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Irish Centre for Social Gerontology

Developing an age-friendly county in Fingal, Ireland: Older people's lived experience of place and age-friendliness

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Outline of Presentation

- Background to the development of the national Age-friendly Cities and Counties programme in Ireland
- Findings from a doctoral study completed in 2018 on the lived experience of older people in two urban areas
- Some implications for theory, policy and practice related to ageing and place and creating age-friendly cities and communities



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Ireland's National Age-friendly Programme

- **WHO** - Active Ageing Policy Framework in 2002; WHO Age-Friendly Cities guidelines in 2007; WHO Global Network Age-friendly Cities and Communities in 2010 - (937 cities and communities; 12 affiliated programmes including Irish national age-friendly programme; 41 countries; >240 million people).
- In **Ireland**, national age-friendly community programme piloted in 2009; now in all 31 Local Authority areas; in 2019 declared age-friendly country
- **Fingal Age-friendly County** programme established in 2011; age-friendly strategy for 2012-2017 published and now in second five-year plan



Age-friendly Community Process in Four Steps

1

START

- Get agreement – Local Authority & other agencies
- Get political buy-in
- Form Inter-Agency Alliance
- Launch Programme

2

CONSULT

- **Hold consultations with older people**
- Consult key players
- Collect key data
- **Set up Older People's Council**

4

ACT

- Begin implementation
- Monitor & review

3

PLAN

- **Complete Strategy based on consultation findings**
- **Launch Strategy**
- **Affiliate to WHO**



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WHO Age-friendly Cities Guide (2007) - eight domains



The Research Study

Research Question - Does the Age-friendly County Programme as implemented in Fingal adequately reflect the lived experience of older residents?

- Investigate older people's lived experiences of ageing in Fingal
- Explore the development of the Fingal Age-friendly County programme

Research Design – Qualitative , mixed method case study

- **Data Collection** - intensive interviews with **fourteen older people** (sit-down and 'walk and talk'; repeat interviews two years later) and semi-structured interviews with sixteen local, national and international stakeholders
- **Sampling** – older people was purposive (age; location; gender; 'out-and-about'; place of origin) and theoretical; stakeholders was purposive (policymaking role)
- **Data analysis** – **Constructivist grounded theory** (Charmaz ,2014) for interviews with older people; thematic analysis (Rapley, 2011) for stakeholder interviews.
- **Research panel** of older adults



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Introducing two older people who live in Fingal and relationship with place

(**Margaret**, age 86; former carer of her husband; widow of six months; mother and grandmother; lives alone)

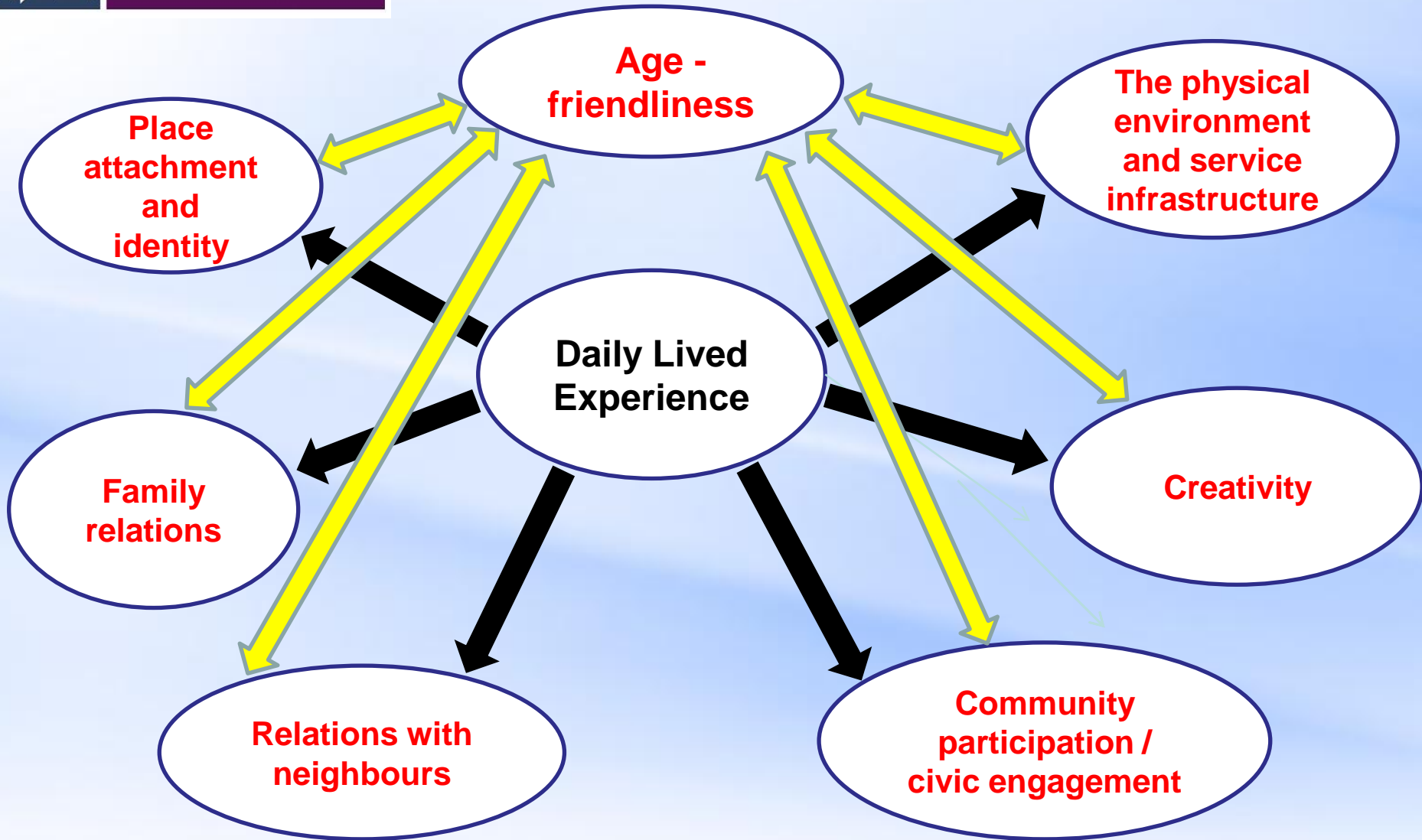
I sometimes feel desperately lonely... there've been so many deaths on this road ... all my own generation is gone; people no longer have the slightest interest in me ... Ten years ago I identified with Swords ... now I no longer belong here ... it means nothing to me now.

(**Martin**, age 82; married; main carer for his wife; father and grandfather)

I'm not really that connected on account of my background you know, my own work background as a merchant seaman. I was used to not being too connected ... No, no I've no desire to be more connected ... I don't want to be the most popular person in town ... If someone said to me would you like to be captain of the golf club I'd say: for fuck sake give me a break.



Older people's relationship with place – major thematic areas (e.g. Margaret and Martin)





Model of Person-Place Relations and Creating Age-friendly Communities

- Dynamic – people change (significant life-course transitions e.g. bereavement; major changes in health status; retirement)
- Place change – development of public spaces; economic recession; public policy shifts
- Person-place relations is emergent rather than static; consisting of intersecting rather than discrete ‘themes’; psychosocial as well as physical



Findings of the empirical study	WHO eight-domain conceptual model
Place attachment	Not recognised in the WHO model
Active involvement in creative activities	Not recognised in the WHO model
Relations with family	Limited recognition in the WHO model
Relations with neighbours	Limited recognition in the WHO model
Civic engagement activities	Extensive recognition in the WHO model, but with different emphasis to the study findings
Physical-spatial and service environment	Extensive recognition in the WHO model, with similar emphasis to the study findings



The WHO age-friendly conceptual framework and the lived experience of older people in Fingal

Current study indicates need for a cautious, critical use of WHO model for age-friendly planning purposes. While it:

- has capacity to reflect some elements of lived experience of older people e.g. domains related to physical environment and service infrastructure - Outdoor spaces and buildings, Transportation, and Community support and health services

However, it also:

- has limitations, sometimes due to different focus e.g. evidence of influence of retirement and bereavement on civic participation
- fails to capture socio-culturally significant aspects of lived experience identified in study – place attachment, family relations, relations with neighbours, and creativity
- finds it difficult to capture the dynamic nature of ageing in place (changes in people and changes in environment over time) or the diversity of experience of older people related to intrapersonal factors and life-course transitions and events (same space experienced as different place)



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Same space different place 'the exercise machine'



- Outdoor exercise machine in wrong place ...'too public'
- Islands evoked memories of place of origin in West of Ireland
- Play equipment for pre-school children
- Evidence of older people not being listened to in planning decisions



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The WHO age-friendly ‘movement’ and reducing old-age social exclusion – a sample of questions

Is there a need for closer links to be developed between age-friendly and place-based social exclusion research?

How can the lived experience of older people be brought to the centre of the age-friendly planning process?

What is the role of critical evaluation research in the age-friendly ‘movement’, and how can it be promoted and supported?

Děkuji za pozornost!

Thank you for your attention!

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