using it successfully as a platform to base the network on. This view was expressed by Alex in the following way:

> "... a lack of understanding how you control what you do with Facebook. Because I joined it too, because I thought it would be helpful with the work I was doing with the voluntary sector I was involved in. But my first communication was with a young lady from Poland who wanted to be my friend. [...] If there was a way in which I could be more confident in the safety aspects of using it." (Alex)

As a response to these concerns highlighted by Alex, other group members suggested a closed Facebook group or profile sharing, for example using the radio station's profile that everybody can have access to, as a way to be more inclusive and to address privacy issues. The group also discussed the organisational tool Trello, which allows teams to create digital to-do-lists. However, as opposed to using Facebook groups to write messages to each other, Trello requires a more constant engagement with the tool. It was therefore not considered as useful for the network *"unless everybody is using it and is on it all the time" (Rachel)*. From the discussion it became evident that if the network wanted to base their organisation and communication on certain digital tools, it should be a technology that is inclusive and available for use to all members of the network. Indeed, these considerations of using and adapting familiar and well-

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known technological platforms rather than engaging with new platforms as part of a sustained participatory process in groups, also known as the concept of 'unplatforming', are becoming more common (Lambton-Howard *et al.*, 2020). As a common and 'unplatformed' ground for the group, using e-mails was identified as an inclusive way of communicating.

After having discussed advantages and disadvantages of several technologies suggested on the cards, the group came up with the idea of using a digital platform to share content between the radio stations. According to Rachel, a community radio station manager, Sonder Radio's main interest lay in maximising the voices of older adults through radio:

> *"It could be great to share exciting bits of content across a platform and really promote each other's work. [...] If you've got an amazing interview, you might want this to go as far as possible" (Rachel).*

This highlighted the role of digital technologies within the network not only for organisation and communication, but also for content-sharing purposes. This idea was brought to the plenary, where Rachel shared its potential with other participants:

> *"Rather than creating a new platform, then we will all be directing people to a new platform rather than to each other's. So, if you're part of the network I'm wondering if say every Thursday one o'clock I will be showcasing some of the amazing work that is on the Network. And it might not be Sonder's work, but it might be from [London] and it's really, it's like the best bit of content that we can all put forward and we know that somebody else will be playing it on that day. So it's reaching a new audience, building the existing audience and not having to manage a new platform, which I think is really tricky." (Rachel)*

The audio platform Mixcloud was suggested as a way to facilitate this sharing process between the member stations without compromising the individual stations' listener numbers or having to manage an entirely new platform:

> *"We could have a Mixcloud page that would cost us nothing, it's whatever the network is called. And you repost your content, our content, anyone's content as examples. We still get the numbers. So Mixcloud is a listen again page." (Ian)*

In addition to this conversation on using a Mixcloud page to showcase talk-based content created by older people, radio.garden, a web-based tool for browsing community radio stations across the world, was suggested as a technology to promote the network's content sharing ambitions:

> *"This idea of having a network of stations that have some shared values, that is something that might be achieved through radio.garden and I wonder if it's possible for stations to be tagging themselves as having a particular*

> *interest or serving particular communities and then somebody who is listening to Radio for older people can access that category of radio stations and immediately you've got a world-wide networks of those."* (Lila)

Even though this was not technologically possible, radio.garden was identified as a tool that could support the network in the creation of playlists that highlight radio stations that meet the network's best practice criteria. However, this would have required a more in-depth project to identify criteria and then subsequently radio stations worldwide. Instead, the participants decided to prioritise the more feasible steps of sharing content between the network's members first, using a digital platform (Mixcloud) and highlighting productions that already met the network's previously established values for age-friendly community radio production.

To summarise, this fourth theme highlights one group's initial thoughts on the role of digital technologies within this network for older adults creating community radio content. Communication and content sharing were identified as the primary purposes for the use of digital technologies in such a community of practice. In addition, technological requirements were raised, taking into account privacy concerns and usability.

5.4.6   *Summary and a way forward from the Radio Festival*

Overall, the Radio Festival offered a wide range of activities, such as conceptual talks, hands-on workshops and discussions. I reported findings from group discussions and a subsequent plenary discussion, that related to my first research question by highlighting the group's main civic ambitions to create a network as a community of practice for older radio show creators, namely challenging ageist stereotypes, advocating for intergenerational cohesion, and considering community radio as a technology to engage communities of older adults. I then presented findings on one discussion group's consideration's how this community of practice might engage with digital technologies, highlighting an 'unplatformed' approach (Lambton-Howard *et al.*, 2020) of focusing on easy-to use and privacy-aware communications channels. Additionally, the group considered content sharing within the network as an approach that could widen awareness for radio content created by older adults.

Already at the Radio Festival, a steering committee of volunteers was established to take the idea of forming a radio network for older adults further. Drawing on the core values as identified in the findings in section 5.4.4, the steering committee developed a mission statement for the network to:

- Promote positive views and challenge negative views of age and ageing by providing talk-based audio and radio content created by diverse groups of older adults.
- Strengthen the visibility of content created by older adults in media and encourage the expansion of radio programming related to ageing and relationships between the generations.
- Engage older adults in broadcasting, facilitate skill development and build communities by enabling discussion of a wide range of topics (Later Life Audio and radio co-operative, no date)

This mission statement developed by the steering committee based on the Radio Festival discussions has informed the subsequent development of the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative, which I will outline in the next section.

Overall, the Radio Festival advanced my understanding of the civic value of creating community radio content in later life, by witnessing the passion and determination with which discussions about creating the network were driven forward by older people themselves. Indeed, the creation of the network for older content creators can be regarded as both an outcome from my PAR project driven by older people themselves, as well as a subsequent PAR cycle and therefore a source of data for additional findings. This example of the creation of the network is an example of how outcome, data and findings might be enmeshed and intertwined as part of the 'messiness' of a real-world PAR project. It also represents a success within the PAR, as the project was authentically co-developed and taken forward by older people themselves.

In the next sections, I will outline the subsequent steps that were taken in order to bring the vision of a network to life via the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative. Highlighting the unique contributions of older adults in broadcasting more widely, the network represents an innovative means to promote civic participation in later life, whilst at the same time strengthening the members' digital citizenship by actively engaging with online spaces.

5.5 Forming the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative

In this section I review how the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC) was established as a direct outcome of the discussions at the Radio Festival and at the same time represents the last PAR cycle of my research project (cycle 7) and is therefore an object of my research analysis. After the Radio Festival, I built on the previously established research

collaborations by extending my embedded research into being part of the radio network's steering committee. This was an organic development for me, as I transitioned all my individual research collaborations into the network and was able to work with all groups as part of this newly established community of practice.

5.5.1   Methods: Data collection and analysis

This section is based on my ongoing observations as an embedded PAR researcher within the network. Throughout the process, starting after the Radio Festival in October 2019 up to the point of first drafting this chapter in March 2021, I collected data in the form of contemporaneously written field notes capturing the content of discussions, observations of group interactions, process milestones as the radio network developed and committed to a co-operative governance model, and my personal research reflections. Overall, I report on field notes taken at 34 LLARC-related meetings, collected as part of my digital research diary. In retrospect, some of the field notes were more elaborate than others depending on the nature of the meetings. Some represented clear action points, others focused on more detailed observations. I also noticed a difference in my note taking depending on whether another LLARC member circulated official meeting notes, in which case my field notes often focused more on group dynamics. These field notes amount to approximately 17 pages in Microsoft Word. Additionally, I draw on contextual materials, such as written statements circulated by Mervyn as part of the steering committee process and officially circulated LLARC meeting notes. Referring to my overall research focus to understand better how older adults engage with content creation activities to advance their civic goals, I analysed the data by focusing on milestones in the process of developing LLARC, such as structural and governance considerations and the operation of LLARC throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. I identified these milestones by considering discussions that were particularly in-depth, required a lot of time or came up multiple times, and then interpreted the data with regard to how these significant events shaped the course of the LLARC development. I present a structural analysis of these milestones chronologically, to highlight how the LLARC developed throughout a final working cycle in this PAR project (Figure 5.10).
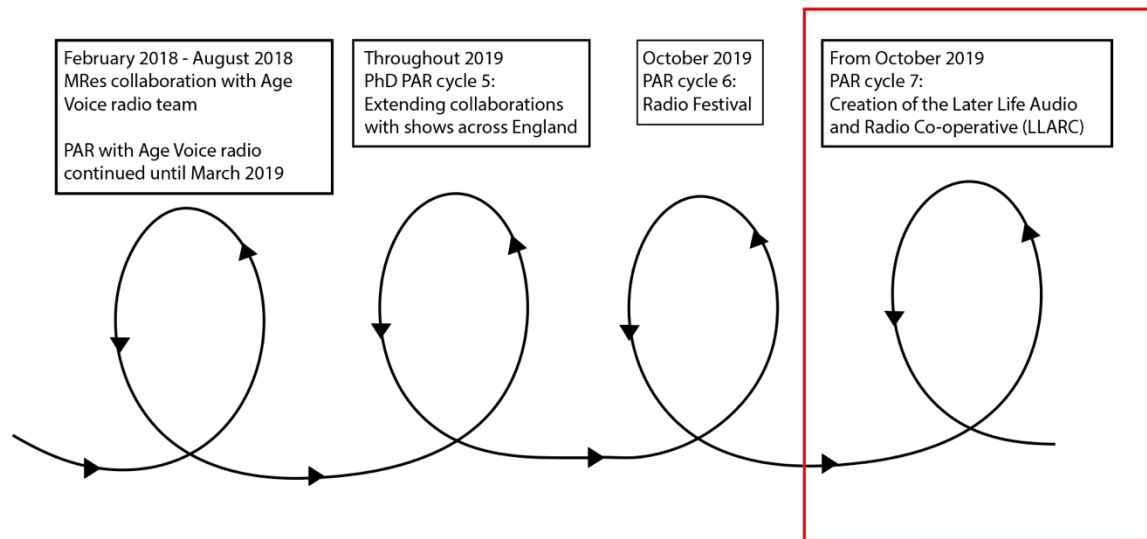
Figure 5.10: PAR cycle of establishing the LLARC

First, I review debates around the governance of the emerging network, outlining how and why the network decided to become a co-operative. I contextualise this process by drawing on an initial discussion from the Radio Festival, a subsequent working paper circulated to the steering committee by one of the participants, and the steering group's first meeting. Second, I elaborate on how LLARC is organised using a sociocracy co-operative model, reflecting a civic approach to organisational governance. Third, I present insights from how LLARC adapted to the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic by shifting to digital workflows, which in turn strengthened the digital citizenship of their members throughout a critical time. To conclude this section, I reflect on a future direction for LLARC.

5.5.2 *Becoming a co-operative*

In this section I share insights from the practical realisation of the radio station and content creator network. The initial idea to become a co-operative was shared by Mervyn at the discussion plenary session during the Radio Festival. A co-operative is a "business that is owned and controlled by its members. The members can be customers, employees, residents or suppliers. Profits are shared between people who have a stake and a say in how the co-op is run" (Cooperatives UK, 2020). As a life-long co-operator and owner of the ChangeAGEnts co-operative, Mervyn highlighted at the Radio Festival the potential benefits of a co-operative governance model as a way of supporting the nascent network's civic values:

> *"Whatever the network is, we need to be clear that it has to get the governance arrangements very very right. And actually, I think there were some interesting discussions taking place that it should be a cooperatively*

based network, where everybody is equal, everybody is a member, everybody has ownership. [...] We also need to keep the independence of the radio stations in the context of what they do and their programming. But hopefully it's about extending the menu of audio outlets that think and talk positively and create a different narrative [on ageing] rather than the constraining narrative that exists and is seen as being ok. That's what I would like the network to be clear about." (Mervyn)

Shortly after the festival, Mervyn circulated a discussion paper to the steering committee formed at the Radio Festival and tasked with bringing the network to life, in which he outlined the civic relevance of the network, in terms of four key points:

- "Promoting the harmony and diversity of the older adult demographic as inclusive, cohesive, and culturally diverse communities
- Supporting community involvement in broadcasting
- Increasing the representation and engagement of older adults within their given communities
- Enhancing the diversity of programming choices available and presenting programmes that expand the variety of viewpoint broadcast at local, regional and national levels" (Mervyn, Discussion paper, 2019)

The paper was suggested as the main focus of a first meeting of the steering group (see Table 5.5 for members), which took place in February 2019 in York.

Name	Organisation	Location
Ada	Age Voice	Newcastle
Victor	Age Voice	Newcastle
Kate	Information Now	Newcastle
Daniel	Open Lab	Newcastle
Arlind	Open Lab	Newcastle
Mervyn	Age Speaks	London
Ian	East London Radio / Age Speaks	London
Beena	Sonder Radio	Manchester

Table 5.5: overview of LLARC's founding members

Based on the points raised in Mervyn's discussion paper, the meeting was characterised by a detailed discussion about adopting a co-operative model. Building on the discussion paper, using a co-operative approach was identified by the steering committee as a way of protecting the integrity of the member stations in terms of programming, through the principle of equality of members/owners. At the same time, the principles of co-operation align closely with the principles of the community radio sector in terms of democracy, access and equity, especially for older adults who might be at higher risk of being excluded from participating in civic activities. However, one participant suggested at the meeting the potential to establish the network as a charity instead. This came as a surprise to most other participants, as the discussion throughout the meeting had moved on in apparent consensus about becoming a co-operative. Despite having talked in more detail about implementing a co-operative approach, the steering group was obliged to postpone the governance decision and continuation of practical discussions on funding until it had considered in more detail the person's proposal to become a charity. In order to be well-informed, we used this opportunity to consider and talk through other forms of governance (e.g. Social Enterprise, Community Interest Group, Charity, Co-operative) and compare the respective benefits of each model for our network. This discussion was followed by a more practical discussion on naming the network. Based on a consideration to incorporate audio and radio equally in the network, in order to be inclusive to different types of audio content creation, the steering committee initially decided the network should be named the 'Later Life Audio and Radio Network' (LLARN). Shortly after the first official meeting, and after careful deliberation on different governance models and deciding to become a co-operative via e-mail, the Network was able to rename itself the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC).

In terms of PAR, the longer discussion on the governance model was an important step in prioritising a democratic collaboration over fast progress. This parallels closely my previous reflections on the Radio Grabber software (Section 5.2.2). In order for PAR to be successful in terms of real-world impact and sustainability of a project, it is crucial to negotiate the foundations of a project with all involved stakeholders. Aligned with the principle of 'democratic member control' within the co-operative movement (which is also a crucial aspect of PAR), it was also important to allow everyone in the steering group to participate actively in the decision-making process regarding governance arrangements. Throughout the process, I came to realise that establishing a functioning co-operative from a PAR research project is a very well-aligned outcome, as there are many parallels that can be drawn between the principles of PAR and those of a co-operative. The seven co-operative principles are 1) open and voluntary

membership, 2) democratic member control, 3) member's economic participation, 4) autonomy and independence, 5) education, training and information, 6) cooperation among cooperatives, and 7) concern for community (International Co-operative Alliance, no date). Especially principles 1, 2, 5 and 7 parallel closely the PAR principles of 1) taking part in research voluntarily, 2) ensuring that PAR is a democratic process driven by the community, 5) working towards sustainable change within a community, which can have an educational component and 7) PAR as an inherently community-based research process (Manzo and Brightbill, 2007). Having worked with the principles of PAR for nearly two years ahead of establishing the LLARC, transitioning the PAR project into a co-operative governance model felt to me like a natural process.

In the next section I elaborate in more detail on the specific governance model used by LLARC, sociocracy, and critically review how the governance approach was implemented by different LLARC members.

5.5.3 *Sociocracry in practice: a civic approach to governance*

It is essential to consider governance as a direct link to the concept of civic participation, due to the ability of governance structures to either empower or disempower individual members within an organisation. In this section I critically analyse LLARC's implementation of sociocracy as an approach to co-operative governance (Eckstein, 2016), which relates to my research question as an approach that supports older people as civically engaged citizens and creates sustainable civic structures in digital and non-digital spaces. I examine how the choice of sociocracy reflects the LLARC members' civic values to have full ownership and control over the organisation, thus maximising their own voices in the space of broadcasting rather than being represented by a third party.

LLARC decided to co-operate using a sociocratic approach based on a suggestion by Mervyn. As a lifelong co-operator, he had heard about sociocracy through his networks and introduced the concept to the LLARC steering committee by circulating reports about the approach. Sociocracy represents an approach to productive and democratic decision making and organisational structuring (Sociocracy for All, 2021), which is well suited in civic contexts that aim to strengthen a community's voice. Using sociocracy in co-operatives is "in line with the ethos of the cooperative identity, which honours and centers the human individual within the organisation", by implementing the co-operative values of "self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity " (Sociocracy for All, 2021). A sociocracy model is

characterised by small working groups, called circles, which have a defined aim and decision-making authority. Circles can be interlinked, for example with some members assuming roles in different circles, to ensure that the circles stay connected. Decisions within the circles are made by consent rather than majority vote, with consent for a proposal achieved when none of its members objects to it. In this way, a range of tolerance is included in the decisions which allows the circles to get started with actions more efficiently. Members might not explicitly agree to each action, but it is ensured that the action lies within their range of tolerance and can be reviewed at a later stage, thus aiming for a constant improvement of the circles (Sociocracy for All, 2021). Circles operate in rounds, making sure that every member of the circle can speak one-by-one until everybody has spoken. This is done with the intention to hear all voices and strengthen the listening process, as members do not need to worry about expressing their opinion in time for a decision to be made (Sociocracy for All, 2021). At the time of writing in October 2021, LLARC operates with six circles:

1) the general circle, which welcomes representatives from all individual circles and serves as a space to update each other on the circle's work;
2) the governance and membership circle, which deals with constitutional questions as well as membership and recruitment;
3) the production circle, which is responsible for managing LLARC's content creation process;
4) the marketing and branding circle, which aims to identify ways to promote LLARC and its mission;
5) the finance circle, which works on funding applications; and
6) the LLARC academy, to provide a space for (digital) skill sharing (e.g. audio production or social media skills).

LLARC's constitution was developed in less than six months by the governance and membership circle in iterations using the sociocracy concept. In November 2020, LLARC officially joined Co-operatives UK as a member. Since its inception and at the point of writing (October 2021), LLARC has grown its membership to 14 active members (and associated member stations) in different locations across the UK (Newcastle, Manchester, London, Berwick upon Tweed) and internationally (Ireland, USA).

However, establishing LLARC as a sociocracy was not without its challenges. Drawing on field notes, I critically observed that whilst sociocracy in theory is a democratic process, and

therefore aligned with citizenship ideals and well-suited for civic purposes, the implementation is a learning process with regard to developing authority of the circles:

> *Once again, accountability between the circles was brought up as an issue, which the members are unclear about. Should the production policy be read back by the marketing/branding team? Should everything with LLARC's brand on go through the general circle first? (Field notes, Marketing & Branding circle meeting, 26/6/20)*

This quote is one of many similar field notes that I made throughout the process, in which the team navigated the unclear space of defining each circle's decision-making and task authority. Over time, I became aware that in terms of my own life-course experience and world view, I have a different approach of engaging with the work of LLARC compared to other members, who had a long history of managing organisations governed as charities. This meant that our perceptions on authority and accountability differed. Charities operate with a defined cause for the community that they are serving and can therefore be held accountable to this aim. In contrast, the LLARC's beneficiaries as a co-operative are its own membership, which means the co-operative is accountable to its membership first and foremost, followed by the wider community that LLARC wants to reach. These reflections are of importance when considering civic participation in intergenerational settings using a life-course approach, because it highlights how people have accumulated different experiences that inform their organisational thinking and collaborative habits across their lifespan. These differences in approaching governance within LLARC also reflect the PAR process of negotiating different understandings in intergenerational research projects and ultimately find a collaborative way of achieving a joint goal.

Another example of the importance of deliberating and creating shared knowledge throughout a PAR relates to LLARC's Twitter engagement. I reflected on different understandings of how the organisation should use Twitter for their civic outreach:

> *The team wants to implement strict rules about who can access the social media accounts. My idea of account sharing was dismissed as 'risky', as it could lead to misuse of the social media channels by individuals. We agreed that each circle should have a social media representative, who can use the accounts and share requests from externals. (Field notes, Marketing & Branding circle meeting, 07/8/21)*

The decision we made echoes previous findings on the network's priority of valuing privacy and safety online (Section 5.4.5). Additionally, this reflection highlights my role as a PAR researcher. Whilst I could take part in meetings and share my ideas about processes, the co-

operative's work was, and ultimately continues to be, driven by its older members. Especially with regard to the members' digital participation, which is the foundation of the co-operative's digital citizenship activities, it is important to consider life-course trajectories of working with digital technologies. Considering people's different life experience aligns with a need to not only acknowledge, but learn from 'local knowledge' in PAR, which has often evolved from years of experience, as discussed by Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008).

Overall, this section reviewed sociocracy as a co-operative governance approach contextualised in the work of LLARC. Linking administrative and digital challenges of establishing the sociocracy with insights on conducting PAR, I reflected on negotiating different life-course experiences throughout the process. As sociocracy is a governance model focused on democracy and equity, it has potential to support civic participation by giving all members a voice. My reflections on LLARC's first steps of negotiating their voices internally and digitally on Twitter highlight the importance of learning from individual and experiential knowledge of PAR stakeholders throughout the research process. In the next section I discuss how the LLARC members adapted to the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasising new perspectives on the concept of digital citizenship at a point of crisis.

5.5.4   LLARC and COVID-19

The first lockdown in the UK, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, began in March 2020 shortly after LLARC's York meeting (Section 5.5.2). With a stronger focus on connecting digitally due to the restrictions placed on meeting in-person, I had the opportunity to gain a new perspective on my overarching research topics of ageing, civic participation and digitalisation. I was able to deepen my understanding of older adults' civic participation through content creation in digital spaces and develop critical insights into older adults' digital citizenship. As for all other organisations regardless of their size, resources or longevity, the pandemic posed fundamental challenges for LLARC. However, LLARC survived and thrived throughout the pandemic since its mission of promoting older adults' voices in broadcasting suddenly gained urgency. The experience of lockdown had two immediate impacts on LLARC. First, since planned in-person meetings were no longer possible, it became necessary to implement the co-operative's workflows within a digitalised structure. Second, given the considerable impacts of the pandemic on society as a whole and older people in particular, there was an opportunity for the co-operative to use its online platform to respond to the changing context. Here, I discuss in turn LLARC's internal response to the pandemic, in terms of its structure, and its external and public response statements.

Even before the pandemic, LLARC was exploring ways to facilitate remote working in order to connect as efficiently as possible its members across England. This process was heavily accelerated as part of the restrictions on in-person meetings imposed by the pandemic. Starting in March 2020, the LLARC members engaged digitally for two purposes: connecting the members remotely via Zoom and shifting their content production workflows online. Drawing on peer-support within LLARC as part of their Zoom sessions, all members became more proficient in their digital skills throughout the course of 2020. Focusing on digital citizenship, LLARC stayed committed to their aim of making their civic messages widely available. As a first step, a Mixcloud page (https://www.mixcloud.com/LLARC/) was established based on the idea on content sharing from the discussion at the Radio Festival (Section 5.4.5). This Mixcloud page represents a hub to showcase talk-based content created by older adults that was produced by individual LLARC members or the LLARC's member stations. Some LLARC members had not previously used Mixcloud, which resulted in a slower uptake for them, however, drawing on peer-support everybody learned how to upload content to the platform. Drawing on the expertise of the radio professionals within LLARC, individual LLARC members started using Zoom for remote production activities with the specific civic purpose of representing older adults in broadcasting. The recordings are as diverse as their members' interests, ranging from series of audio episodes discussing COVID-19 explicitly, to interviews on housing issues, or travel diaries and local history. Some productions were part of LLARC's public response to COVID-19, as the LLARC members felt it was important to address the societal changes on their platform, in particular, what they viewed as an increasingly ageist public discourse. This issue was raised by a collective of researchers and practitioners, who spoke out for greater inclusion of older people in public discourse and the need to be mindful of avoiding ageism in relation to the implementation of policies (Ayalon *et al.*, 2020). By creating discussions on COVID-19 with experts from academia, policy and practice, the LLARC members aimed to counteract the predominantly negative representations of older adults in the media throughout the pandemic (Ehni and Wahl, 2020; Søraa *et al.*, 2020). Through LLARC, it was possible to generate intergenerational conversations in order to broadcast older people's voices in a public debate that largely by-passed older age groups. Since the inception of the Mixcloud page (March 2020) and at the point of writing in October 2021, the LLARC members have created and uploaded 116 pieces of talk-based content, four of those relating directly to COVID-19, in addition to linking to the member stations' Mixcloud streams. LLARC's Mixcloud content has been listened to for over 13,548 minutes in total (226 hours) and reached an international audience online with a majority of listeners from the UK. With their work, the LLARC members have set an example of how a group of older adults can leverage their peer-support

system to exploit the current restrictions to their collective benefit. By actively contributing digital content to the LLARC Mixcloud, they extended civic debates and strengthened their digital citizenship, highlighting the need to consider a digital dimension in older adults' civic activities. This civic impact of magnifying older adults' voices to such an extent would not have been possible without the previous work of establishing LLARC as an overarching body that represents a collaboration of older radio and audio creators. It also demonstrates the success of this PAR project, which facilitated the creation of a considerable amount of digital audio content by older adults at a time in which their digital citizenship became a more crucial part of civic life and a lack of digital skills might have led to social exclusion.

Reflecting on doing PAR throughout the pandemic, some aspects of my research, especially aspects of exploring civic participation in digital spaces, were accelerated by the restrictions on in-person meetings. The pandemic presented me with an interesting opportunity to gain novel insights on the intersection of my overarching research topics (ageing, civic participation, digitalisation), as digital skills were necessary if older adults wanted to continue to stay socially and civically included. With regard to my research questions the course of the pandemic emphasised my argument of the importance of considering digital citizenship within frameworks of later life civic inclusion and allowed me to critically assess older adults' content creation in a community radio setting in non-digital as well as digital spaces. However, the pandemic also posed challenges to my overall work and position as a PAR researcher within a community group. These ranged from small practical issues, such as occasional problems with an unstable internet connection, to more conceptual adaptations such as the need to find a different way of capturing observations, as interpersonal dynamics changed in this digitally mediated setting. As the only person in the co-operative with access to a Zoom pro account and, therefore, the option to have higher numbers of participants in Zoom meetings, I often took on administrative roles of creating meetings. Reflecting back, it made my role within the co-operative unclear to new members and I subsequently found it difficult to establish boundaries and retreat from the field, due to the considerable administrative load that came my way. Difficulties with retreating from a PAR project are common as in most cases there is no defined end point to the cycles (Hayes, 2012). According to Hayes (2012), determining the end of a PAR project often requires that the change achieved through the project can be sustained by the community themselves. In my case, the growth of LLARC lessened my administrative workload and also prompted me to become even more clear about how I presented myself to collaborators and new members.

To summarise, out of necessity, the COVID-19 pandemic forced LLARC to implement digital meeting and production processes. By incorporating digital workflows, the co-operative supported the digital citizenship of their older members at a critical time. The continuous production of content established LLARC as an organisation that magnifies the voices of older people in broadcasting, thus strengthening their civic participation by involving them in citizen dialogue during uniquely challenging circumstances. In the next section, I give a brief overview of LLARC's future endeavours to serve their membership better and increase LLARC's civic outreach.

5.5.5   *Future of the LLARC*

After the end of PAR data collection in March 2021, I have remained actively involved with LLARC as a member. Since then, LLARC has continued to welcome new members from England and Scotland, as well as widening its international collaborations with new members in Ireland and the United States of America. As a result of this increase in the LLARC membership, new project ideas emerged in order to achieve the co-operative's dual goals of 1) better serving the interests and needs of the LLARC's membership through the LLARC academy, and 2) increasing the LLARC's civic outreach by creating a podcast. A central part of these projects is the development of a LLARC academy with the goal of supporting LLARC members in their interest to engage with the production aspects more in-depth by increasing their own audio editing skills. The academy represents a skills exchange hub for the membership. In addition, the members consider bringing in external people to educate them on specific topics of interest. The second project, with the aim to increase LLARC's civic outreach further, is the creation of a LLARC podcast. By using established podcasting platforms, the LLARC's content could be listened to by a wider audience, in particular those who are not regular Mixcloud users. While the Mixcloud page is useful in terms of directing people to a playlist that showcases talk-based content created by older people, the podcast could be curated in different ways that focus more on intergenerational aspects within LLARC. We were able to support these two projects through the 'telling tales of engagement' grant, which LLARC was awarded through the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's Digital Economy fund. We have since been able to offer a week-long audio editing workshop as part of the LLARC academy, at which the members created their first podcast episode to be able to share their voices more widely in the future (https://www.mixcloud.com/LLARC/the-llarc-show/).

5.6   Discussion

This chapter has built on the findings from Chapter 4 by analysing a societal dimension to the intersection of the three key concepts of ageing, civic participation, and digitalisation, moving beyond examining these concepts in a local context. I presented findings of my PAR journey from bringing older community radio content creators together through building a larger community of practice as part of the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC). Responding to the research questions, I explored ways in which audio and community radio production can strengthen civic participation and digital citizenship in later life. The research presented in this chapter highlights community radio production as a way for older adults to become digitally involved with citizen dialogue, whilst at the same time strengthening their own digital citizenship through increased digital skills. Drawing on findings across the PAR cycles, I highlighted the PAR process of initiating LLARC at a Radio Festival for older adults and establishing it as a way of advocating for strengthening older adults' digital citizenship in broadcasting. LLARC represents an innovative way of promoting civic participation in later life, driven by older adults themselves.

5.6.1   *Locating LLARC in the civic participation framework: digital technologies as a catalyst for a social movement*

This project demonstrates a trajectory of how a unique community can emerge based on a shared interest in using a specific technology for civic purposes (using community radio broadcasting to advocate for older people), and subsequently lead to the establishment of a broader community of practice (connecting age-friendly radio stations and older radio creators). By establishing LLARC as a community and peer-network, a large focus of LLARC's initial efforts was to connect and learn from each other. According to Serrat *et al.*'s (2019) framework on later life civic participation, this emphasis on connecting as part of a co-operative movement can be classified as a collective social, or Type 2, civic activity. Additionally, as integral to their work with LLARC, the members make use of digital and FM audio broadcasts for their civic activism (e.g. addressing political issues such as ageism) with the goal of reaching and engaging other communities and members of the public. This form of civic participation can be classified according to Serrat *et al.*'s (2019) framework as a political civic activity. Due to its collective nature as part of LLARC, it can be located in the framework in Type 4, a collective political form of later life civic participation. I argue that LLARC therefore embodies both a collective social form and a collective political form of civic participation (see Figure 5.11). This hybrid form of civic participation reflects that whilst Serrat *et al.'s* (2019) framework organises patterns of later life civic participation by type, the real nature of older adults' civic activities

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can span more than one type. Indeed, it also reflects the dynamic development of a civic activity, largely facilitated through the use of digital technologies. LLARC is an example not only of how an interest and practice with a certain technology can encourage community building, but also of how technology can democratise the process of establishing and running a new organisation without the need for a large infrastructure in terms of finances or organisational processes. Building this co-operative entirely online using existing digital technologies (in this case Mixcloud, Twitter and Zoom), my findings provide novel insights into the different ways in which communities of older adults operate and interact digitally whilst seeking to achieve their civic goals. In the previous chapter I argued that the civic participation framework developed by Serrat *et al.* (2019) should be extended to incorporate a digital dimension. The findings of this chapter highlight the potential of using the digital space to bridge Type 2 and Type 4 civic participatory practices (Figure 5.11).

	Civic participation	
	Social participation	Political participation
Individual forms	Type 1	Type 3
	Prosocial/helping/altruistic behaviours outside family	Voting
		Contacting political representatives
	Donation of money/in-kind supports to charities/NGOs	Donating money to political parties and organisations
		Signing petitions
		Writing letters/emails/blogs/articles with political content
		Boycotting and political consumption
		Other individual political manifestations
Collective forms	Type 2	Type 4
	Participation in volunteering, community, or charitable organisations	Running for or holding a public office
		Working on campaigns
		Participation in political organisations or forums
		Protest activities
		Participation in social movement organisations
		Other collective political manifestations

DIGITAL SPACES

Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative

Figure 5.11: LLARC as a hybrid form of civic participation

In the case of LLARC, digital technologies, such as Zoom, were used to keep the co-operative's volunteers connected with each other (Type 2) and at the same time facilitated the recordings of new content as a way of supporting the co-operative's political messages (Type 4). Indeed, the co-operative's technology requirements are continuously shifting alongside the development of the co-operative. With the ongoing pandemic at the time of writing in October 2021 and a lasting change in how societies operate, LLARC is continuously trying to leverage new technologies to support their growth, such as incorporating live streams or creating podcasts. This strengthens my previous argument that it is necessary to consider a digital dimension in older adults' civic participation. More fundamentally, it sheds light on my research questions by highlighting the dynamic nature of older adults' digital citizenship.

5.6.2   *Reconsidering older adults' digital participation in policy and practice*

Findings presented in this chapter have shown how the creation of community radio content can support later life digital citizenship by strengthening older adults' civic participation in digital spaces. From data collected before and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, I highlighted pathways leading from community radio production towards heightened digital skills in later life – for example, through the intentional development of digital skills to support the radio production process, as a by-product of the radio engagement with the aim to promote a show, or leveraging skill sharing support from within a group such as LLARC. As outlined in the previous section, and with reference to the framework developed by Serrat *et al.* (2019) the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated LLARC's transition from an initial Type 2 civic participatory activity to a hybrid form between Type 2 and Type 4, as the members not only wanted to support each other through the pandemic by being socially connected, but also to use their digital platform to speak up on political topics online. This highlights the potential of using digital technologies to support older adults' social connectedness, whilst simultaneously supporting their civic participatory practices. Whilst the previous chapter explored the role of digital technologies within the age-friendly city framework, my findings from this chapter imply that the pandemic has accelerated the need to consider digital participation as the focal point of digital citizenship activities, as the concept promotes active contributions of older adults in digital spaces and therefore requires a creative digital skill set. In terms of practice, there is value in re-thinking the ways in which digital inclusion was previously delivered through activities that focused on the teaching of digital accessibility rather than incorporating creative ways to support older adults' digital participation. The example of LLARC and its individual members suggests that the community media sector can be a resource to support this goal of encouraging older adults to become more civically and digitally involved. The LLARC

members raise awareness for ageing issues by creating their Mixcloud platform as a main digital infrastructure (a process that was planned before the pandemic but implemented as a matter of priority as an initial response to the pandemic) with the goal of curating an online sound archive of age activism. The co-operative's members also embody a different way of ageing by showing that people of all ages, genders and digital literacy backgrounds can successfully engage with community broadcasting and digital technologies. Based on the LLARC example, I make a case for the concept of digital participation to be incorporated within the goals of digital inclusion frameworks. Such an approach acknowledges the distinction between the ideas of digital participation and digital inclusion (as became clear throughout the pandemic), with the former being better suited to supporting older adults' civic participation.

5.7   Chapter summary

The research presented in this chapter reflects the expansion of my PAR project from a local collaboration towards the formation of the UK-wide Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative, which is now in the process of creating international connections. Whilst the previous chapter provided evidence for the need to include a digital dimension within the later life civic participation framework, this chapter highlights that, by doing so, older adults can merge different types of social and political civic participation as part of their content creation activities. These findings expand on RQ1 by exploring political forms of civic participation in more depth. Focusing in particular on the creation of community radio content in later life, I respond to RQ2 by showing the potential of the community media sector to support older adults' digital participation and inclusion in citizen debates before and throughout the pandemic. Bringing together older radio creators and age-friendly community radio stations, LLARC was built entirely within a digital infrastructure due to the Covid-19 pandemic, showing the potential of digital technologies to support the infrastructure of this emerging co-operative. Indeed, LLARC has advocated for older people throughout the pandemic, by broadcasting community radio content highlighting the urgency to challenge ageism. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings and implications of my project, taking into consideration the broader research and societal context.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

As a result of increasingly digitalised societies, research, policy and practice have paid greater attention to how older adults make use of digital technologies. This development has been exaggerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, stressing the need for older adults to be online in order to connect socially and access public services. However, despite recent efforts to support older adults' digital inclusion, as outlined in the literature review (Chapter 2), surprisingly little is known about how older adults use digital technologies to participate in civic life. Against this background, two overarching research questions have underpinned my research:

- how do older adults engage with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices? (RQ1)
- how can age-friendly communities better exploit digital technologies and community media to support older people's civic participation? (RQ2).

In this chapter, I draw on the findings presented in the two preceding chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) to locate the discussion at the intersection of the topics of ageing, civic participation, and digitalisation. Drawing attention to key findings, I am able to highlight how my participatory action research project has given rise to new perspectives on older adults' interactions with digital media for civic purposes. I discuss the contribution of my research in two domains. First, with reference to academic debates, I show how the incorporation of a digital dimension in the later life civic participation framework contributes to understandings of digital citizenship in later life, by highlighting the role of content creation activities in collective social and political forms of later life civic participation. Second, building on the contribution to academic debates, I demonstrate the potential of my work to inform the development of age-friendly policy and practice with regard to older adults' digital participation.

Weaving together a narrative of civic participation and digitalisation in later life, I discuss the potential of the community radio sector, as an overarching point of engagement, to strengthen older adults' digital citizenship. I conclude my discussion with a short reflection on PAR as a process in this work and draw attention to some of the limitations of my research approach.

6.2 Digitalisation of collective forms of civic participation in later life

In this section I highlight the contribution of my PhD project in terms of the intersection between digital technologies and civic participation in later life. My research is rooted in the discourse on social exclusion, considering civic participation as a sub-dimension of social

exclusion that affects older adults (Walsh, Scharf and Keating, 2017). The effect of civic exclusion in later life is intensified by the increasing digitalisation of civic life in a society. Older adults are already disproportionately disadvantaged because of the digital divide (Hargittai, Piper and Morris, 2018), a concept that highlights divisions of technology access and use within and between societies (Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal, 2007). Prioritising a technology agenda that supports the development of technologies for older adults' health, mobility, social connectedness, safety and daily activities (Schulz *et al.*, 2015; Vines *et al.*, 2015) over their active contributions further reinforces civic exclusion in later life. In addition, older adults' use of digital technologies is often associated with a focus on accessibility. Smart assistive technology is conceived as supporting daily lives (Vines *et al.*, 2015; Marston and Van Hoof, 2019) rather than as a tool to facilitate older adults' citizenship. This one-sided focus on assistive technologies has been criticised in the context of age-friendly cities and communities (Marston and Van Hoof, 2019; Reuter, Liddle and Scharf, 2020), which have the potential to support active ageing in physical, social and digital environments (Liddle *et al.*, 2020). Even though digitalisation and older adults' civic participation have been researched independently, the intersection between these fields continues to be underexplored. Whilst the field of gerontology has established a broad knowledge base on older adults' civic participation or exclusion from civic activities (Serrat *et al.*, 2019; Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021b, 2021a), a digital dimension remains under-researched within the later life civic participation framework (Serrat *et al.*, 2019). A similar trend can be witnessed in HCI research. With ongoing interest in digital citizenship activities, HCI researchers increasingly focus on civic and community factors that inform the design of new technologies (Righi, Sayago and Blat, 2017; Klerks *et al.*, 2020). However, with regard to later life, a biomedical focus still dominates HCI research (Vines *et al.*, 2015). As part of my literature review in Chapter 2, I outlined the few projects within the HCI and Gerontechnology space that consider older adults as digital citizens in communities (e.g. Righi et al., 2017; Durocher & Gauthier, 2018; Jarke, 2021). Against this background, I will use this chapter to highlight my unique contribution and insights from PAR at the intersection of both topics and research fields.

Using the later life civic participation framework developed by Serrat *et al.* (2019) as a structure to locate my research activities, I explored the concept of digital participation within the collective dimension of later life civic participation. By examining older adults' use of digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices (RQ1) and locating the civic use of digital technologies and community radio in age-friendly communities (RQ2), I contribute insights on online-mediated and technology-enabled forms of collective civic

participatory activities. Locating my work within the discourse on digital participation, as opposed to adopting the more common (and rather limited) approach of digital inclusion, which tends to view older adults as passive recipients of digital services (Reuter, Scharf and Smeddinck, 2020), my PAR provides examples of what digital citizenship might look like for groups of older adults. My PAR was carried out in two main strands: 1) working with one organisation's digital media output to engage their community in age-friendly topics, and 2) working with older adults who produce community radio content and consequently founded a co-operative (LLARC) in order to strengthen their civic impact. I argue that in an increasingly digitalised society, scholars need to consider in much more depth the role of digital technologies within this framework.

6.2.1 *Older adults' digital participation in collective social forms of civic participation*

In Chapter 4, I responded to the research question **'How do older adults engage with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices?'** by outlining an example of how digital communications and content creation can be a way for older adults to be civically active as part of their local community. Considering their efforts within the wider age-friendly city initiative, I also shed light on the second research question **'How can age-friendly communities better exploit digital technologies and community media to support older people's civic participation'**. Working closely with Age Voice of Newcastle, a charitable organisation that advocates for older people in the city and aims to use digital content creation as a way to facilitate engagement around age-friendly issues, we explored the organisation's content creation activities throughout four PAR cycles (Figure 4.1 in Section 4.2): exploring the organisation's media landscape and production workflows using workshops and interviews, re-designing their digital newsletter and creating research through design opportunities with digital audio.

Key findings from this chapter encompassed the volunteers' motivations to engage with the organisation's content creation. Analysis captured a complex interplay of intrinsic and civic factors, such as the wish to improve one's digital skills or advocate for the organisation more widely. Additionally, my findings highlight the organisation's strategy to create inclusive and efficient workflows, with the intention to balance digital and non-digital interactions in order to include members of varying digital skills. A third key finding highlights the creation of digital content as an asset for age-friendly communities, with the potential to showcase age-friendly collaborations widely and support active contributions of older adults to civic life online. I now extend the initial discussion presented in Chapter 4, by outlining in more depth

the implications of my work with regard to uncovering older adults' civic motivations to participate digitally.

Whilst previous studies have shown the potential of digital media for civic participatory activities in general (Vlachokyriakos *et al.*, 2016), my findings from PAR with older content creators add a new perspective by focusing specifically on digital citizenship in later life. By considering especially how older adults use digital content creation activities for their civic participation, my findings expand the current discourse on digital media and civic participation by highlighting a life-course perspective of digital citizenship beyond youth. My work emphasises the value of digital participatory activities to support older adults' societal and civic roles, showing a real-world example of how older adults already engage with digital content creation activities for activist purposes. Even though previous studies have touched on some civic motivations in the context of older adults' digital content creation (Harley and Fitzpatrick, 2009; Brewer and Piper, 2016) and show that creating digital content is a form of proactive participation through technologies (Celdrán *et al.*, 2021), they have not been declared as such. Often, these motivations are identified from a social and community perspective, such as the creation of content in order to maintain social interactions or as a valuable activity throughout retirement. This reflects not only the interconnectedness and blurred lines between social, personal and civic factors, but also echoes a bias that concentrates on social over civic factors in research regarding older adults. For example, Serrat *et al.* (2019) point out that many more research papers focus on older adults' social participation compared to their civic participation in later life. As a consequence, my research makes the case that we should regard older adults not only as social, but also as civic stakeholders in society.

My research also shows the need to consider the value of digital technologies as a supporting factor that enables older adults' civic participation practices. Aligned with previous research that worked with older people who chose not to take part in a technology-based social intervention (Waycott *et al.*, 2016) and as a result identified that a combination of social, personal and technological contexts plays a role in (non-)participation with a technology, my project also revealed the interconnectedness of social, personal and civic factors within an evolving technology-ecosystem. The findings from my PAR collaboration highlight the positive impact of being socially connected as part of a communications team as a social-technological context and the wish to develop new digital skills as a personal-technological context.

Beyond these social and personal reasons for creating content, my research contributes to the existing literature by uncovering a complex pattern of civic motivations that inspired my collaborators to engage with digital content creation technologies and to participate digitally. Examples are enthusiasm to be involved in the distribution of age-friendly information online and to be digital advocates for older people. Whilst similar civic motivations have been reported for younger people (Bennett, 2008; Rheingold, 2008), at the point of writing (October 2021) I am not aware of research that explicitly reports on the use of digital and community media for civic participation in later life. This lack of knowledge translates into practice and policy, where younger people are structurally supported in their civic engagement using digital content creation, for example through participatory media courses in the school curriculum (Rheingold, 2008). By contrast, older adults typically have fewer opportunities to access structural support due to the accumulation of lifelong inequalities (Hargittai, Piper and Morris, 2018). In similar vein, digital participation is an underrepresented factor in government initiatives that support digital inclusion (Helsper and Eynon, 2013; Manchester and Facer, 2015).

The need to make civic opportunities more inclusive to support capacity building in the older generation has been highlighted (McBride, 2006) and implemented (Scharf, Mcdonald and Atkins, 2016; Scobie, 2019) over the last decade. McBride (2006) identified factors that prevent older adults from participating civically, and in turn highlighted access to civic opportunities, expectations of norms and requirements, information about civic roles, intrinsic and extrinsic incentives and facilitation and support in civic roles as key pillars for civic inclusion. Practical civic engagement programmes aimed at older adults, such as the Active Ageing Partnership's 'Touchstone programme' in Ireland (Scharf, Mcdonald and Atkins, 2016), point to the importance of using media for civic participatory purposes and offer detailed advice on how to "forge a relationship with the press" (Scharf *et al.*, 2016, p.60), for example, by writing press releases. However, with the rise of participatory media as a tool to support participation (Vines *et al.*, 2015), my work provides an explicit example that the production of grassroots digital content holds the potential for older adults to create their own media narratives in addition and beyond traditional forms such as press releases. Drawing on the empirical evidence collected within the context of my participatory project, I have been able to demonstrate that being a member of an older people's forum, such as Age Voice or a similar civic organisation, can provide a pathway to increased digital citizenship in later life. Such forms of citizenship can engage not only with more traditional interactions with the media, including press releases in local newspapers, but also newer digital formats, such as the creation of an e-newsletter or e-magazine.

My research also highlights the scope for civic engagement programmes to support digital participation in later life and vice versa. As the research reported here predominantly focused on collective aspects of civic participation, I found that older content creators valued both social and civic factors in equal measure. This finding adds to previous work that considered older content creators individually (Waycott *et al.*, 2013; Brewer and Piper, 2016; McGrath, 2018) or in social contexts (Burmeister *et al.*, 2012; Hunsaker *et al.*, 2020), by highlighting a civic purpose for engaging with digital content in later life. This is something that has been previously explored only in a small number of studies, such as the work of Durocher and Gauthier (2018) that describes a PAR project in which a group of older people created content on their blog critiquing the "mediatized food culture" as part of their activist goals to engage with social justice and equality matters. Durocher and Gauthier (2018) define the content creation activity as an opportunity for older people to "find their voice/place within a mediatized culture" and "stay connected in a digital world" (p.85). My findings build on Durocher and Gauthier's (2018) work by specifically positioning content creation as a civic activity that supports digital participation in later life, and by highlighting other forms of content creation beyond blogs, namely the creation of digital communications or radio shows.

Previous studies recognised the need to create informal, personal and collaborative ICT learning environments, in which older adults can increase their digital skills depending on their personal needs and in collaboration with others (Sayago, Forbes and Blat, 2013a). My research echoes these findings and shows that this collaborative way of learning can be created within civic contexts. Civic organisations can be key stakeholders in providing new opportunities to enhance digital skills through the creation of content that, in turn, serves a civic purpose of supporting older adults' political participation in civic society. This echoes Clarke's (2018) findings that digital media can be a route for older adults to advocate issues of relevance to their local authorities. As reported by Clarke, media content created by older adults and presented as evidence in public consultations served as a conversational prompt, rather than being considered as quantifiable evidence for certain issues (Clarke, 2018). I identified a similar pattern in my research. My work shows that even though the creation of content was often perceived as a way to collect evidence for political changemaking (see Chapter 4, Section 4.6 on using digital audio to capture older people's opinions on age-friendliness), most content creation activities aimed to spark citizen dialogue as a form of civic activism. My research therefore highlights the importance of older adults' active contributions to media content and the facilitative role of the third sector in this regard.

Alongside these civic motivations of engaging with digital content creation activities in later life, my findings in Chapter 4 also explored in depth specific challenges that hinder older adults' civic participation in digital spaces. Balancing the dynamic nature of both personal and civic life, we have to consider the evolving time constraints, which require some older adults to divide their attention between different areas of life. Such constraints reflect the lived experience of the "busy amateur", as one of my collaborators framed it. In a more recent conversation with the Age Voice communications team, reflecting on the nature of our four-year collaboration, one communications team member commented that the organisation's newsletter now looks so professional that "nobody would ever know that it is produced by volunteers, but would assume that it is created by a full-time professional staff member". I position this finding within a critical gerontology context, critiquing the "view of volunteerism and lifelong labor as normative ideals to which older people should aspire" (Martinson & Minkler, 2006, p.322) and the associated idea that "successful" forms of ageing can be measured by an individual's productivity. Martinson and Minkler's (2006) critical views on civic engagement in later life highlight the increasingly normalised expectations of communities relying on older adults' civic contributions as opposed to receiving government support. The Age Voice's comparison of equating their work with that of a professional reflects this discrepancy, highlighting the pressures faced by the older content creators as part of their voluntary engagement to provide informational content to other older adults as part of the age-friendly city concept. Indeed, my research highlighted the bilateral opportunities of involving older adults with the creation of communications in age-friendly cities and communities, such as supporting civic expression in later life and the grassroots implementation of age-friendly work. On the other hand, this can also result in challenges for the older volunteers due to a lack of support, and increase the pressures mentioned above. Additionally, the productivity narrative is closely tied to the challenge that the communications volunteers aspire to create "perfect" content of a high standard that represents their organisation professionally. This perception of the need for perfection is reinforced in online spaces, in which most of the "perfect" content is created professionally by younger people, with a flat learning curve to new digital skills and who experience fewer digital inequalities compared to older adults. Indeed, younger people are often seen as negatively impacted and under pressure to achieve perfection online, for example having to showcase a perfect life on social media (Freitas, 2017). Brewer and Piper's (2016) study of older bloggers reported similar pressures of perfection on older adults. However, older content creators striving for perfection often relates less to appearing perfect, but rather to produce a certain meaningful depth of content which they viewed as "professional publications" as opposed to "superficial sharing". Additionally, the authors positioned the digital learning

journey as a deliberate contrast to the assumption that older adults are "digital immigrants and less adept at using technology" (Brewer and Piper, 2016). This shows that the proactive participation of older adults in online spaces alone can contribute to a less ageist society, as recently argued by Celdrán *et al.* (2021).

I suggest that one way to heighten the visibility of older adults as civic stakeholders online and their digital participation in general is to focus on older people's involvement with existing technologies, rather than the design of new technologies. My participatory research with the Age Voice showed that the organisation was operating within a diverse media landscape. Indeed, the field of HCI has recently taken up interest in the use of existing technologies, such as social media, which are increasingly incorporated into civic life. For example, Lambton-Howard *et al.* (2020) refer to the utilisation of existing social media technologies to sustain a process of participation as "unplatforming", pointing out the potential of such appropriation of existing technologies for co-ordinated participation compared to the design of new civic technologies. My findings add to this line of argument by showing that older activists often already make use of existing technologies for civic purposes, such as distributing their activist messages through Twitter, radio shows and on blogs. In light of the general push towards co-creation in the design of new technologies, or the development of concepts such as the "innosumer" as an older user who provides configurational work to create technological systems (Peine, Rollwagen and Neven, 2014), I argue that equal focus should be laid on co-creating digital capacities with existing technologies. This can also encourage older people to view themselves as active content creators, diminishing the barrier between people "who consume content" and "those who produce content", and in turn normalise the bi-directional interaction with digital media. Encouraging content creators to identify similarities in workflows, for example between a magazine article and a podcast, might be one way to empower older content creators and inspire the production of a wider range of media. My participatory research also showed that the process of engaging with digital media in later life as part of a civic organisation relies heavily on highly motivated individuals and supportive stakeholders. Focusing on similarities in workflows might at the same time become more time efficient, enabling people to manage better the challenges of combining a busy private life with a commitment to civic participation.

Based on the ideas outlined above, I suggest a first amendment to the civic participation framework, by highlighting the need to re-imagine digital engagement within collective social forms of civic participation, as indicated in Figure 6.1.

Collective forms	Type 2	Type 4
	Participation in volunteering, community, or charitable organizations	Running for or holding a public office
		Working on campaigns
	↓	Participation in political organizations or forums
	Re-imagining new digital forms of engagement	Protest activities
		Participation in social movement organizations
		Other collective political manifestations

Figure 6.1: Collective social forms of civic participation with digital implications

I suggest this re-imagining of new digital forms of engagement encompasses the recognition of older adults' civic motivations for engaging digitally, thus affirming them as digital citizens. It can be achieved through considering older adults' collective and social digital participatory activities, for example by contributing content online as part of age-friendly work.

6.2.2   *Older adults' digital participation in collective political forms of civic participation*

This section discusses my findings presented in Chapter 5, which responded to my research questions by examining **how older adults engage with digital media as part of their civic participation in community radio broadcasts and as part of the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC)**. Additionally, I explored **how community radio in age-friendly communities facilitates civic dialogue and supports forms of social and political civic participation in later life.** I introduced and reflected on the different ways in which older adults can engage with local community radio stations based on my collaborations. As a result of these collaborations, my PAR facilitated the creation of the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC) as a community for older content creators and age-inclusive radio stations. The development of the research project into LLARC demonstrates how a unique community emerged based on a shared interest in a specific technology and purpose, in this case community radio broadcasting. Echoing previous HCI projects that highlighted community and social aspects in the context of ageing and technology research (Vines *et al.*, 2015; Righi, Sayago and Blat, 2017), my collaboration with LLARC is an example of how participatory media projects can promote community engagement and citizen dialogue in later life whilst fostering social

connectedness over a collective mission by combining social, civic and digital production elements.

So far, few studies incorporate digital forms of participation in their conceptualisation of later life civic engagement, as most scientific definitions emerged before the digital transformation of societies (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021a). Evidence suggests that creative, expressive, individualised, and digitally enabled forms of participation indeed have the potential to classify as political participation. They should be conceptualised and included as such in general definitions of political participation (Theocharis, 2015; Theocharis and Van Deth, 2016). However, older adults' political participation remains understudied in general, in particular compared to social forms of civic engagement such as volunteering (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021a). As established in the previous section, there is also a remarkable lack of consideration for older adults' digital citizenship, due to a heavy focus on older adults' social and health-related use of technologies (Vines *et al.*, 2015). Research in political science suggests a generational change with regard to citizenship norms, as older adults are shown to prioritise duty-based citizenship compared to 'engaged citizenship' activities, for example being active in civic groups and general political activity (Dalton, 2008). This indicates both the need to increase research on older adults' civic participation with regard to political activities, as well as the need to support older adults' digital participation in a sphere that is increasingly digitalised. My findings indicate that digital technologies can be facilitative tools to transform collective social participation into political participation in later life. LLARC was initially established as a network to connect older community radio show hosts and age-friendly radio stations with each other, therefore strengthening the collective social dimension of their civic participation. Operating in a digital context, the co-operative made use of digital production workflows not only to connect socially, but also to produce digital audio content that includes the voices of older adults from across the UK on current political issues, such as a critique on ageism. This work therefore contributes new insights on how older adults can use technologies as a catalyst for political action and how political participation can be technology-mediated. The potential of using digital technologies to support older adults' political participation is of relevance within the context of the age-friendly city movement. AFCs aim to support older adults' civic participation, yet rarely consider technologies beyond accessibility and smart assistive support (Marston and Van Hoof, 2019). My findings highlight a civic dimension of older adults' technology use in AFCs, such as the creation and distribution of age-friendly communications or creating digital audio to raise awareness for age-friendly policy. I elaborate

on this argument and discuss implications of my research for age-friendly cities and communities in Section .

The focus of my research on older adults as digital citizens also adds a novel perspective to the HCI Digital Civics research agenda, which seeks "to understand and design technologies for a wider range of civic interactions and experiences" (Asad *et al.*, 2017, p.2296) and examines how technologies mediate civic interactions with a particular focus on participatory and relational interactions. At the point of writing (October 2021), as far as I am aware there are no other research publications focusing specifically on older adults' digital citizenship. However, there is an emerging interest in adding a life-course perspective in digital citizenship research, as demonstrated by the newly established Centre for Digital Citizens (Newcastle University and Northumbria University, 2021), which includes an "ageless citizen" challenge area (https://www.digitalcitizens.uk). The use of technologies within LLARC and its turn towards a co-operative governance system can therefore be understood as a unique example of how older adults appropriate technologies in the production context of community media in order to serve a civic grassroots initiative. The project therefore represents a shift towards a more decentred and relational use of digital technologies, allowing for a co-production of political thinking and action by creating civic dialogue that cuts across a diversity of experiences, values and knowledge (Olivier and Wright, 2015). My work implies that placing value on the social interactions and dialogues that arise through the collaborative use of a technology can contribute to a deeper understanding of later life civic participation with regard to collective social and collective political aspects. This focus on collaboration echoes findings from Righi *et al.* (2017) who suggest that researchers should take into account how older adults use technologies within community settings. In the case of LLARC, this means looking at participatory tools that facilitate older adults' engagement with content creation and their participation in civic debates, in order to create a more inclusive civic discourse that counteracts ageist narratives.

Throughout the pandemic, LLARC has focused specifically on the creation of a 'later life and COVID-19' audio series on their Mixcloud. Using Zoom as a production tool, LLARC members produced political debates on COVID-19 with experts from policy and practice. The series is a reflection of their civic efforts of including older people's voices in current debates using a widely available digital tool, such as Zoom. Civic media have previously been recognised as tools that support the creation of an inclusive, collaborative and experience-based discourse, especially on a city-wide scale (Cazacu, Hansen and Schouten, 2020). However,

Cazacu *et al.* add that "the common denominator within these directions is citizens' capacity to work with technology and gradually become a co-creator of value together with service providers, organizations, and communities" (Cazacu *et al.*, 2020, p.695). This re-iterates my earlier considerations on the need to focus on digital participation, namely active digital contributions, rather than emphasising the more passive concept of access and accessibility through digital inclusion. Klerks *et al.* (2020) describe in more detail how technologies challenge citizen participation in itself. For example, if participation is perceived as an obstacle within a process due to a lack of digital skills, inaccessible information, location or emotions, diversity in community technology initiatives might not be achieved (Klerks *et al.*, 2020). One such example was reported by Müller *et al.* (2015), who highlighted generational differences in the engagement of participants with a living lab study. As the researchers decided to slow down the technology-mediated co-design process in order to keep the older participants engaged, they experienced higher drop-out rates from younger participants who felt bored in the project (Müller *et al.*, 2015). The LLARC had to consider similar challenges, in which technologies proved to be a barrier to participation. For example, the uptake of using the Mixcloud platform was slow, as some members had to familiarise themselves with it. Even though the benefits of using the technology as an organisational tool outweighed the challenges and the co-operators drew on intergenerational learning support, the experience highlighted the possibility of exclusion through adoption of a specific technology. This shows that whilst promoting access and accessibility has its merits, we need to consider collaborative and intergenerational contexts as a foundation, from which older adults can be supported in achieving higher political participation through the use of digital technologies.

Based on the discussion points outlined here, I am now able to suggest a second adaptation to the later life civic participation framework developed by Serrat *et al.* (2019) in the next section. In Section 6.2.1, I established the need to re-imagine digital engagement in collective social activities of civic participation (Type 2), such as participation in an organisation for older people. In this section, I highlighted the potential role of digital technologies to transform a collective social activity of civic participation (Type 2) into a collective political action (Type 4). This argument was illustrated by the creation of LLARC as a digitalised community of older radio content creators, who participate politically in debates on ageism. In Figure 6.2, I indicate this trajectory with the red arrows and highlight in particular which forms of political participation benefit from a technology-mediated engagement.

6.2.3 *Summary: Adding a digital dimension to the civic participation framework*

In this section I have synthesised the two aforementioned stages of adapting Serrat and colleagues' (2019) later life civic participation framework. I discussed how collective social and political forms of later life civic participation are shaped by a digital dimension, despite a lack of previous research on older adults' digital citizenship (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021a). Integrating my work in the overall framework, I suggested the addition of a digital dimension to the collective aspects of later life civic participation (Figure 6.2). The adaptation reflects a) that collective civic spaces are increasingly digitalised or technology-mediated in general, and b) highlights the potential of digital technologies to facilitate a dynamic between collective social and political forms of civic participation.

Civic participation		
	Social participation	Political participation
Individual forms	Type 1 Prosocial/helping/altruistic behaviours outside family Donation of money/in-kind supports to charities/NGOs	Type 3 Voting Contacting political representatives Donating money to political parties and organisations Signing petitions Writing letters/emails/blogs/articles with political content Boycotting and political consumption Other individual political manifestations
Collective forms	Type 2 Participation in volunteering, community, or charitable organisations ↓ Re-imagining new digital forms of engagement →	Type 4 Running for or holding a public office Working on campaigns Participation in political organisations or forums Protest activities Participation in social movement organisations Other collective political manifestations

(left margin label: DIGITAL SPACES)

Figure 6.2: Adapted civic participation framework to locate digital citizenship

This suggests that if societies wish to support older people's civic participation, there is a need to consider a digital dimension alongside it and facilitate wider opportunities for older adults to exercise their digital citizenship. This way of locating digital technologies within the civic participation framework is novel in itself, highlighting digital content creation and community media as possible pathways to supporting increased political participation in later life. Political participation as an area has so far received the least attention in civic participation research

(Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021a). Overall, I highlighted the contribution of my research to the academic discourse. I also outlined my rationale for considering a digital dimension in the later life civic participation framework and argued for the potential of making use of digital content creation activities to support collective social and political forms of later life civic participation. In the next section, I highlight the implications of my research findings for age-friendly policy and practice.

6.3 Opportunities for age-friendly cities

In this section I outline the contribution of my research to policy and practice. For this, I focus in particular on the concept of age-friendly cities as a context which can support older adults in their digital and civic participation, building on the framework I established in the previous section. As argued in the literature review (Chapter 2), the age-friendly city framework, which is built around eight core domains of life (social participation; communication and information; civic participation and employment; housing; transportation; community support and health services; outdoor spaces and buildings; and respect and social inclusion), has been shown to be insufficiently oriented towards a digitalising society (Marston and Van Hoof, 2019). However, digitalisation now intersects into most of the age-friendly domains. Recognising Liddle and colleagues' definition of age-friendliness:

> *Underpinned by a commitment to respect and social inclusion, an age-friendly community is engaged in a strategic and ongoing process to facilitate active ageing by optimising the community's physical, social and digital environments and its supporting infrastructure (Liddle et al., 2020, p.19)*

my work provides an example of how older adults contribute to the process and creation of these social and digital environments with regard to civic participation. Even though digital technologies have the potential to influence most age-friendly domains due to their interconnectedness (Buffel, Phillipson and Rémillard-Boilard, 2019), my discussion is focused on the AFC domains of 'communication and information' and 'civic participation' (Figure 6.3), as I located digital citizenship activities from my PAR at the intersection of these two domains.
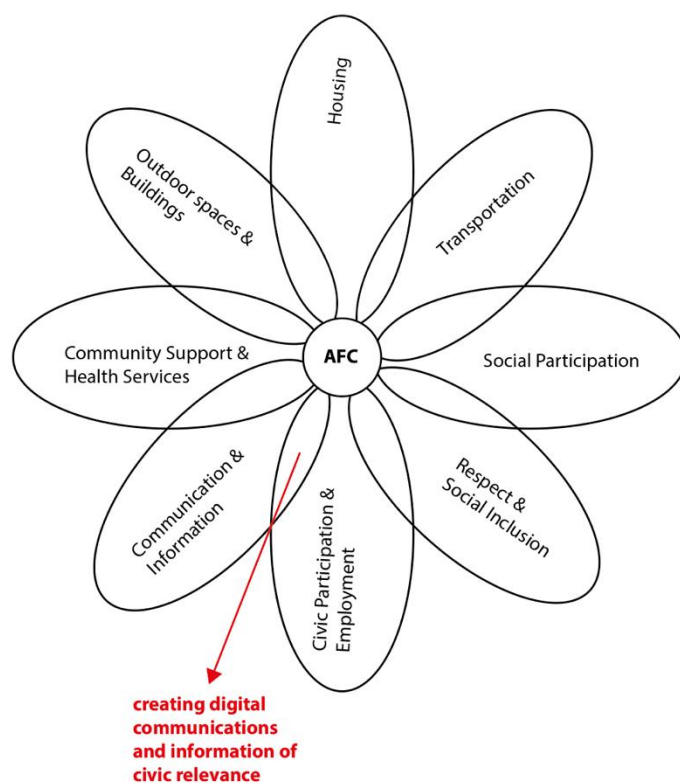
Figure 6.3: Locating digital citizenship in the AFC domains

Based on Liddle *et al.*'s (2020) definition of age-friendliness, I examined how collective social and political forms of civic participation (Types 2 and 4 according to the framework of Serrat and colleagues, 2019) are linked to a digital age-friendly environment. Returning to the idea of having a 'right to the city', as expressed by Buffel *et al.* (2012) in their manifesto for age-friendly cities, I associate this right with the opportunity to be able to use digital technologies as a means to achieve civic expression and a mechanism to actively contribute to civic debates in later life (Buffel, Phillipson and Scharf, 2012). This has been shown by Age Voice's efforts to create a media landscape for age-friendly information in their city, as well as the LLARC members' efforts to heighten age-friendliness in broadcasting. My findings suggest that communicating age-friendly city work through digital means is an important factor in how age-friendly a city is perceived to be by public audiences. The research presented in Chapter 4 highlights that cities which have not invested in a professional communications strategy might be perceived as being less age-friendly than those whose work is more digitally visible, despite ongoing efforts and a great amount of activity around the topic. As part of my field work, I also observed that such age-friendly media strategies are often co-ordinated by younger people. My work with Age Voice provides a compelling example that demonstrates how older people themselves can be involved not only in distributing age-friendly information across their city

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but also in driving the communications work of an age-friendly city. This could be seen as an opportunity to support older adults in both the learning of digital skills as well as their increased civic participation within the context of the AFC initiative.

Age Voice's work as part of Newcastle's AFC can also be seen as an example of the continuation of the bottom-up approach from which the age-friendly city framework was derived, taking into account older people's views on what makes a city a good city to age in (World Health Organization, 2007b). However, this bottom-up approach to age-friendliness is seldom realised effectively in practice, due to the involvement of many different stakeholders within AFC initiatives, on the local, national and international level (McDonald, Scharf and Walsh, 2018). Based on a study in Ireland, McDonald and colleagues reported that whilst most stakeholders within an age-friendly county agreed that AFC initiatives should be informed by older people's lived experiences, stakeholders also preferred a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches to acknowledge the diversity of interests that exist within municipalities. This led the authors to question whether older people's involvement in AFCs is tokenistic or a real influence (McDonald, Scharf and Walsh, 2018). Based on my research, I connect these two lines of argument in two ways. First, I have been able to show that digital and community media can be facilitators in age-friendly cities to reconnect to older adults' views, if created by older adults themselves. Second, my work highlights the need for participatory approaches rather than consultation methods in age-friendly cities in order to allow older adults to express agency as active stakeholders in their city. Tine Buffel's work in Manchester represents one such participatory approach to co-producing research on developing age-friendly cities with older adults (Buffel, 2018). Collaborating with older people as co-researchers allows older people's voices to be heard through research activities and creates a meaningful foundation from which the age-friendliness of communities can be improved. In similar vein, my PAR focuses on content creation as a way for older people to have a voice in age-friendly cities, whilst involving older people in a research process. This suggested shift towards participation in age-friendly cities requires a mindful approach with regard to capacity-building opportunities for diverse voices to be heard, taking into account different levels of digital skills as well as other inequalities with regard to civic participation (Norris, 2001a). Similar programmes exist, including, for example, the Touchstone programme in Ireland (Scharf, Mcdonald and Atkins, 2016). Such initiatives could be adapted to incorporate a digital dimension in the future in order to capture the digital aspects of civic participation further whilst supporting a diversity of voices.

In my research, I encountered some aspects of diversity, especially with regard to older women who represented a majority of people involved with Age Voice's content creation activities. Older women are particularly underrepresented in HCI research with a limited number of papers explicitly addressing middle-aged or older women in the context of medical technology research (e.g. menopause technologies such as (Gkrozou *et al.*, 2019)), and few studies looking at older women's creative content creation practices (McGrath, 2018). This gender effect is repeated in formal political civic participation activities (Serrat and Villar, 2020), highlighting the uniqueness of Age Voice's digital work which is predominantly driven by women. Additionally, I witnessed as part of my PAR with the Age Voice in particular an incredible amount of care given to a disabled member of the group, ensuring that all places were accessible for a wheelchair. Another point of diversity is shown in LLARC, who place importance on intergenerational solidarity within their co-operative. I recognise that my work was predominantly carried out with white and often well-educated older people and that there is a lot of work to be done to ensure that more diverse older people can participate in digital citizenship activities. However, based on the above-mentioned points of diversity, the project showed that it is possible to engage with the production of technology-mediated community media regardless of age, gender and health status. Adding to debates in critical gerontology, which highlight the inequalities in older people's civic participation (Martinson and Minkler, 2006), I see Age Voice as well as LLARC as pioneers who facilitate the engagement of diverse members of communities through technical innovation. I will elaborate on this argument in Section 6.3.3. Overall, I suggest that digital participation needs to be identified as a key feature of age-friendly strategies and I will now expand on what this might look like in policy and practice.

6.3.1   *Reconsidering digital inclusion in policy*

My analysis suggests a need to reconsider digital inclusion at a policy level and to re-evaluate current formats of its delivery in practice. As outlined in the literature review (Chapter 2), older adults face disadvantages with regard to ICT use, compared to other age groups (Serafino, 2019). These disadvantages can be a result of complex interplay of personal, social and technological contexts as opposed to a general age-based assumption of non-use of digital technologies (Neves, Waycott and Malta, 2018). In light of the increasing digitalisation of civic participation, this may lead to inequities. Inequities primarily refer to exclusion due to unfair conditions, whilst inequalities refer to the difference in a distribution of resources (Global Health Europe, 2009). As outlined previously, reasons for digital exclusion are manifold, ranging from personal factors, such as low confidence in ICT skills or technical factors like

lack of accessibility of technologies (Vroman, Arthanat and Lysack, 2015), to social traits that can be determinants of an unequal distribution of opportunities for using technologies, also known as the digital divide (Selwyn, 2004). My research presented in this thesis adds to this line of argument, by highlighting additional technological barriers that challenge older adults' participation in civic spaces. This encompasses such factors as a structural focus on digital inclusion rather than digital participation, which contributes further to the disadvantages and ageist assumptions associated with older adults' technology use. So far, existing policies in countries like the UK aim to promote digital inclusion based on the digital skills framework, primarily focusing on access and accessibility of the internet (Davidson, 2018). However, even though digital inclusion is located within the old-age exclusion framework as part of the wider domain of "services, amenities and mobility" (Walsh, Scharf and Keating, 2017), as presented in section 2.3, it has a broad impact across all domains due to the interconnectedness of the dimensions. Additionally, researchers have argued for some time that the digital exclusion debate "benefits from a more nuanced understanding of skill – going beyond general skill, to look at how kinds of online engagement vary in relation to different kinds of skill" (Helsper & Eynon, 2013, p. 708). In similar vein, evidence suggests that basic digital skills do not necessarily translate into digital participation (Helsper and Eynon, 2013; Manchester and Facer, 2015). I argue that digital exclusion in later life represents a key concern for public policy in ageing societies, as it impacts on daily life activities as well as citizenship opportunities. Using the internet and, in particular, digital media for civic participatory purposes can support older adults in shaping their communities and mobilising action, for example in communicating directly with their local councils or in articulating collective needs and interests. This became especially apparent within the context of the LLARC's efforts described in Chapter 5. Using the medium of community radio, older people were able to voice their opinions with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic and other current issues that directly affected older adults. This occurred at a time when older people's voices were markedly absent from public debates during the course of the pandemic (Carney *et al.*, 2020).

Amongst the plethora of schemes aimed at addressing digital exclusion, there is a growing focus on the role of community learning schemes in promoting older adults' digital literacy. However, my research highlights that it is important that local communities go beyond simply addressing use or non-use of digital technologies and create the necessary infrastructures that can support older adults to become (more) civically active by making effective and creative use of appropriate digital technologies. Whilst my research showed successful examples of such engagement, they were entirely co-ordinated by volunteers rather than structurally supported

through the implementation of policy. This points to a failure of policy to respond appropriately to the needs occurring as a result of demographic change. As a result, the digital inclusion agenda reflects a structural lag, indicating a mis-match between older adults' lived realities and the prevailing social structures (Riley *et al.*, 1994). Gerontechnology scholars have previously argued that research has not sufficiently considered the structural lag in conceptualisations on ageing and technology (Peine and Neven, 2011). Instead, an individual lag perspective is prioritised, positioning the older person as a user who lacks competence or technological expertise (Peine and Neven, 2011) or by drawing on erroneous age-based assumptions of older adults as non-users of technologies (Neves, Waycott and Malta, 2018). My research presents an example of how older adults are ahead of policy makers by showing the way to creative forms of digital citizenship. This in turn highlights the fundamental need for policy to overcome the ageist assumptions that typically underlie digital inclusion strategies and to instead prioritise approaches that support older adults' creative use of digital technologies.

To summarise, I suggest that a higher level of digitally engaged older adults within communities can be achieved by incorporating the concept of digital participation within the goals of digital inclusion frameworks. Such an approach acknowledges the distinction between ideas of digital participation and digital inclusion, with the former being better suited to supporting older adults' civic participation. Referring back to earlier considerations about exclusion in later life, I highlight that by acknowledging the civic contributions of older people in a digital space, we can promote social inclusion and combat risk factors for exclusion in later life.

6.3.2   *Shifting digital inclusion practice towards participatory approaches*

In practice, there is value in re-thinking the ways in which digital inclusion is currently delivered through activities which focus on the teaching of basic digital skills, as mentioned above. Even though previous research has highlighted the need for personal and creative ways of teaching digital skills (Sayago, Forbes and Blat, 2013), current digital inclusion classes are still limited to primarily delivering "basic digital skills and capabilities" (UK Government, 2017). Instead, my work highlights the need to incorporate creative ways to support older adults' digital participation as part of their opportunities to contribute to increasingly digitalised civic spaces. For example, my research shows that content creation activities often lead to an extended digital skill set, as older adults aim to not only create content but also to use it in different ways and advertise it more widely through social media. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic has been associated with an increase in older adults' digital inclusion, a focus has predominantly been on the benefits of being socially connected to family, friends and the

community (Centre for Ageing Better, 2020). Additional 'benefits' that previously influenced the design of technologies for older adults were to enable consumerism or monitor health. Both of these benefits have been challenged by critical Gerontechnology scholars (Cozza and Östlund, 2020). My research, both before and after the pandemic, suggests that in addition to social, economic and health considerations, public initiatives should prioritise activities that support older adults in becoming civically active online. Grounded in a highly participatory approach, I demonstrated that digital content creation can be a way of creating spaces for meaningful civic participation. The example of LLARC shows that community radio shows can be a way to foster both civic participation and digital participation in later life (Reuter *et al.*, 2019). It can also be a space to get together to facilitate age-inclusive citizen dialogues. Additionally, my work with Age Voice shows the potential of working with digital marketing platforms such as Mailchimp to distribute age-friendly information across the city. In turn, this reflects an opportunity for age-friendly cities to put older adults at the forefront of distributing age-friendly information, by enabling and supporting their digital participatory activities and thus advocating for their digital citizenship (Reuter, Liddle and Scharf, 2020).

As far as I am aware, based on my review of existing literature and policy documents, there are currently no guidelines in the UK's public domain that would support older adults' digital citizenship. One contribution of this thesis lies, therefore, in highlighting the importance of considering the intersection between digital technologies, community media and citizenship in later life as a pathway to supporting age-friendly cities and communities. This entails shifting attention to those older adults who already make use of media production. There is much to learn from such individuals' experiences of how media can be a way to bridge the digitalisation gap, as noted in this thesis and in previous studies (Sayago, Forbes and Blat, 2013; Celdran, Serrat and Villar, 2019; Ferreira, Sayago and Blat, 2019). By creating content of different formats, older adults are able to share their voices more widely. My analysis supports findings from the wider literature that older adults can indeed engage with digital media in creative and active ways (Waycott *et al.*, 2013) as they become active digital content creators (Ferreira, Sayago and Blat, 2019; Reuter, Scharf and Smeddinck, 2020). I regard the community media sector in general as a local point of contact for older content creators of any format and will now discuss specifically my findings from Chapter 5 on the importance of ageing and community radio.

6.3.3   Older adults and community radio

Weaving together the discourses of later life civic participation and digital citizen empowerment, content creation and age-friendliness, my research suggests that the community radio sector can be located as an overarching point of engagement. Its values are closely linked to civic participatory goals, as community radio is able to support older people's citizenship through the principles of democracy, access and equity. Indeed, community media might sometimes be referred to as citizen media (Lewis, 2008). Additionally, community radio can be a way not only to: 1) support groups that are underrepresented in the media in general (such as older adults); but also to 2) develop local partnerships by connecting local groups; and to 3) create participatory learning environments that involve various technologies (Mitchell and Baxter, 2006). These three potentials of community radio became a notable feature throughout my PAR, and subsequently throughout the founding of LLARC. As central to LLARC's mission are three equivalent goals: to promote older adults' voices in the media and challenge ageist assumptions; to create a community of interest and practice regarding community radio created by older adults; and to learn how to create (digital) audio content. Similar themes also emerged throughout my research process with Age Voice, especially regarding their activism on age-friendliness. Returning to Liddle and colleagues' (2020) revised definition of age-friendliness, and based on my research carried out with the Age Voice radio team as well as LLARC, I argue that the community radio sector can be one part of the infrastructure that supports the development process of age-friendliness with regard to the *"community's physical, social and digital environments"* (Liddle *et al.*, 2020, p.19).

Liddle and colleagues (2020) also highlight especially the processual dimension of becoming more age-friendly with regard to digital environments. In my research, I observed two different "digital learning trajectories" with regard to digitalisation, ageing and community radio. First, there was a hybrid digital and non-digital learning process before the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, during the pandemic, we witnessed the compulsory digitalisation of community radio production workflows. Learning and education have been established at the core of community radio production (Lewis, 2008), with Mitchell and Baxter (2006) highlighting the importance of community-based learning using radio and the concept of learning for citizenship as an important component for lifelong learning (Mitchell and Baxter, 2006). Even though less structured and not in the form of community radio courses, but rather as an organic development from a piece of participatory research, my work with LLARC offers an example of a similar learning concept in which the production of community radio content facilitates digital

citizenship in later life. I will now discuss in more detail the two "digital learning trajectories" that I observed as part of my PAR.

My research carried out before the COVID-19 pandemic indicated that unlike many technologies, community radio creates opportunities to engage participants in non-digital as well as digital ways. Broadcasts functioned as tools to bridge the digital divide, connecting analogue workflows such as running the broadcasting desk with digitalised workflows regarding audio editing or online streaming. Nearly 20 years ago, Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada (2002) reported a similar practice of using community radio stations as an interface between villages and information on the internet. The researchers showed how community broadcasters could adapt information from the internet to local languages and local interests (Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada, 2002). Taking this further into an even more digitalised society, where digital skills are now essential for citizens of any age, I argue that this hybrid model of bridging digital and non-digital spaces in community radio production can be an ideal environment for older adults to expand on their digital skills, whilst at the same time creating local content with a civic impact. Throughout this thesis I have highlighted these interactions by reviewing ways in which community radio stations support older adults' digital skills through structured workshops and prompt engagement with digital technologies to advertise their radio shows. Focusing on the production of local content and drawing on expertise in communities, the community radio space addresses both social and political dimensions of civic participation. Community radio provides an accessible and secure starting point for trying out digital skills. This is important as previous research has shown that older adults can be particularly privacy conscious in the use of digital technologies (Waycott *et al.*, 2013). Community radio can, therefore, be a way to engage those older adults who are not digitally skilled, as well as those who want to engage with various digital and non-digital technologies at a more proficient level in social and civic spaces. As part of this work, I have shown how the creation of radio and audio content can be a pathway to enhanced digital participation in later life (Reuter, Scharf and Smeddinck, 2020), facilitates collective civic activities for older adults (Reuter and Liddle, 2020), strengthens older adults' digital voices in age-friendly cities (Reuter, Liddle and Scharf, 2020), and additionally functions as a motivating factor to engage with digital production tools, such as audio editing software (Reuter *et al.*, 2019).

This research interest in the topics of ageing, civic participation, and digitalisation with a specific focus on the production of community radio content took a different turn in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Suddenly, the topics of civic participation and digitalisation

of older adults became even more relevant as we witnessed the extent of the digital divide (Centre for Ageing Better, 2020) and an increase in ageist narratives (Ayalon *et al.*, 2020). As a response, the community radio sector has shown ongoing support to local communities in counteracting ageist assumptions by supporting older adults with their broadcasts and general digital skills. Most community radio stations transformed from a hybrid digital and non-digital space towards predominantly digital production workflows (Coleman, 2020). Coleman's report on the UK's community radio response to the COVID-19 pandemic shows that the community radio sector has demonstrated considerable resilience and continued to broadcast by "adjusting and innovating in ways which have enhanced their resourcefulness in presenting shows, providing entertainment and sourcing and sharing important information" (Coleman, 2020, p.17). The report highlighted that some radio stations worked with volunteers who were not "technically minded" and did not use digital technologies at all. However, many "older […] presenters were taught new skills and bought their own equipment" (Coleman, 2020, p.14). My work with LLARC and its member community stations mirrors these findings. All members began to engage digitally, regardless of previous experience, in order to stay involved with the content creation activities. Another reason to engage with LLARC digitally was to support its activism of broadcasting the opinions of older adults in order to counteract the ageist COVID-19 narrative on a societal level which was reinforced through many mainstream media outlets (Rosales and Fernández-Ardèvol, 2020). By enabling older adults to contribute to and speak for themselves in digital spaces, LLARC sets an example of how technologies can be used in a radio production context to produce media that better reflect the diversity in later life. Echoing researchers that highlight the complexity of socio-technical systems in later life (Cozza and Östlund, 2020), my research with LLARC highlighted an example of a complex interplay between civic, social and personal factors. This was shown through the LLARC members' mutual support with digital skills such as Zoom, audio editing or uploading content to the Mixcloud, in order to work towards their civic goal of challenging ageist stereotypes. I argue that their broadcasts, but also their technology engagement in itself, challenges ageism by showing that people of all ages, genders and digital literacy backgrounds can successfully engage with community radio production and broadcasting in order to present their views, both in digital and non-digital ways.

Another aspect that needs to be considered with regard to the even further accelerated digitalisation of community radio content as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic is the expansion of localised broadcasting that operates within local boundaries and provides content to local communities. Even though a shift towards digital broadcasting, for example using

Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) or internet platforms, has been advocated for by European policy makers over the last ten years, it is not always a straightforward choice for community radio stations. Whilst for some stations it can be of advantage to reach more people, the original local target audience might not be captured in broadcasting more widely (Hallett and Hintz, 2010). My findings arising from collaboration with LLARC, as a UK-wide network of older community radio content creators and age-friendly radio stations, show that the broadcasting of digital content, for example through the Mixcloud, is a preference when aiming to reach a community that is not bound to a specific geographic location. However, my understanding of the use of digital technologies in this piece of research does not relate to the broadcasting technology itself, but rather to the production workflows of creating community radio content. As Coleman (2020) outlined, these had to be adapted drastically and were often shifted to digital formats in order to adhere to social distancing guidelines (Coleman, 2020). As observed in my collaboration with LLARC and the Age Voice radio team, these decisions to produce content digitally in the first place required less steps of digitalising content after the broadcast.

Whilst the aim of this section was to discuss my findings in relation to the opportunities for older adults' civic and digital participation that lie within the community radio sector, I want to acknowledge that the work of engaging older adults with community broadcasting in the UK, and co-operatives such as the LLARC, is predominantly carried out by volunteers in this third sector. A network such as the LLARC creates opportunities between third sector organisations, such as working with shared values, but also shifts responsibilities on creating opportunities for digital participation in later life from the public sector towards volunteers. In the USA, many commercial radio stations aimed towards retired people have adopted the concept similar to a community radio and support their residents in the creation of radio shows (e.g. Colorado Community Media, 2017). However, to date, such structured opportunities in the commercial sector are absent in the UK. I therefore refer to my earlier point that it is important to place opportunities for older adults' digital participation at the heart of public policy and age-friendly efforts. After discussing my research findings and situating them in the wider scientific literature and alongside policy and practice in this section, I now move on to discussing the process of conducting PAR with older content creators. I reflect on my own engagement as a PAR researcher and discuss my role as part of a systemic approach to create sustainable change as part of PAR.

6.4 The engaged researcher as a catalyst for technological change in age-friendly cities

Against the background of exploring older adults' digital citizenship with regard to content creation activities, I now discuss the role of PAR in general and my role as a PAR researcher in this section. I reflect on the dynamic and processual dimension that underlies this PAR project on many levels: the learning process of supporting older adults' civic and digital participation; the process of digitalisation of societies and associated creation of digital environments in age-friendly cities; and the process of doing participatory action research as an active stakeholder within an evolving ecosystem of individuals, organisations and technologies. I view the method of PAR in itself as a factor that facilitated my collaborators' engagement with technological innovation in later life and thus heightened their levels of civic participation over time. By dedicating a section of this discussion chapter to the 'process', I aim to acknowledge the value that lies in time and in participatory methods that embrace the synchronised process of development of research and communities. These are common considerations for PAR researchers in gerontology and HCI projects who work with diverse people and personalities and integrate multiple voices within a project over a longer period of time (Vines *et al.*, 2015; Corrado *et al.*, 2020). Recognising the ever-changing nature of digital technologies and contrasting the broader digitalisation of societies as an ongoing process, my PAR contributes an in-depth local perspective in which communal change is driven by older adults themselves. As discussed by Klerks *et al.*, engaged researchers can support this process of communal change by "helping the community to discover (hidden) resources and, in this way, unlock greater potential in the community" (Klerks et al., 2020, p.102).

This role of engaged researchers as catalysts for change resonates with my own project and role as a PAR researcher, in particular with the Age Voice communications team. Even though the volunteers had been aiming to change their content creation workflows (with regard to their email newsletter) for a period of time, entering the research context gave a new dynamic and momentum to the situation. Workflows that manifested over time, such as the creation of pdfs for newsletters, were now challenged by the volunteers themselves in the new context of the research collaboration. Even though the development of new digital skills, for example the use of Mailchimp, took time, the participatory research process was an opportunity for the volunteers to "discover [their] resources" as Klerks *et al.* frame it.

Taking on such a systemic approach of not only focusing on socio-technical systems, but also evolving networks and collaborations between different stakeholders and researchers, can contribute to a sustainable change and use of civic technologies (Klerks *et al.*, 2020). The

creation of LLARC in particular is a powerful example of forming a network and leveraging expertise from this community of practice, which secured its future sustainability by scaling up as a co-operative. This focus on nurturing collaborations as part of PAR should be a main concern for technology researchers and public authorities who aim to support older adults' digital participation. Indeed, the age-friendly city initiative and its revised definition that includes digital environments also includes a processual dimension (Liddle *et al.*, 2020). Whilst some small-scale projects, such as those outlined in this thesis, can thrive as multi-stakeholder collaborations and indeed support older adults in transforming digital environments within AFCs, the involvement of too many stakeholders' interests on the bigger scale can also lead to stagnant AFCs with difficulties in empowering older adults in the civic space (McDonald, Scharf and Walsh, 2018). However, the process of PAR is not without challenges for researchers and collaborators, which I highlighted throughout this thesis. The consistent negotiation of interests is a time-consuming matter, which is essential to PAR, but often not reflected in research timelines (Corrado *et al.*, 2020). In particular, in a technology-mediated context, we encountered differences in our understandings of digitalised workflows that had to be addressed through a negotiation process. One example was the use of the Mixcloud platform for the LLARC. In this case, a negotiation process was critical, as it directly reflected a potential point of exclusion for some of the LLARC members who previously had no experience with uploading content to the platform. As Minkler (2000) argues, PAR is an approach that is "time consuming and filled with challenges as local communities and their research collaborators […] attempt to navigate difficult ethical and practical terrain" (p.196). It also represents a co-learning process (Blair and Minkler, 2009), which can support intergenerational understanding, as in the case of the LLARC.

6.5   Limitations and future perspectives in research

The findings presented in this thesis should be interpreted in the context of the recognised limitations of a small-scale empirical study. I am aware that my qualitative research project draws its evidence from a relatively small and necessarily limited sample. It therefore lacks generalisability to other contexts. However, this is a common limitation of qualitative and participatory research approaches (Hayes, 2014), which aim for transferability of the findings rather than strict generalisability. Working in-depth with a small and diverse group of collaborators, I gained unique insights into digital aspects of civic participation in later life. By working with different groups of older content creators, I have been able to highlight the applicability of the findings with regard to different types of digital and civic engagement, as well as future policy and practice with regard to digital citizenship in later life. By engaging

with PAR, I was able to facilitate a collaboration between communities, third sector, public authorities, and researchers, something that is an inherent benefit of engaging with the steps of PAR rather than a generalisable research protocol (Hayes, 2011).

Another limitation of my research lies within the geographical context of the UK. Even though the LLARC is expanding to become an international organisation, it is too early for research insights that indicate any meaningful geographical trends. The experience of using digital content creation to be civically active in later life is likely to vary between countries and world regions, not least in terms of culturally bounded features of digital content creation. I anticipate that findings would be different especially in countries that report higher rates of digitalisation. Examples are the Nordic countries, which are amongst the most digitalised countries in Europe with regard to public services and mobile connectivity (European Commission, 2020). Such geographical differences can also have an impact on other factors that play a role in older adults' digital citizenship. These factors might include family structures and therefore intergenerational opportunities to learn digital skills. However, studies indicate that most older adults increase their digital skills in community settings rather than in family contexts (Blat *et al.*, 2010; Betts, Hill and Gardner, 2019). My work mirrors these findings by showing the interconnectedness of collective civic and digital participation and highlights especially community contexts, such as Age Voice, the LLARC or community radio stations, as drivers for digital citizenship.

A further limiting factor of my research lies in the length and timescale of this project. Even though I discussed the processual dimension in Section 4.3 and highlighted benefits of engaging in long-term projects that support older adults' digital citizenship, it was beyond the scope of my work to locate the role of technology as part of a lifespan perspective (Schulz *et al.*, 2015) and investigate personal inequalities with regard to technology across the individual collaborators' life courses. An additional limitation lies in the inability, also due to the timescale, to consider sufficiently the differences between different types of content creation. My research considered the entire Age Voice media landscape, which included many types of content creation, but most of my collaborators concentrated their strengths on the production of one specific medium, namely community radio. Based on the natural development of the PAR towards the creation of LLARC, I limited my findings to these radio-related activities, rather than exploring in more depth Age Voice's various media outputs. Overall, more data is needed to be able to consider differences between different types of content creation as the producers' skills increase and as they start to engage with different types of media (as identified in Section 5.3.4, by looking at the increase of digital skills through community radio

production). Nevertheless, a key strength of my in-depth qualitative study is that it provides initial evidence that older adults can strengthen their digital skills and civic participation through content production activities, for example in age-friendly communities or by collaborating with community radio stations.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the findings of my research project in relation to the wider literature in the fields of Gerontology and Human-Computer Interaction. Drawing on mainly qualitative studies, my PAR replicated similar findings on older adults' use of digital technologies, for example with regard to the complexity of socio-technical systems and interconnected social, personal and civic factors, and the importance of learning trajectories and digital skills. My research adds novel insights to the field of later life civic participation by focusing on a digital citizenship perspective and highlighting civic motivations that underlie older adults' content creation activities. These content creation activities can either be located in the context of "unplatforming" existing digital and social media (e.g. as shown with the Age Voice's media landscape using Facebook, e-newsletters or Twitter for their civic purposes) or through engaging with the community radio sector. In both cases, I echo previous research findings highlighting the importance of community. However, following Serrat *et al.* (2019), my work goes beyond the community or collective social (Type 2) perspective of civic participation showing the potential of digital content creation activities to transform a social activity into a political statement (collective political or Type 4 forms of civic participation).

Overall, my research adds to key debates on civic participation, digitalisation and age-friendliness in later life. By using PAR over a period of nearly four years, I show that engaging with content creation activities can have a bi-directional effect of supporting sustainable civic participation, as well as digital participation in later life. These insights have implications for future research on older adults' civic participation, which needs to consider a digital dimension, and the delivery of digital inclusion strategies, which should consider older adults as digital citizens and therefore support their digital participation.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Contributions

The research presented in this thesis has examined older adults' digital citizenship by addressing two research questions simultaneously. First, I explored how older adults engaged with digital content creation activities as part of their civic participatory practices (RQ1). Second, I analysed how age-friendly communities exploited digital technologies and community media to support older people's civic participation (RQ2). My research was conducted as participatory action research (PAR) in collaboration with older adults who create digital content with the aim to be civically active. Together, we shaped the course of the project. First, we reviewed one organisation's media landscape and its underlying workflows. From this foundation, we engaged with a series of PAR cycles to re-design the organisation's e-mail newsletter and explore the use of digital audio as a means to engage local older citizens in issues related to ageing. As a second strand of PAR, I extended my collaborations to focus on the production of community radio as a form of civic content creation. Working with older community radio show hosts and age-friendly radio stations, we conducted a Radio Festival for older adults. This engagement resulted in the creation of the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative as a network to advocate for older people in broadcasting. Based on the interdisciplinarity of my research, located in the fields of gerontology and HCI, I conclude this thesis by summarising the academic and practical contributions of my research.

7.1.1 Academic contributions

The concept of social exclusion in later life is of key concern within ageing societies due to its potential to explain and respond to various forms of disadvantage (Walsh, Scharf and Keating, 2017). Exclusion from civic activities represents one key domain of social exclusion that affects older adults (Torres, 2021). Due to the intersecting effect of civic and digital exclusion, as part of an increasing digitalisation of civic activities (Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal, 2007), older adults might be disproportionally excluded from civic life. As a key contribution to the academic discourse on civic participation in later life, my research proposed the addition of a digital dimension to existing conceptualisations of civic participation in later life. Until now, a digital dimension to older adults' civic participation remained largely unexplored (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021a), despite research that increasingly considers the digitalisation of civic life for younger people and adults (Rheingold, 2008; Theocharis, 2015). Focusing on content creation activities as a form of digital citizenship in later life, my findings shed light on the complex entanglements of civic, social, and technological factors that influence older adults' motivations to participate digitally in civic spaces. I highlighted civic considerations that inform older adults' choices to engage with content creation, such as the intention to inform other older

adults about opportunities within an age-friendly city or promote the voices of older adults in broadcasting. By focusing on these civic factors, I extended the current discourse on technology use in later life, which is still heavily focused on health, social inclusion or accessibility (Vines *et al.*, 2015). Locating my findings in Serrat *et al.*'s (2019) later life civic participation framework, I demonstrated what older adults' digital citizenship might look like in practice. In particular, I presented a technology-mediated trajectory of bridging collective social and collective political forms of later life civic participation. Since political participation is the least well researched type of later life civic participation (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021a), my findings contribute to our understanding of how older adults' political participation is influenced by the use of digital technologies in communities. The relevance of advancing this research agenda on older adults' political participation has become apparent throughout my work with the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC). During the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, the older members connected digitally and produced audio content that represented their voices in political debates around ageism. I observed a similar pattern of social and political efforts in my collaboration with the Age Voice, who are a key contributor to information in an age-friendly city context and use their digital platforms to distribute political information related to age and ageing. My findings therefore repeat the existing demands for research on age-friendly environments in gerontology and HCI to consider the potential of technologies as a means for older adults to be more active in their communities, digitally and in real life (Righi, Sayago and Blat, 2017; Marston and Van Hoof, 2019; Liddle *et al.*, 2020). Overall, the academic contributions of this thesis show that in order to leverage the opportunities created by demographic change, we need to consider how older adults can be supported as active and engaged citizens in digital spaces.

7.1.2   *Implementation of PAR with older adults*

A second contribution of my research lies in the field of conducting PAR with older adults. This research established what has proven to be a sustainable collaboration between different stakeholders in the form of the Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC). My research goes beyond many traditional PAR projects carried out in collaboration with older people (Corrado *et al.*, 2020), as the process of establishing LLARC as a long-term initiative within the co-operative sector was entirely driven by the older adults themselves, showing a high civic motivation and a considerable degree of agency. Building on work that identified PAR as a well-suited and critical method for supporting older adults in exercising their citizenship (Trentham and Neysmith, 2018), my PAR shows an equal impact with regard to digital citizenship activities. Focusing on the civic impacts of digital content creation activities,

the process of doing PAR represented a method of assistance in itself. By positioning myself as an embedded researcher within the Age Voice communications team and what became an intergenerational setting as LLARC, I could witness how the collaborators' digital activities flourished as a result of the mutual support and opportunities to draw on a variety of life experiences. Based on this observation, my collaborators and I were able to shape a PAR project focusing on content creation as a form of digital citizenship in later life. In terms of sustainability of the PAR, LLARC continues to grow. Since becoming a member of Co-operatives UK, LLARC and the associated research project have been recognised in different ways. At the British Society of Gerontology's annual conference in 2020, I co-presented a poster on the development of LLARC with one of my collaborators (https://slides.com/arreut/llarn-poster). The poster received the Society's Stirling Prize for the innovative design as a representation of a collaborative PAR process. In 2021 my research project won one of Newcastle University's Engagement and Place awards (https://www.ncl.ac.uk/press/articles/archive/2021/05/engagementplaceawards/), specifically acknowledging the civic and intergenerational impact of the research. Additionally, we have been awarded a highly competitive grant under the Engineering and Physical Science Research Council's Digital Economy Telling Tales of Engagement scheme. Recognising the strategic importance of LLARC as a way for older people to broadcast their voices as part of the digital economy and as an alternative to the mainstream media discourse on ageing, this grant will support the development of LLARC's public profile further by supporting the delivery of skills workshops to support older adults with audio editing and other radio creation skills, and the creation of a LLARC podcast and website. LLARC also features as a case study in a high-profile Centre for Ageing Better report on community radio in later life, highlighting its key role as a pioneering community of practice for older radio creators and age-friendly radio stations (https://ageing-better.org.uk/stories/community-radio-case-study).

7.1.3 *Contributions to age-friendly policy and practice*

As a third contribution, my research has implications for the delivery of age-friendly policy and practice with regard to older adults' digital citizenship. These implications suggest a need to encourage older people to participate in the digital world and create more diverse opportunities for older adults to exercise their digital citizenship. The Centre for Ageing Better also highlighted my research contributions as part of their age-friendly case study on community radio. My research identified the fundamental importance of distinguishing between the digital participation of older adults on the one hand and their digital inclusion on the other (Reuter, Scharf and Smeddinck, 2020). While the former implies a more active form of agency and

contribution in digital spaces, the latter merely refers to individuals being included and able to receive information. Referring to my research questions, one example of such digital and civic participation is the creation of digital content. Despite a growing number of research studies that highlight the positive benefits of digital content creation for older adults' social connectedness (Waycott *et al.*, 2013), cognitive performance (Celdrán *et al.*, 2021), or development of identity (Brewer and Piper, 2016; Celdrán *et al.*, 2021), civic benefits of content creation activities are not yet considered in policy and practice. Echoing findings from Durocher and Gauthier's (2018) work on using blogging for collective political purposes in later life, my collaborations highlight the potential of content creation activities to support older adults' digital citizenship in collective social and political ways. Indeed, my research with the Age Voice of Newcastle's communications team showed the importance of involving older adults in the creation of age-friendly informational content with regard to their digital and civic participation. The plethora of emerging work, which highlights the contributions of older adults as content creators indicates a structural lag with regard to policy and practice on digital citizenship in later life, highlighting the need to re-consider ways in which digital inclusion is conceptualised and delivered. Based on the findings presented in this thesis, I argue that prioritising digital participation as an objective of policy and practice on digitalisation in later life will be valuable in developing heightened agency of older adults as digital citizens. Indeed, giving older people the opportunity to lead on distributing information within age-friendly communities and cities can be one way to recognise and promote older adults' creative digital and civic contributions more widely, as well as support the authenticity of AFC initiatives as a framework in which older adults are active agents in co-creating their communities (World Health Organization, 2018). Overall, my research sets the foundation for novel paths of research into digital citizenship and ageing, and inspires original thinking about the digital component within age-friendly cities and how older adults can become more active civic agents in their communities.

Accompanying the need to re-consider ways in which policy and practice can support older adults in strengthening their civic participation online is a requirement to challenge the typically negative representations of older adults in the media (Ayalon *et al.*, 2020). This challenge includes shifting the existing negative narrative and use of images towards a demonstration of diversity in later life, along the lines of the approach promoted by LLARC. Indeed, the work conducted by LLARC is driven by an important activist goal: to challenge ageist stereotypes by highlighting the active contributions of older adults as content creators on the radio. The findings presented in this thesis positioned the creation of community radio as an asset to

promote older adults' digital citizenship in age-friendly cities. Building on Liddle *et al.*'s (2020) argument on considering digital environments to support age-friendliness in communities, LLARC is an example of older adults' efforts to create a digital media environment that represents older adults' diverse voices. Taking stock of the work at the time of writing (October 2021), I remain in awe of the achievements of LLARC's content creators. Their work in the space of age activism and broadcasting is exceptional in so many ways, representing older adults as connected, civically and digitally engaged change-makers. By raising awareness of the contributions of older adults to civic dialogue, the LLARC members lead the way towards a media sphere in which older adults advocate for themselves. Drawing on the opportunities created as part of the community radio sector, the LLARC represents a text-book example of how groups of older adults can leverage an existing infrastructure as part of their age-friendly efforts and establish new collaborations between community radio stations and older people's interests. This collaboration between the community radio sector and older activists was particularly important throughout 2020 and into 2021 in light of the predominantly negative public discourse on older adults that characterised the COVID-19 pandemic (Ayalon *et al.*, 2020). Commercial and public broadcasters valued local radio as a "lifeline" for older adults in lockdown isolation and the BBC gave away free radios to people over the age of 70 (BBC, 2020). However, whilst this effort has its merits, it also homogenises older adults as passive listeners rather than active creators of radio content, thereby contributing inadvertently to a discourse in which older adults were one of the main groups in society portrayed as frail or in need of a "lifeline". As a response, the LLARC and its associated community radio stations actively campaigned for a more diverse narrative, broadcasting conversations between the older LLARC members and experts from public health that gave room for a more differentiated discussion on ageing throughout the lockdown. Since the easing of lockdown in the UK, the LLARC continues its political participation to advocate for a broader representation of later life in radio and audio and to raise awareness for age-friendly topics.

Overall, the work presented in this thesis contributes to three key areas: (1) academic conceptualisations of digital citizenship in later life; (2) PAR as a method to support older adults' digital citizenship; and (3) implications of my research to inform age-friendly policy and practice with regard to considerations of digital participation as well as representations of older adults in society. These lines of thought have ample potential to be taken forward and I will now outline some future perspectives for researchers (including myself and my reflections on future interests) and practitioners aiming to make society more age-friendly.

7.2   Future perspectives

The research presented in this thesis is a first key step towards developing a more detailed understanding of older adults' civic participation in digital spaces. This has been a previously under-researched area in gerontology and HCI (Serrat, Scharf and Villar, 2021a), albeit one which gained increasing attention throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this thesis I presented an adaptation of Serrat *et al.*'s (2019) conceptualisation of later life civic participation, which includes a digital dimension. There are opportunities for future research to take this adapted framework further and investigate how we might adequately support older adults who wish to expand their civic contributions to embrace a digital component. Additionally, my research highlighted practical ways in which growing numbers of older adults can strengthen their digital citizenship. I will now outline what I regard as important next steps for researchers with reference to conceptual and methodological characteristics.

Despite the promising examples presented in this thesis concerning how digital citizenship development can happen through content creation activities, there is ample scope for future work to address this topic in greater depth. Even though I explored a variety of content creation activities with the Age Voice, most of my work focused on the production of community radio as a form of content creation that contributes to a civic purpose. My findings show that this might lead to further engagement with the production of other content, such as intentional support for the initial activity or as a by-product through increased digital skills. However, more data is needed from this PAR project over a longer period of time to consider the differences between the different types of media produced and how they link to the producers' civic participation. Even though some studies have explored other forms of content created by older people, such as blogs or YouTube (Sayago, Forbes and Blat, 2012; Celdran, Serrat and Villar, 2019), I have highlighted the potential for future research agendas to investigate these topics from a civic lens. The benefits of this are twofold: 1) to push the existing research agenda, especially in the field of HCI, beyond its current focus on social or health implications of digital technologies for older adults. This in turn would lead to: 2) strengthening the recognition of older adults as active digital citizens with political opinions. Considering the digital adaptation of Serrat *et al.*'s (2019) framework might be of interest in particular regarding international comparisons, for example between countries with different degrees of digitalisation. Additionally, getting more insight on differences between different types of content creation might also guide the design of future (participatory) digital media tools for older adults as an autonomous group of technology users. On the other hand, it might also lead to new considerations on the concept of "unplatformed design" (Lambton-Howard *et al.*, 2020), by

contributing perspectives on how older people make civic use of, or repurpose, existing social media technologies in their own ways and exploring the ways in which this contributes to the development of digital skills in later life. In addition, a future research agenda also needs to consider contrasting examples in which digital skills development might not arise from participation in content creation activities, similar to Waycott *et al.*'s (2016) efforts of investigating non-participation with social aspects of digital technologies. It is necessary that we continue to explore barriers to digital and civic participation, and their intersection, faced by an older population with increasingly diverse digital skills.

Barriers to older adults' digital citizenship might be rooted in other domains of social exclusion, such as defined by Walsh *et al.* (2017). Exploring how exclusion from civic participation might link to other forms of exclusion in a digitalised world should be of central consideration in contemporary society. Further insights could be achieved by enabling more projects with a participatory methodology, which can create in-depth insight and potentially enable change for those older adults who currently experience digital and civic exclusion, for example due to their gender or ethnicity. The goal of PAR to enable action and participation can be aligned with the inherent action of civic participatory activities (Trentham and Neysmith, 2018). I found that PAR as a methodological approach complemented my research on later life civic participation, as it allowed me to develop rich qualitative insights into the research topic whilst at the same time aligning with my activist mindset of using research to provoke change in communities. My personal research interest for the future builds on the work presented in this thesis. It lies in broadening my understanding of digital activism in later life and developing intergenerational participatory projects with civically minded older individuals or older people's forums that emphasise even more the principles of co-research, such as involving collaborators even more closely in all stages of the research process from inception through data collection and analysis to dissemination and impact.

In addition to taking the research presented in this thesis further with regard to civic and digital participation, there is ample scope for future research and public practice to consider how different digital technologies can support an increasingly diverse population of older adults in urban settings to engage with the age-friendly cities and communities agenda. Until now, a digital dimension is not sufficiently represented in the WHO framework for age-friendly cities and communities (Marston and Van Hoof, 2019), despite research highlighting the need to consider digital environments in implementations of age-friendliness (Liddle *et al.*, 2020). Moving beyond the predominantly needs-based narrative on ageing and assistive technologies

in age-friendly cities (Marston and Van Hoof, 2019) is key to achieving the objectives of the global age-friendly movement. My findings on digital content creation activities as a form of civic participation located the concept of digital citizenship within the age-friendly cities framework (World Health Organization, 2007b). This forms the foundation for a new research agenda on older adults as active digital citizens in age-friendly cities. In this context, it will be of particular interest to discover new and creative ways through which digital technologies can facilitate a dialogue with older residents and age-friendly city groups. Recent work that emphasised the need to develop age-friendly communities in collaboration with older adults focused on co-production as a method (Buffel, 2018). My findings from PAR extend this collaborative approach by considering digital technologies as facilitators of age-friendliness. My research located in the age-friendly city of Newcastle upon Tyne represents one model of how local communities can maximise digital opportunities in their AFC initiatives. These efforts have the potential to be considered on a country-wide level, supporting the digital work of older adults in their age-friendly initiatives. This is an exciting research agenda that necessarily cuts across scientific disciplines, engages with multiple methods of enquiry, and benefits from close collaboration between researchers and citizens.

7.3 Final Remarks

This thesis adapts an existing framework on later life civic participation to incorporate a digital dimension, highlighting the importance of older adults achieving digital citizenship. In light of the increasing digitalisation of civic life, not least within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, this timely research points out a need to reconceptualise how the intersection of the topics of ageing, civic participation and digitalisation is currently represented in research and public discourse. Engaging with participatory action research enabled my collaborators and myself to change the existing narrative. We did this by envisioning and creating new ways in which older adults can represent and advocate for themselves in digital media spaces. Putting the creation of digital content in the centre of this work, we explored ways in which diverse voices of older adults can be heard more widely. LLARC was established as an outcome of this research, connecting older radio show hosts, age-friendly community radio stations, third sector organisations, local authorities and researchers as a network that aims to realise our visions of a more diverse societal representation of older adults in alternative broadcasting. Within this network of stakeholders, digital technologies can be seen as mediators between different types of civic participation, bridging social and political spaces within a civic activity and empowering older adults to have a voice in digital spaces. In a more fundamental way, shifting the awareness towards older adults as active creators of community content, rather than as

passive listeners, can challenge ageism on a societal level. Within the context of ageing societies, recognising older adults as digital citizens who actively shape their communities will be of future interest to cities and communities across the world that share the aim of becoming more age-friendly.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Collaboration agreement with Age Voice

Throughout my PhD across Open Lab and the Institute of Health and Society at Newcastle University, I will be looking at participatory and media technologies and how they can facilitate the process of civic participation in later life. This involves exploring existing engagement of older adults with those technologies, barriers and facilitators of engaging with those technologies in later life and the potential of exploring new technologies.

For this project, I propose a continued collaboration with the Age Voice, in particular with the communications team. Building on the existing collaboration and initial talks, this document will outline a possible structure of the collaboration.

Working cycles

My first working cycle can involve a phase of familiarisation with the teams through meetings, discussions and observations as well as working directly within the teams. This is done to ensure that our work is aligned with the Age Voice's goals and interests. We can observe existing workflows and explore general ideas, aims and challenges that the groups face. However, I want to emphasise that the underpinning idea for this project is a co-design process oriented on the Age Voice's needs and that this is a flexible process.

The second working cycle will be a hands-on process, which might lead to the development of sustainable workflows for the teams or the exploration of using new kinds of participatory media as a means to present the message of the Age Voice.

This can involve

- a continued support in the use of the Radio Grabber tool and further engagement with the Age Voice radio team to investigate ways in which they can engage their listeners more widely
- workshops to rethink ways in which the message/content of the Age Voice can be promoted more publicly and widespread

We are happy to advise on other matters related to the Age Voice's online presence.

My PhD project is supervised by:

Professor Thomas Scharf
Newcastle University Institute for Ageing
E-mail: Thomas.scharf@ncl.ac.uk
Telephone: 01912085329

Appendix B: Example interview schedule

1. Tell me how you got the idea to start a radio show / how you got involved with radio.

2. What is the history of the show?

3. The link to co-operatives?

4. What do you do in terms of promoting your show? Social media?

5. Governance: is there a group supporting this show?

6. How much is it dependent on you as an individual?

7. How do you create content? What does an example schedule look like?

8. Re-listen? Podcasting? Content access and do you know about your audience?

Appendix C: Data overview and origins

Continuous alongside cycles 1-4: Interviews (audio recorded and transcribed)

PAR cycle 1: September 2018 - January 2019

Collaboration agreement & action: exploring the Age Voice's media landscape

Data origin / collection method: Media mapping workshop

List of data:
- audio recordings (transcribed)
- workshop field notes
- map of media landscape

PAR cycle 2: February - September 2019

Designing an improved communications strategy

Data origin / collection: Design workshops and embedded research

List of data:
- workshop field notes and observations

PAR cycle 4: October 2019

Launching newsletter

Data origin / collection: Embedded research

List of Data:
- field notes about the launch process and audience statistics

PAR cycle 3: March - April 2019

Research through Design: Older people's voices in the market

Data origin / collection:
- research through design: informal discussions, structured ideation (user scenarios approach)
- market engagement

List of data:
- field notes capturing observations & quotes throughout planning stage and market engagement
- postcards collected at the market

PAR cycle 5: ongoing throughout 2019

Exploring radio shows produced by older adults

Data origin / collection:
- reaching out to radio stations
- visits

List of data:
- interviews (audio recorded and transcribed)
- field notes

PAR cycle 6: October 2019

Radio Festival

Data origin / collection:
- discussions:
open-ended and facilitated (technology cards)

List of data:
- transcripts of discussions

PAR cycle 7: from October 2019 onward

Taking the LLARC network forward

Data origin / collection:
- embedded research within LLARC

List of data:
- field notes from 34 LLARC meetings
- contextual materials (e.g. written statements)

Appendix D: Ethical approval

University Ethics Form Version 2.1.1

Date submitted
08/11/2018 14:32:03

Applicant Details

Is this approval for a:
Student Project [A2]

What type of degree programme is being studied?
Postgraduate Research (e.g. PhD) [A3]

Name of Principal Researcher:
Arlind Reuter

Please enter your email address
a.reuter2@ncl.ac.uk

Please select your school / academic unit
Institute of Health & Society (IH&S) [A27]

Please enter the module code

Please enter your supervisors email:
thomas.scharf@ncl.ac.uk

Please select your supervisor's school/unit:
Institute of Health & Society (IH&S) [A27]

Project Details

Project Title
Digital and Participatory Media Technologies for Civic Participation in Later Life

Project Synopsis
This PhD aims to articulate how the use of digital and participatory media technologies can support older adults' civic participation. This project will enhance our understanding of older adults' diverse experiences and interactions with technologies. Through long-term engagement with a local organisation of older adults in Newcastle, I will investigate how older adults can use and interact with digital technologies in meaningful ways to increase civic participation and support their organisational purposes in order to have their voices heard in their community. Taking on a participatory action research approach, we will identify the design challenges around using community media for civic participation in later life and consequently explore the potential for the integration of new workflows.

Project start date
26/11/2018

Project end date
21/09/2022

Is the project externally funded?
Yes - I have a MyProjects reference number [A1]

MyProjects reference
KH135377

Does your project involve collaborators outside of the University?
Yes [Y]

Please provide a list of the collaborating organisations?
████████████

Existing Ethics, Sponsorship & Responsibility

Has ethical approval to cover this proposal already been obtained?
No [N]

Will anyone be acting as sponsor under the NHS Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care?
No [N]

Do you have a Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals (NUTH) reference?
No [N]

Will someone other than you (the principal investigator) or your supervisor (for student projects) be responsible for the conduct, management and design of the research?
No [N]

The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act defines protected animals as: 'any living vertebrate other than man…in its foetal, larval or embryonic form……from the stage of its development when— (a)in the case of a mammal, bird or reptile, half the gestation or incubation period for the relevant species has elapsed; and (b)in any other case, it becomes capable of independent feeding'. In practice 'Protected' animals are all living vertebrates (other than man), including some immature forms, and cephalopods (e.g. octopus, squid, cuttlefish). Using this definition, does your research involve the observation, capture or manipulation of animals or their tissues?
No [N]

Will the study involve participants recruited by virtue of being NHS patients or service users, their dependents, their carers or human tissues or the use of NHS & Health/Social Care Facilities or otherwise require REC approval?
No [N]

Does the research involve human participants e.g. use of questionnaires, focus groups, observation, surveys or lab-based studies involving human participants?
Yes [Y]

Does the study involve any of the following? [a. The study involves children or other vulnerable groups; including those who are relatively or absolutely incapable of protecting their own interests, or those in unequal relationships e.g. participants who are subordinate to the researcher(s) in a context outside the research?]

Does the study involve any of the following? [b. The study requires the co-operation of a gatekeeper (defined as someone who can exert undue influence) for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited e.g. students at school, members of a self-help group, or residents of a nursing home? NB. The IoN & School of Psychology volunteer pools are not considered gatekeepers in this case.]

Does the study involve any of the following? [c. It is necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places?]

Does the study involve any of the following? [d. Deliberately misleading participants in any way?]

Does the study involve any of the following? [e. Discussion of sensitive topics e.g. sexual activity or drug use?]

Does the study involve any of the following? [f. The administration of drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to the study participants.]

Does the study involve any of the following? [g. Invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?*]

Does the study involve any of the following? [h. Obtaining blood or tissue samples?*]

Does the study involve any of the following? [i. Pain or more than mild discomfort?]

Does the study involve any of the following? [j. Psychological stress, anxiety, harm or negative consequences beyond that encountered in normal life?]

Does the study involve any of the following? [k. Prolonged or repetitive testing i.e. more than 4 hours commitment or attendance on more than two occasions?]

Does the study involve any of the following? [l. Financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time)?]

Does the research involve the viewing, usage or transfer of sensitive data or personal data as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) or data governed by statute such as the Official Secrets Act 1989 / Terrorism Act 2006, commercial contract or by convention e.g. client confidentiality? (If you are unsure please tick YES and complete the sub-questions).

No [N]

Will the study cause direct or indirect damage to the environment or emissions outside permissible levels or be conducted in an Area of Special Scientific Interest or which is of cultural significance?

No [N]

Will the research be conducted outside of the European Economic Area (EEA) or will it involve international collaborators outside the EEA?

No [N]

Next Steps

Based on your responses your project has been categorised as (ethically) low risk and no further review is required before you start work. You will receive a formal approval email on submission of this form. Should your project change you may need to apply for new ethical approval.

Supporting Documentation

Please upload any documents (not uploaded elsewhere in the application) which you think are relevant to the consideration of your application.

PhD%20Proposal%20Arlind%20Reuter.pdf (193.198KB) -

filecount - Please upload any documents (not uploaded elsewhere in the application) which you think are relevant to the consideration of your application.

1

Thank you for completing the University's Ethical Review Form. Based on your answers the University is satisfied that your project has met its ethical expectations and grants its ethical approval. Please be aware that if you make any significant changes to your project then you should complete this form again as further review may be required. Confirmation of this decision will be emailed to you. Please complete the declaration to submit your application.

Declaration

I certify that:

[the information contained within this application is accurate.]

Yes [Y]

Thank you for completing the University's Ethical Review Form. Based on your answers the University is satisfied that your project has met its ethical expectations and grants its ethical approval. Please be aware that if you make any significant changes to your project then you should complete this form again as further review may be required. Confirmation of this decision will be emailed to you. Please complete the declaration to submit your application.

Declaration

I certify that:

[the research will be undertaken in line with all appropriate, University, legal and local standards and regulations.]

Yes [Y]

Thank you for completing the University's Ethical Review Form. Based on your answers the University is satisfied that your project has met its ethical expectations and grants its ethical approval. Please be aware that if you make any significant changes to your project then you should complete this form again as further review may be required. Confirmation of this decision will be emailed to you. Please complete the declaration to submit your application.

Declaration

I certify that:

[I have attempted to identify the risks that may arise in conducting this research and acknowledge my obligation to (and rights of) any participants.]

Yes [Y]

Thank you for completing the University's Ethical Review Form. Based on your answers the University is satisfied that your project has met its ethical expectations and grants its ethical approval. Please be aware that if you make any significant changes to your project then you should complete this form again as further review may be required. Confirmation of this decision will be emailed to you. Please complete the declaration to submit your application.

Declaration

I certify that:

[no work will begin until all appropriate permissions are in place.]

Yes [Y]

Subject: Ethics Form Completed for Project: Digital and Participatory Media Technologies for Civic Participation in Later Life KH135377

Date: Thursday, 8 November 2018 at 14:32:03 Central European Standard Time

From: Policy & Information Team, Newcastle University

To: Arlind Reuter (PGR)

Ref: 8659/2018

Thank you for submitting the ethical approval form for the project 'Digital and Participatory Media Technologies for Civic Participation in Later Life' (Lead Investigator:Arlind Reuter). Expected to run from 26/11/2018 to 21/09/2022.

Based on your answers the University Ethics Committee grants its approval for your project to progress. Please be aware that if you make any significant changes to your project then you should complete this form again as further review may be required. If you have any queries please contact res.policy@ncl.ac.uk

Best wishes

Policy & Information Team, Newcastle University Research Office

res.policy@ncl.ac.uk

Appendix E: Information and consent form for interviews

Open Lab
at Newcastle University

<u>**RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET**</u>

Please read this information sheet carefully and ask as many questions as you like, before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study. Please feel free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research.

WHO IS THE RESEARCHER and WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH?

I am Arlind Reuter, a doctoral trainee in Digital Civics based at Open Lab, Newcastle University. This research is part of my PhD project. My supervisors are Professor Thomas Scharf (Institute for Ageing), Dr Jennifer Liddle (Institute for Health and Society) and Dr Jan Smeddinck (Open Lab). We are interested in civic participation in later life in general. In this project, we would like to know more about how people engage with the use of different media for their organisational purposes.

WHAT AM I ASKING YOU TO DO?
I am asking you to participate in an interview, where I will ask questions related to your involvement with the age-friendly city group. You are free to choose whether or not to participate in this study and can withdraw from the research at any time.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?
The findings from the study contribute directly to my PhD thesis and may also be presented at scientific meetings or published in reports or scientific journals.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?
Your participation in this research will contribute to research studies around the important topic of civic participation in later life using digital and participatory media, a newly emerging research field.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND STORAGE OF YOUR DATA

I would like to audio record the interviews, workshops and meetings in order to transcribe (type up) and analyse them. I may use direct quotations from you when I report findings from the study. However, all interviews can be pseudonymised, so that all identifiable information is removed, if you wish so. I would also like to take photographs; however you are free to opt out and I will make sure no photograph with you is taken. All data collected will be stored securely on password protected computers at Newcastle University. Any printed copies of data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at Newcastle University. The data will only be accessed by myself and my supervisors. The data will also be submitted to University internal and external examiners for assessment purposes.

WITHDRAWAL OF YOUR DATA

You can exit from the research at any time without explanation or can ask me to temporarily stop the interviews or workshops if necessary.

Please notice that after a certain point it will be impossible to withdraw any data collected from the research, for instance after the results are published. Therefore, I strongly encourage you to contact me within a month of participation if you wish to withdraw.

If you have any **further questions** please don't hesitate to contact me:

> **Arlind Reuter**
> OpenLab Newcastle University
> 1 Science Square, Science Central
> E-mail : a.reuter2@ncl.ac.uk
> OpenLab telephone: 0191 2084630

Or my supervisor:

> Professor **Thomas Scharf**
> Newcastle University Institute for Ageing
> E-mail: Thomas.scharf@ncl.ac.uk
> Telephone: 01912085329

Thank you for reading this information sheet!

Open Lab
at Newcastle University

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in this study. I can confirm that (please initial):

- I have read the information sheet & have had the opportunity to ask questions

- I understand how the data will be collected, used and stored

- I understand that the research findings may be used in publications/reports

- I voluntarily agree to take part in this research and understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without needing to say why. If so, my information will be removed from the study. However, I understand that it will not be possible to withdraw my information after one month following the end of the study.

Signature   …………………………………………. Date ………………

Name in capitals …………………………………………