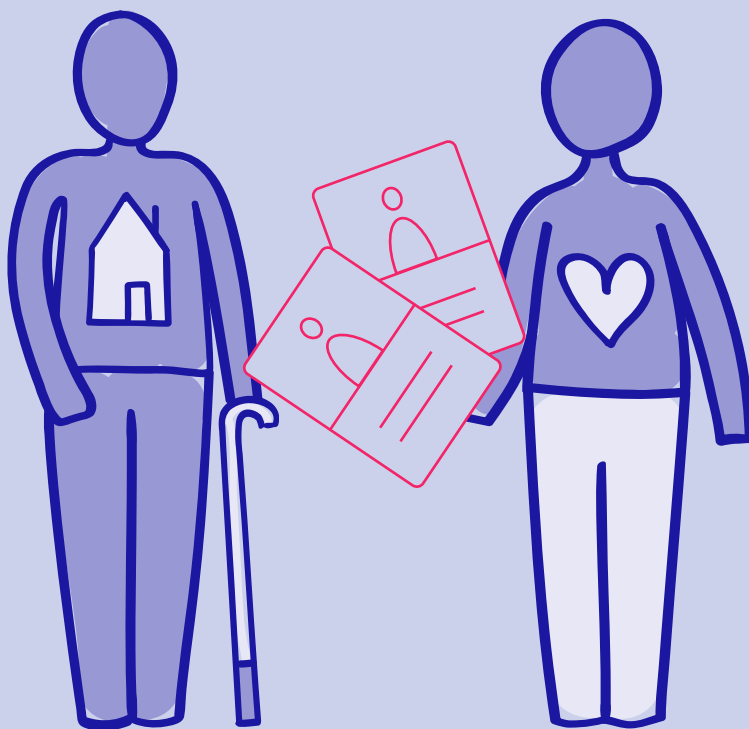


# Let's bond! Fostering social connection for older adults in Twente

A **conversation game** for the homebound older adults and their trusted contacts.



By Emmelie Huisman

**Master thesis**

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May 2025



**UNIVERSITY  
OF TWENTE.**

**Let's bond! Fostering social connection for  
older adults in Twente**

# Preface

I truly enjoyed working on this project and feel proud of both the process and the result. I would like to thank the people who supported me along the way with their guidance, expertise, and help with testing.

In particular, I want to thank Carmen, Jet, and Silvia, the three village supporters who took on the role of key actors. My gratitude also goes to P.J. Stappers, C. Hao, and J. Sturge for their supervision and encouragement. And to the team at Trimotion, thank you for providing me with a workspace, it made a real difference.

## Personal motivation

This project brought together my

personal interests in early design exploration, psychology, and designing for well-being. I was eager to begin and genuinely enjoyed the journey.

My motivation for this project is deeply personal. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I saw how isolation affected my grandparents, who spent weeks in a nursing home without visitors. Our phone calls helped, but the lack of real connection clearly impacted their well-being. That experience sparked my desire to explore health-related challenges like social connection and contribute to meaningful solutions.

This project is part of a larger initiative that uses the concept of *positive health*,

a framework that truly resonates with me. I'm someone who naturally looks for potential and growth, rather than focusing only on illness or what's going wrong. I believe everyone deserves the chance to improve their life by building on their strengths and with this thesis I hope to encourage others to adopt this perspective as well.

It frustrates me when people with unmet but less visible needs are overlooked. In this project, that often means older adults who long for connection but remain unnoticed. I want to support them in taking ownership of their lives, offering tools that foster confidence and self-direction, so they can find the connections they seek. Having lived in Twente for the past seven years, I feel especially connected to this region.

### Personal learning goals

I started this project with a few personal development goals in mind.

One was to become more comfortable sharing my work and inviting feedback, something I've found challenging in the past. Throughout the project, I talked about it with colleagues over lunch, with friends, and with family. Those conversations provided fresh perspectives and helped me reflect more deeply on both the process and the

product. I'd like to thank everyone who listened, asked critical questions, and helped elevate my work.

Another personal goal was to ensure that the outcomes of this thesis don't end up gathering dust on a shelf, a common fate for many student design projects, even when they show great potential. From the start, I focused on involving people who could serve as key actors (the village supporters), to give the results a real chance to live on and reach the community. The enthusiastic responses I've received give me confidence that this work will continue to live on in Twente, especially through the dedication of the village supporters.

Finally, I discovered how helpful simple visuals can be when I struggled to put ideas to words. Learning to communicate my story visually not only helped me explain the project to others but also helped me understand it more clearly myself. That's why I'm especially proud of this thesis report and its visual design.

I hope you enjoy reading this thesis as much as I enjoyed creating it! :)

Emmelie

# Summary

This design project, *“Let’s Bond! Fostering social connection for older adults in Twente”*, set out to enhance the well-being of older adults by fostering a greater sense of connectedness. Rather than tackling loneliness directly, an approach often associated with stigma, the project reframed the challenge through the lens of the **Positive Health** framework, focusing instead on older adults’ strengths, and sources of meaning in life. This shift allowed for a more inviting, empowering design process, rooted in the values and lived experiences of the people it aimed to serve.

To understand these experiences, a combination of interviews, contextmapping techniques, and literature studies was used.

Contextmapping revealed implicit knowledge, social values and prompted personal reflection, shaping both process and outcome. Theoretical guidance from the Positive Health framework supported the focus on intrinsic motivation and well-being, anchoring the project in an ethical and person-centered approach.

Initial research showed that older adults value a **meaningful life**, as well as **casual**, and **personal** interactions. Cultural characteristics specific to the Twente region, such as straightforward communication and the importance of trust, also emerged as key considerations.

These insights led to a collaboration with three local **village supporters**, whose role is to enhance village life by

informally supporting both residents and the community. Through this key actor, a more specific design focus emerged: supporting **homebound older adults**, those who feel disconnected, yet remain in their small circles and are difficult to reach through existing initiatives.

The final design outcome is a **conversation-based card game** titled “Wat maakt je blij?” (“What makes you happy?”), created for use between homebound older adults and their **trusted contacts**. It invites players to reflect on their strengths, interests, and meaningful life experiences, encouraging emotional connection and potential actions without imposing a “helping” dynamic. Informed by multiple design iterations and playtests, the game avoids feelings of being childish or therapeutic, offering a casual, low-pressure, warm space for personal discovery and reflection.

Evaluation results showed that:

- Participants felt more **emotionally connected** during gameplay, suggesting the game can deepen existing relationships and open paths to social engagement with the help of co-player encouragements.
- While it did not directly lead to new

social activities, it prompted small, **self-driven actions** that supported well-being, such as calling a friend or revisiting a hobby.

- The village supporters also saw the game as a valuable **tool for healthcare**, appreciating how it gently encourages players to reflect positively on their lives.

Thus, the game promotes emotional connection and positive personal reflection. Despite its promise, the game’s long-term impact on sustained social connectedness remains uncertain. Further testing may provide more clarity. Its success also depends heavily on how it is introduced, framing must avoid implying the older adult “needs help.” Future implementation should equip facilitators with language and strategies to invite participation in an empowering way.

The project highlights the power of design to create tools that do not fix people, but instead open up space for self-driven exploration, joy, and human connection.

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction

Background, problem statement, design and research intentions and overview of the thesis structure.

Chapter 1 introduces the background and context of the thesis project, including its connection to the broader Citizen Science initiative in Twente. It outlines the key actors involved, defines the problem of loneliness among older adults, and presents the design and research intentions that guide this work. The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis structure.

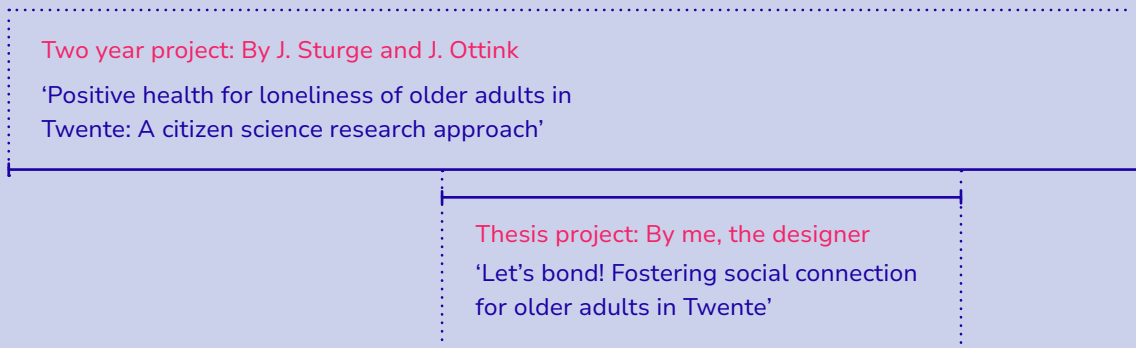


Fig. 1: How this thesis is part of a two year project.

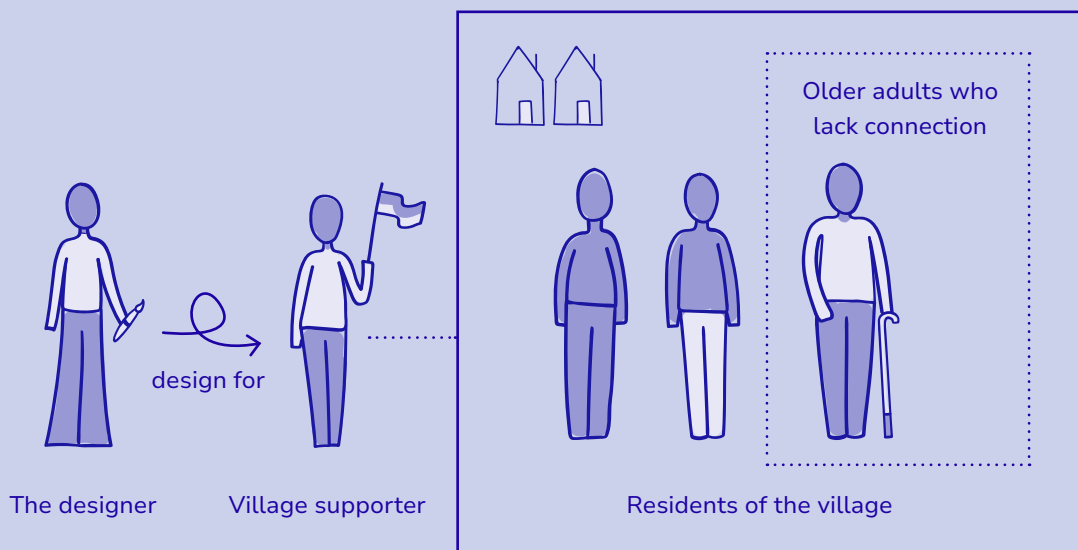


Fig. 2: How the designer can reach the older adults who experience a lack of connection.

# 01 Background and key actor

The thesis project '*Let's bond! Fostering social connection for older adults in Twente*' (see Fig. 3 on p. 16) is part of a larger project for the Citizen Science Hub Twente at the University of Twente, named '*Positive health for loneliness of older adults in Twente: A citizen science research approach*', see Fig. 1.

## Citizen Science Hub Twente

The Citizen Science Hub Twente is one of several citizen science hubs established across Europe in 2023. These hubs aim to bridge the gap between researchers and the general public, fostering collaboration and exchange knowledge. A key focus is the integration of practical knowledge (gathered from citizens), policy insights, and academic research.

Within the Citizen Science Hub Twente, the *Civic & Citizen Science* program was established, supported by funding from the Province of Overijssel, the University of Twente, and the hub itself. This program includes multiple projects that explore collaborative research between scientists and citizens. One such initiative is the two-year project "*Positive Health for loneliness of older adults in Twente: A citizen science research approach*." This thesis project is a part of that larger initiative.

## The client

The project is a collaboration between researcher Jodi Sturge from the University of Twente and Jeroen Ottink, who works closely with citizens in Twente through organizations such as *IkkanWElzijn*, *Samen1Enschede*, and *Samen1Twente*. Jodi brings academic expertise in healthcare systems research with a focus on human interaction with the built environment and technology. Jeroen has been actively involved in addressing loneliness in Enschede and the broader Twente region since 2018.

## Key actor

The client does not have an existing, ongoing relationship with older adults and are therefore unfit to serve as a bridge to those experiencing a lack of social connection. During this project, I came into contact with three village supporters (*dorpsondersteuners*) in Twente. Their role is to enhance the quality of life in their villages by informally supporting both residents and the local community. We share a common goal of supporting older adults in their villages. As a result, these three village supporters have become the key actors in this project thesis (see Fig. 2).

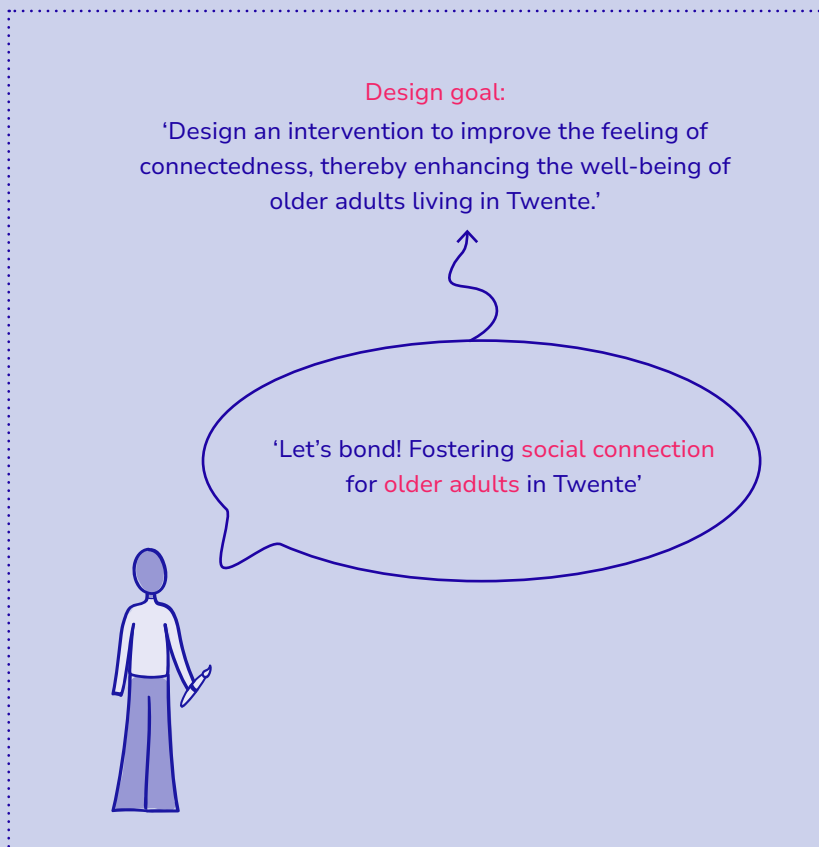


Fig. 3: The goal of this thesis.

## 02 Problem statement

### I. Why focus on connectedness?

A lack of social connectedness often leads to feelings of loneliness. Research on loneliness in the Netherlands has revealed alarming statistics. In 2022, the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS et al., 2023) that approximately **50% of the adult population (18 years and older) reported experiencing loneliness**, 34% feeling moderately lonely and 14% severely lonely. Since the inception of these studies in 2012, which are conducted every four years, a growing trend in loneliness has been observed (CBS et al., 2023).

Loneliness is a highly personal and subjective experience. Individuals assess their own loneliness based on their personal evaluation of their social interactions, including the number of contacts, the depth of relationships, and the frequency of social engagements (Van Tilburg & De Jong Gierveld, 2007).

People become lonely for various reasons, such as shrinking social circles, a decline in meaningful interactions (van Tilburg & Klok, 2018), personality traits, health problems or genetic predispositions (Spithoven et al., 2019). Often, multiple factors contribute to loneliness. While some people experience loneliness temporarily and

are motivated to seek new connections (Nikitin & Freund, 2017), others become trapped in passivity and lowered expectations (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018).

Loneliness has significant negative effects on health. Chronic loneliness can increase stress levels, raising the risk of cardiovascular diseases (Paul et al., 2021). It can also negatively impact perception, leading to feelings of shame and fear of rejection, which in turn make it more difficult to form new relationships (Cheeta et al., 2021). Additionally, loneliness has been linked to an increased risk of dementia (Lara et al., 2019), heart disease (Hodgson et al., 2020), strokes (Valtorta et al., 2016), depression (Dahlberg et al., 2021), and suicidal thoughts (Beutel et al., 2017). Ultimately, loneliness can contribute to increased mortality rates (Rico-Uribe et al., 2018).

Humans have an evolutionary need for social connection, essential for both survival and well-being. Social relationships offer emotional support, meaning, and recognition (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The “Belongingness Hypothesis” posits that people strive for stable, meaningful relationships that enhance emotional resilience. Social bonds also play a vital role in reducing

stress and fostering adaptability through mutual support (Grinde, 2024; Agashe et al., 2021). Connection, therefore, is foundational to human development and resilience.

Ch. 2, Par. 1 delves deeper into the types of loneliness and analyzes existing initiatives to combat loneliness.

### II. Why focus on older adults?

Social isolation and loneliness are particularly problematic in old age due to several factors:

- An aging population: The number of older adults is increasing, making this a growing societal issue (WHO, 2024).
- Staying at home longer: More seniors stay to live independently rather than move to nursing homes, which increases the risk of social isolation (Sundström et al., 2009).
- Decreasing social and economic resources: Older adults may experience shifts in their social environments due to these changes (Courtin & Knapp, 2015).
- Functional limitations: Mobility issues and declining health can limit social interactions (Courtin & Knapp, 2015).
- Loss of loved ones: The passing of

spouses and close friends reduces available social support (Courtin & Knapp, 2015).

- Changes in family structures: Families are more geographically dispersed, making regular visits less frequent (Courtin & Knapp, 2015).

Loneliness is not always visible. Since it is subjective, individuals require different levels of interaction, frequency, and depth to feel socially fulfilled (Van Tilburg & De Jong Gierveld, 2007).

Many older adults may still have social contacts but still experience loneliness if these interactions lack depth. As a result, the severity of loneliness among older adults is often underestimated.

#### *Older adults in Twente*

The project is aimed at older adults in the Twente region. I find this particularly motivating, as I have lived in Twente for many years myself.



Design goal:

'Design an intervention to improve the feeling of connectedness, thereby enhancing the well-being of older adults living in Twente.'

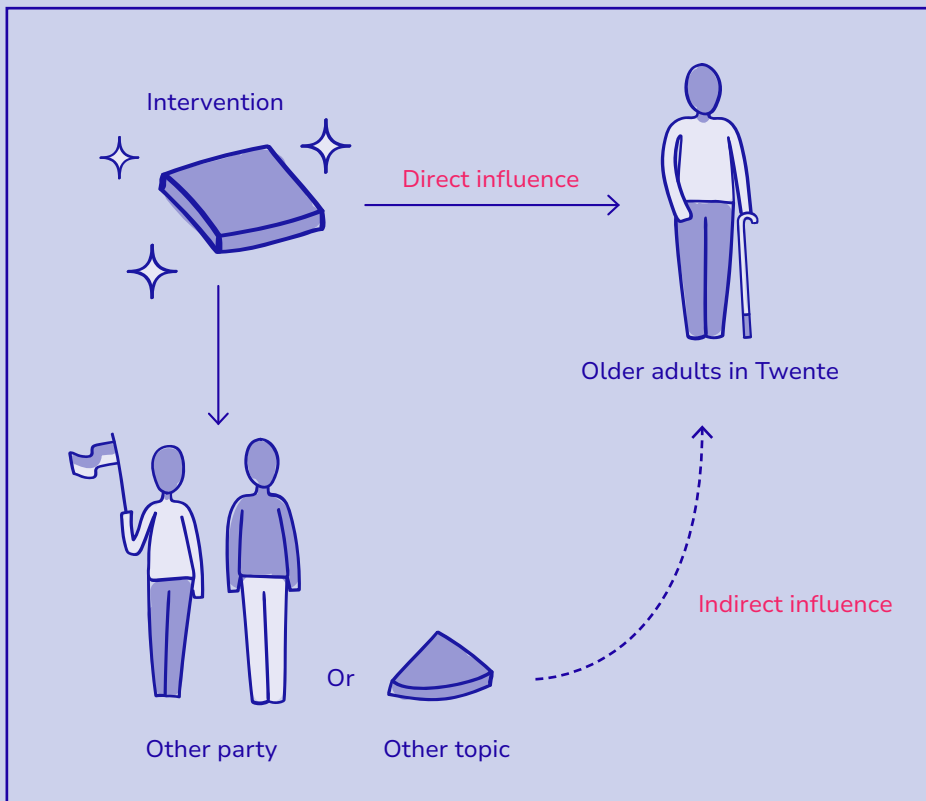


Fig. 4: The intervention can have a direct or indirect effect on the increased feeling of connectedness of the older adults.

## 03 Design and research intentions

### I. Design intention

The overarching project follows the *Positive Health* approach, a modern perspective in healthcare that emphasizes strengths and possibilities rather than focusing on deficits or illness (Huber, 2014). This mindset influenced the framing of this thesis, shifting the focus from loneliness to fostering social connectedness, in line with the principles of Positive Health.

*The primary design goal:*

**'Design an intervention to improve the feeling of connectedness, thereby enhancing the well-being of older adults living in Twente.'**

The aim is to help older adults in Twente who experience a lack of connection to feel more connected. This will be achieved through designing an intervention, which at this point can be anything from a product, service, method, system, tool, or platform.

The intervention may directly support older adults or assist them indirectly through other parties (e.g. the key actor, networks) or other supportive pathways (e.g., improving health or happiness as a means to strengthen connections), see Fig. 4.

### II. Research intention

#### Main research question

'What kind of intervention can be designed to enhance the social connectedness of older adults in Twente (1), focusing on strengths rather than deficits (2)?'

#### Sub-research questions

1. What do older adults in Twente value in social interactions, and what challenges do they face in maintaining relationships?  
→ Literature research + Interviews
2. How can the principles of Positive Health be applied effectively? This concept also ensures an ethical approach to addressing loneliness.  
→ Literature research + Interviews about Positive Health

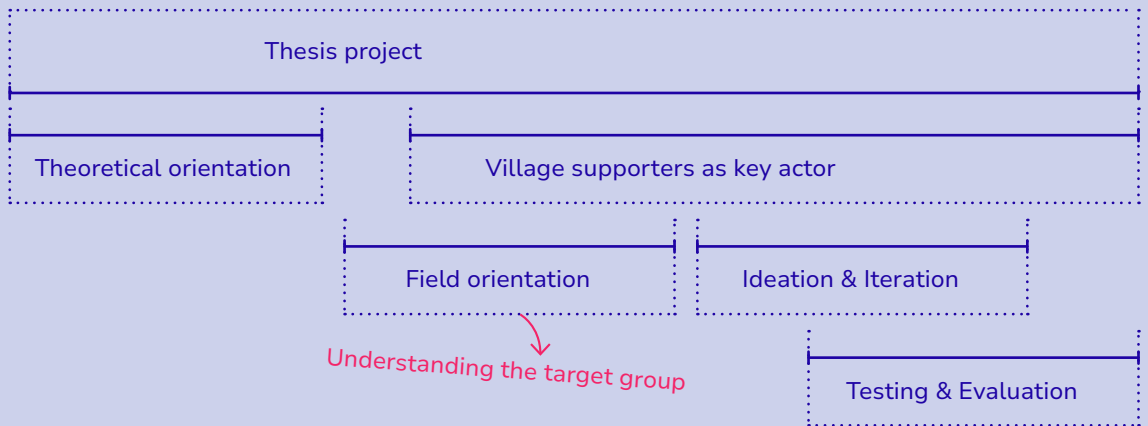


Fig. 5: The structure of the thesis project.

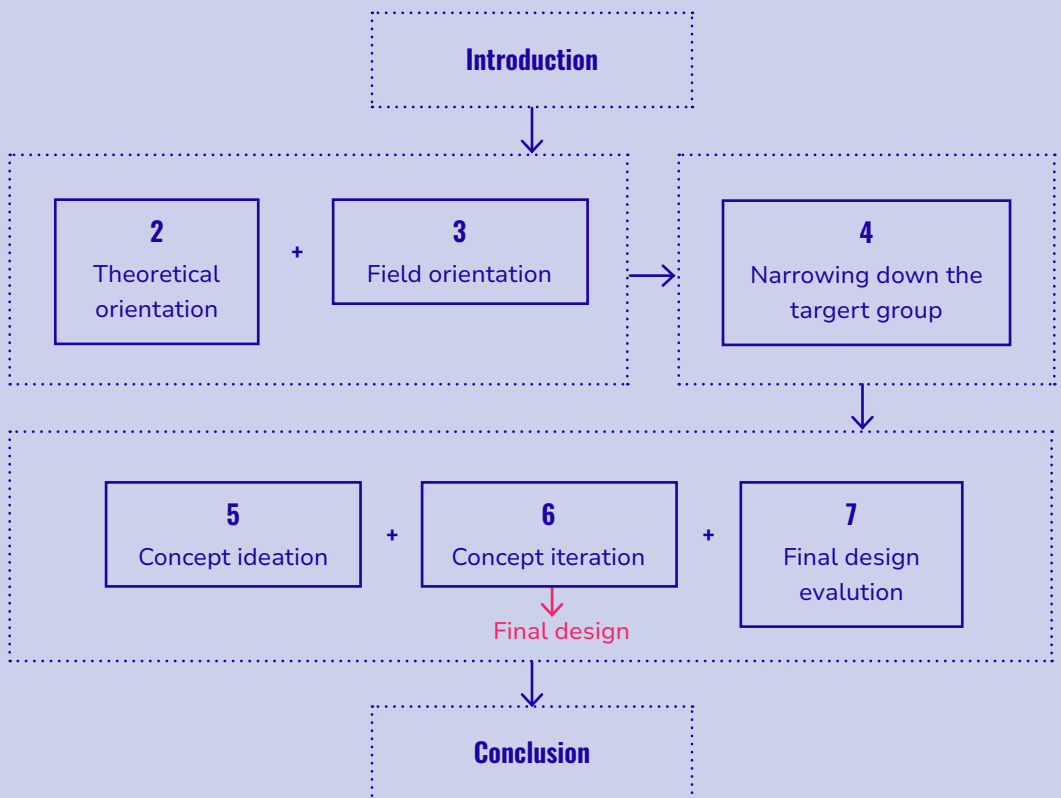


Fig. 6: The structure of the thesis report.

## 04 The structure of the thesis

### Structure of the thesis project

A visual overview of the project structure can be found in Fig. 5.

The project began with a literature review on loneliness, Positive Health, and the method of contextmapping as a tool for gaining deeper user insights.

After realizing that the client would not serve as a bridge to reach older adults, I identified the village supporters as key actors some months into the project. They are an important leverage point.

While getting to know the village supporters, I also spoke with various older adults to better understand their needs. This dual exploration helped me define the specific goals for the project.

With these goals in mind, I developed initial concepts, shared them with village supporters, and tested them. This led to the development of the final concept, which I continued to refine through iterative testing and a final series of evaluative playtests.

### Structure of the thesis report

A visual overview of this report's structure is shown in Fig. 6.

The report follows the process of the project, starting with orientation, moving into ideation, and concluding with the iteration and evaluation of the final

concept.

Figures are used to present or visually explain the most important insights, while the text provides context and elaboration.

On page 210 you will find a glossary of the most important concepts presented in this report.

### Ethics approval

All participants provided consent for their participation in the sessions, including, in some cases, the recording of audio or photos and the use of their data in the final outcomes, such as this report and to support the design process.

A proposal detailing the ethical considerations and a risk analysis of the planned research methods was submitted to the TU Delft Ethics Committee and received HREC approval (Human Research Ethics Committee).

# Chapter 2

# Theoretical orientation

Learn about loneliness, Positive Health framework, and contextmapping approach.

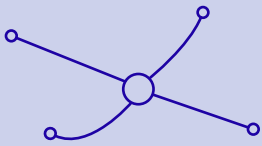
This chapter explores the theoretical foundations relevant to this project. It begins with an examination of loneliness, defining its characteristics and discussing existing initiatives against loneliness, highlighting key insights to take into account in designing a solution against loneliness.

A key perspective shift is then introduced, moving from a focus on reducing loneliness to fostering meaningful social connections. This approach aligns with the principles of positive health, which emphasize overall well-being rather than focusing solely on deficits. In addition to the original project being grounded in the positive health framework, it also serves as a suitable foundation for this thesis, as it offers an ethical and indirect way to address loneliness.

Lastly, I turn to the contextmapping approach. Based on my broad prior experience with this method, I have found it to be highly effective in uncovering implicit knowledge, such as participants' future goals and personal values. I expect this approach to play a valuable role in gaining deeper insights into the lives and needs of older adults.

## Types of loneliness

Social loneliness



Emotional loneliness



Existential loneliness

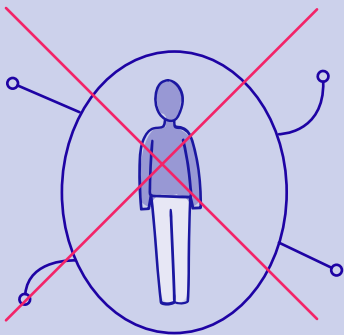


Fig. 7: Three types of loneliness: this thesis focuses on social and emotional loneliness.

# 01 Understanding loneliness

What exactly is loneliness, and why does it persist despite many initiatives aimed at combating it?

## I. What is loneliness?

Loneliness is a complex and subjective experience that arises when the quantity or quality of social relationships does not meet an individual's needs. It is not merely about being alone, but about lacking meaningful or fulfilling connections (Van Tilburg & De Jong Gierveld, 2007).

### Types of loneliness

Loneliness can be categorized into three types (Fig. 7):

- **Social loneliness:** Refers to an insufficiently broad social network, a form of objective isolation. It often arises from situational factors such as small networks, infrequent interactions, or limited participation in social activities (Gierveld & Tilburg, 2008).
- **Emotional loneliness:** Stems from the absence of deep, intimate relationships. This type is more closely associated with subjective isolation. Even when people have contacts, these may lack emotional depth. Emotional loneliness

has stronger correlations with depression and sleep disturbances (Choi, 2015).

- **Existential loneliness:** A more recently defined form that goes beyond emotional loneliness. It involves a deep sense of alienation and disconnection from others and the world. This can lead to feelings of meaninglessness, hopelessness, and a lack of purpose (McKenna-Plumley et al., 2023).

In this thesis, I will not focus on existential loneliness, as it remains relatively under-researched and focusing on social and emotional loneliness already offers valuable opportunities for interventions.

## II. Loneliness initiatives in the Netherlands

Over the past years, loneliness in the Netherlands has gained increasing public and governmental attention. In response, numerous initiatives have been developed to address this issue, particularly among older adults (65+). Below, a selection of several of these initiatives are analyzed to derive key design guidelines relevant to the development of new interventions.

### Neighbors connected

A community-based intervention that guides active older people to organize social activities for their less active older neighbors, facilitated by practical and financial support from the Community Health Service. For older adults (65+) across the Netherlands. (Lezwijn et al., 2011).

Key insights:

- Positively framing aging empowers participants and enhances their perceived control.
- Appreciative, non-problem-focused conversations foster engagement.
- Supportive environments and close contact are vital for sustained participation.
- Financial and logistical challenges hinder involvement.
- Trust in existing networks helps older adults build confidence to participate.
- Clear expectations before participation are essential for older adults to consider participation.
- Findings may be biased, as less active, more isolated individuals were underrepresented.

### Healthy aging

Aimed to increase awareness about social engagement opportunities through media campaigns, meetings,

and psychosocial courses for older adults (65+) in Epe, Netherlands. (Vlaming et al., 2013).

Key insights:

- Understanding physical, mental, and social limitations for its success.
- Peer-to-peer motivation (e.g. personal stories) and word-of-mouth are effective.
- Many participants felt too old or irrelevant for the programs due to lacking communication.
- Clear and honest communication about what the older adults can expect promotes participation.
- Raising awareness alone does not lead to behavioral change.

### Een tegen Eenzaamheid

Focuses on local, awareness-driven and social initiatives.

Key insight: Tailoring initiatives to specific community needs enhances relevance and effectiveness.

### Over de drempel

Promotes cultural activities in neighborhoods for anyone who feels lonely in Leeuwarden, Netherlands. (Over de drempel, 2024).

Note: No evaluation results available.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical orientation

### Thuisgekookt

A meal-sharing service linking people who cannot prepare warm-meals for themselves with home cooks. (Stichting Thuisgekookt, 2023).

Key insights:

- 85% reported an expanded network; 64% experienced deeper connections.
- Practical services can foster social bonding, even if social bonding is not explicitly promoted as the main focus.

### Zilverlijn

Phone service providing scheduled, regular calls to older adults. (Zilverlijn - Ouderenfonds, 2025).

Key insight: Despite a wide reach, insufficient registrations led to discontinuation. This possibly indicates participation barriers.

### OldStarts

Through physical activity courses for older adults (65+) social interaction are promoted. With 600 associations across the Netherlands. (Onze beweegmethode - OldStars, 2022).

Note: No evaluation results available.

### Jong + Oud = Goud

Facilitates intergenerational bonding

between students and older adults. (Stichting SeniorenStudent, 2025).

Key insight: Personal, low-cost relationships were found pleasurable, but volunteer shortages (students) present a challenge.

### Technology-based initiatives

Several initiatives use AI, robotics, wearables, or digital platforms for older adults to use to experience more connectedness. While some initiatives show positive effects, many older adults face barriers such as low digital literacy, lack of interest, fear of failure, and low confidence (Andrews et al., 2019). Designing effective tech-based interventions require extra effort, therefore, I have decided not to focus on tech-based interventions in this project.

## Conclusion

Designing effective solutions to reduce loneliness requires attention to the following key principles:

- Acknowledge the subjective nature of loneliness; the need for connection differs per individual.
- Tailor interventions to the specific types of loneliness and needs of the target group. Social loneliness relates to a lack of connection,

while emotional loneliness concerns shallow or unfulfilling relationships.

- Promote inclusivity by ensuring all intended participants feel seen and involved.
- Avoid focusing solely on loneliness and awareness-raising, as this can evoke negative emotions and often does not result in behavior change.
- Go beyond raising awareness by offering clear, concrete steps and intentions for engagement.
- Address practical barriers such as financial or logistical constraints, especially in local initiatives.
- Reduce participation hurdles by recognizing the emotional challenges older adults may face.
- Recognize the effectiveness of indirect designs: Even activities not explicitly about social contact can foster meaningful connections.

Loneliness is often accompanied by feelings of stigma and shame, which can prevent individuals from acknowledging or addressing their experience, especially in cultures like the Netherlands where modesty and self-reliance are deeply valued (Spiecker et al., 2004). Shame, being a deeply personal or social emotion (Tangney & Fischer, 1995), creates barriers to forming meaningful connections.

Whereas trust, the opposite of shame, provides a far more fertile ground for fostering openness and connection. The insights that I will take into account in this project can be found in Fig. 8.

Many initiatives continue to frame loneliness as a problem to be solved, emphasizing the negative emotional aspects or focusing primarily on raising awareness. However, this can inadvertently reinforce stigma and offer little in the way of practical guidance. As seen in several examples of Dutch initiatives, efforts that aim directly at “reducing loneliness” often lack the warmth and appeal of activities that center on building connection. By shifting the focus toward trust, shared activities, and a more positive, strength-based approach, interventions can feel more pleasant and inviting. This mindset aligns with the principles of **Positive Health**, emphasizing what people can do rather than what they lack. Such an approach is more likely to encourage participation and lead to lasting social engagement.

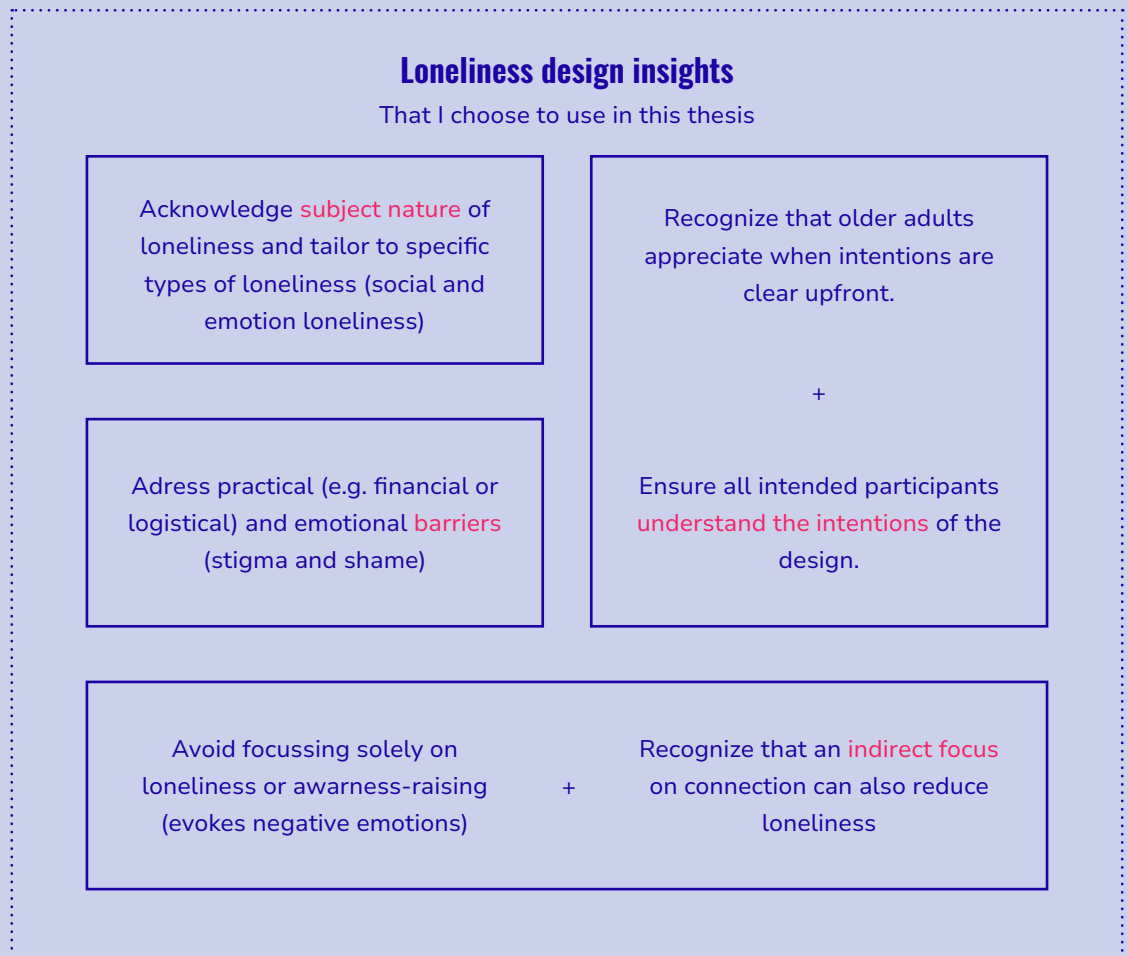


Fig. 8: Insights I will take into account in this project, based on loneliness research.

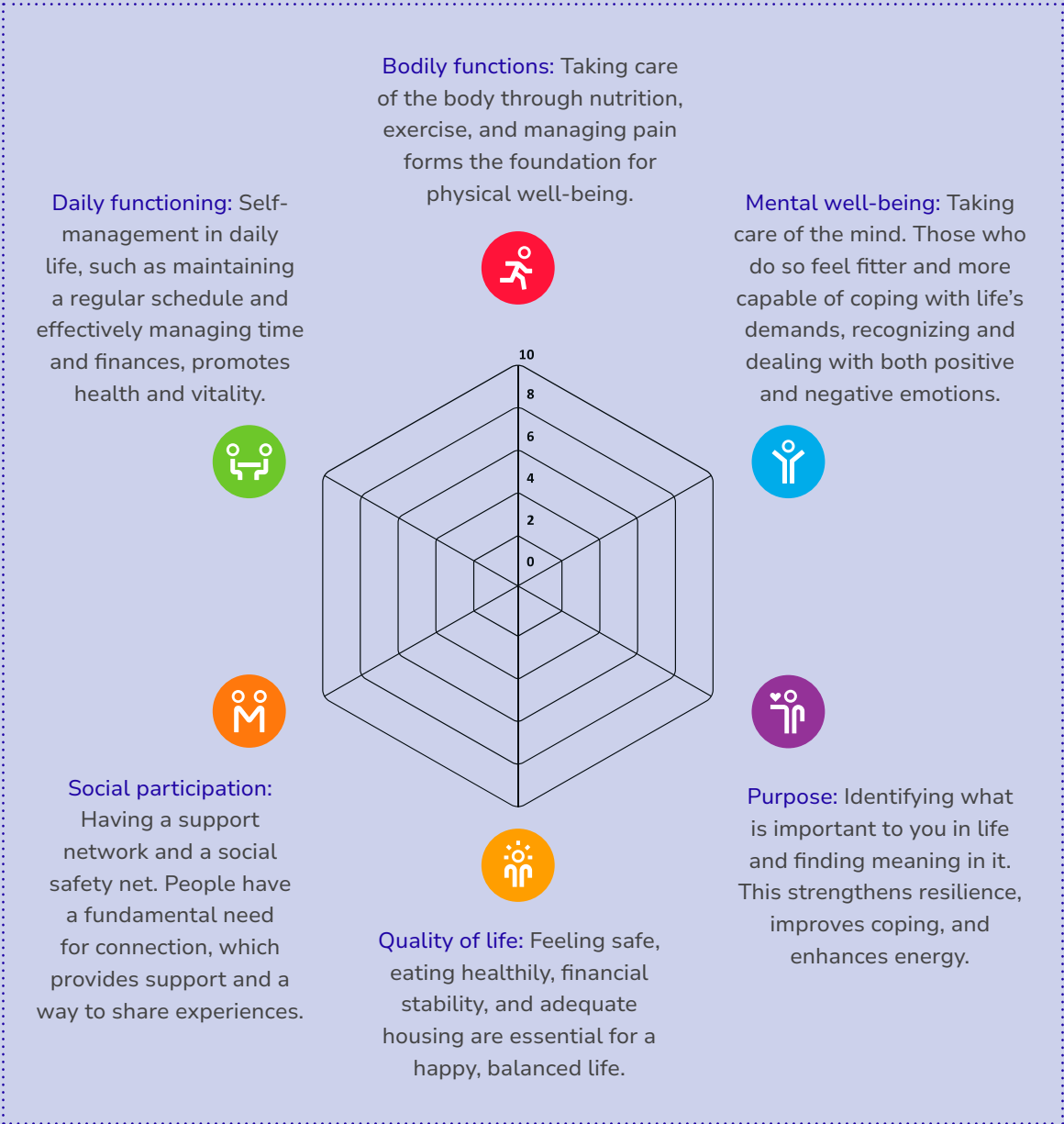


Fig. 9: The six dimentions of Positive Health (Stichting Institute for Positive Health, 2024).

## 02 The Positive Health framework

Positive Health is a dynamic concept that shifts the focus from illness to the ability of individuals to adapt and take control of their lives, even in the face of social, physical, or emotional challenges (Huber, 2014). Rather than offering a fixed definition of health, it acts as a philosophy that promotes **personal resilience**, **self-management**, the **ability to take ownership of one's life**, and **personal growth**, supported by one's community. In this view, **informal care**, **community initiatives**, and **local resources** play meaningful roles alongside traditional healthcare. (Stichting Institute for Positive Health, 2024).

Importantly, Positive Health is not a measurement tool but a framework that can be assessed across six dimensions (Van den Brekel-Dijkstra & Jung, 2022), illustrated in Fig. 9. These dimensions help individuals reflect on their well-being.

### I. Applying Positive Health

In healthcare, Positive Health is often applied as a coaching mindset, where professionals encourage patients to evaluate their lives along the six dimensions. The goal is not to focus on low scores, but to gain insight into

what the individual finds important and wishes to work on. This reflection opens the door to conversations about meaningful goals and actions.

However, this approach is not limited to healthcare. Anyone can reflect on their life using the Positive Health spider web, even outside clinical contexts. This self-assessment can offer valuable insights into one's personal satisfaction and areas of growth.

This mindset is also relevant in design. During an interview I held with a PhD researcher focused on helping people lead healthier lives through design, I learned how she used the Positive Health web as a tool. Her method, *Healthy living as a service*, connects personal values to behavior change. This inspired me to see how the core values of Positive Health can empower individuals to reflect on their own social life in a constructive, forward-looking way.

### II. Motivation through Positive Health

Positive Health motivates individuals to take action through self-determination and pride (see Fig. 10). It encourages self-management by focusing on what matters most to the individual. According to the self-determination

theory, autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2008). When people make choices that **align with their personal values and goals**, they feel **empowered**, which promotes a sense of control and confidence in shaping their own lives (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

This empowerment enhances psychological well-being. As individuals achieve goals, overcome difficulties, and live in accordance with their values, they experience **positive emotions** such as pride, satisfaction, and self-confidence. These emotions are **intrinsically** rewarding because they stem from meaning, competence, and fulfillment (Deci & Ryan, 2008). They also reinforce **sustainable and consistent action**. Notably, *authentic pride*, which is tied to effort and accomplishment, plays a key role in encouraging positive and **prosocial behavior** (Tracy & Robins, 2007).

pride, it can inspire intrinsic motivation and support long-term engagement. Fig. 11 highlights the key insights based on the Positive Health research that I choose to take into account.

### III. Positive Health in this thesis

In this project, I aim to motivate older adults who lack meaningful social connection to take action in improving their social lives. Positive Health provides a valuable foundation for this: by fostering autonomy, reflection, and

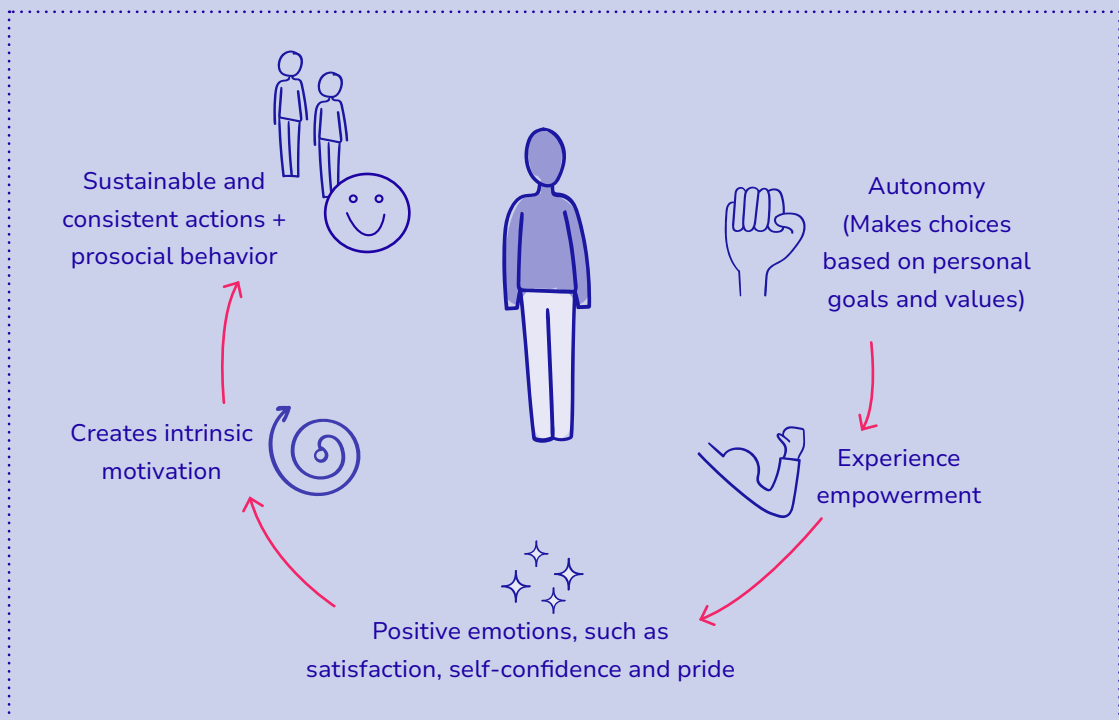


Fig. 10: How Positive Health promotes motivation.

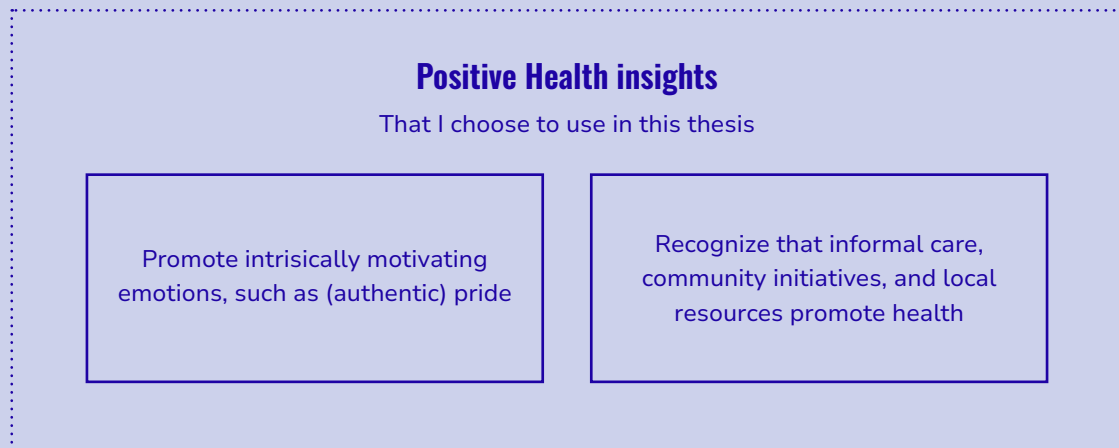


Fig. 11: Insights I will take into account in this project, based on Positive Health research.

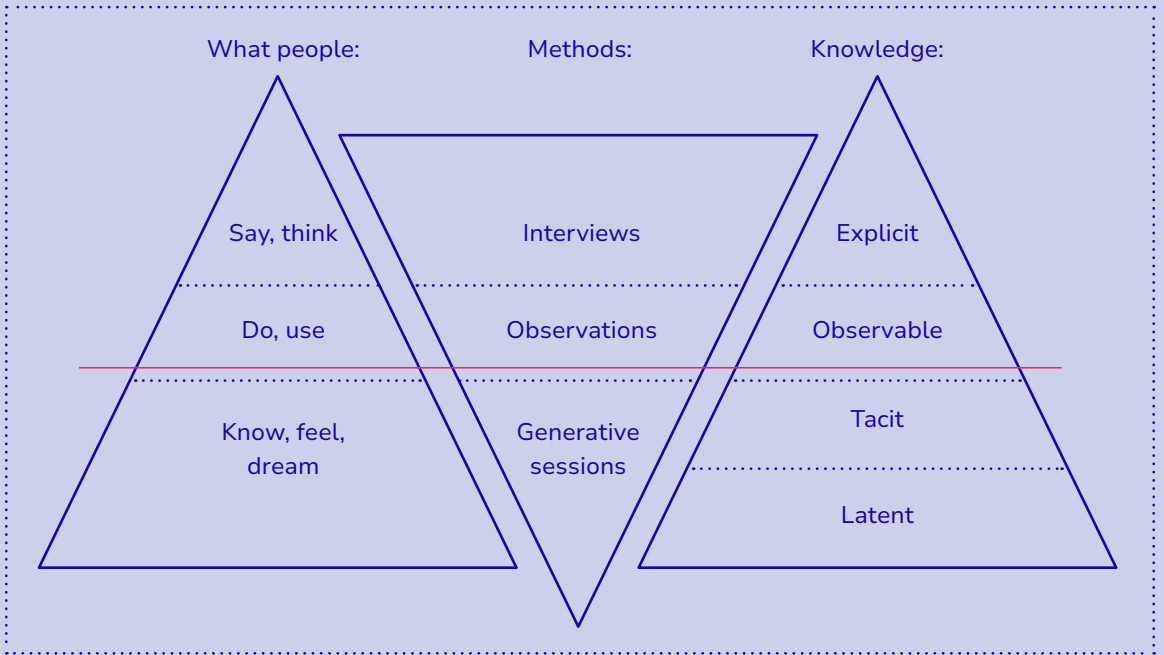


Fig. 12: Different levels of knowlegde.

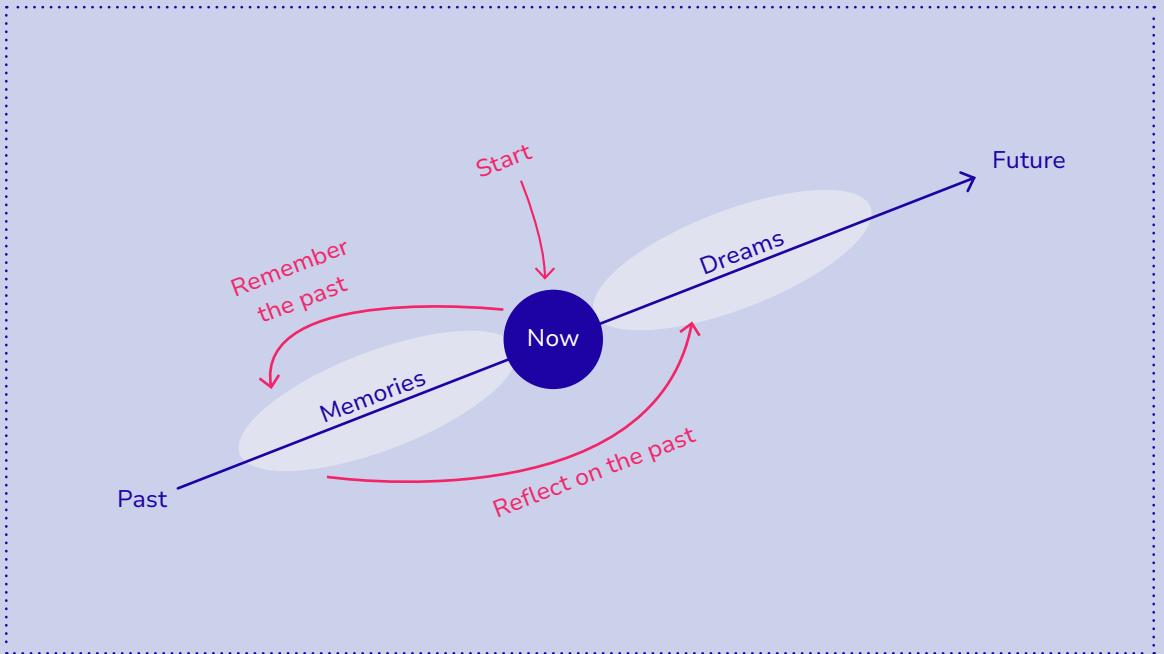


Fig. 13: The path of expression: from present, to past to future aspirations.

## 03 Contextmapping approach

### I. Understanding contextmapping

Contextmapping is a qualitative research method that helps users actively explore, understand, and articulate their own experiences. Rather than merely observing or interviewing users, this approach engages them in creative and reflective exercises. These activities stimulate users to share not only their explicit knowledge but also their deeper, often tacit and latent knowledge. These are insights that are so ingrained in their everyday lives that they are difficult to express in words. (Sanders & Stappers, 2012).

#### Why does contextmapping work?

Traditional research methods such as surveys, structured interviews, or observations focus on what people can easily verbalize or demonstrate, primarily capturing explicit knowledge. However, to uncover deeper layers of needs, desires, and fears, generative techniques can be used. Contextmapping allows individuals to both **create** (“make”) and **narrate** (“say”) their experiences. This process builds a bridge between what they experience, recall, and wish for, as illustrated in Fig. 12. (Sanders & Stappers, 2012).

#### *The Path of Expression*

Contextmapping follows a step-

by-step approach to uncover deep-seated knowledge. It begins with an understanding of the present, the user’s current experiences and emotions. This is followed by a reflection on past events, recalling both positive and negative memories. Through this process, individuals identify their core values and needs, which are likely to remain significant in the future. Fig. 13 (Path of Expression diagram) illustrates this progression from **present experiences to past reflections and future aspirations**. (Sanders & Stappers, 2012).

#### How is contextmapping applied?

Generative sessions help participants reflect on their past and present using creative tools like diaries, collages, storytelling, props, and cultural probes. By working with images and words, they recall and share stories and memories. The tools used in contextmapping include both concrete and ambiguous examples. Concrete examples, like a doctor’s photograph, directly relate to the topic at hand, such as healthcare experiences. Ambiguous examples, like an image of a flame, can evoke different meanings depending on the participant’s perspective. For one person, it may symbolize anger before treatment, while for another, it may represent warmth

and comfort in receiving care. The associations and anecdotes that come from the sessions reveal deep insights into participants' **values and needs** regarding the research topic. (Sanders & Stappers, 2012).

In some cases, conducting a full generative session may be too intensive or impractical. In such instances, elements of contextmapping, such as visual props (such as cards with images or text), can be incorporated into conventional research methods like interviews. These props trigger memories and emotions, encouraging participants to share richer stories and examples. (Sanders & Stappers, 2012).

### **II. Contextmapping in this thesis**

Having used contextmapping in previous projects, I have witnessed firsthand the value of doing generative sessions or integrating props into conversations. Participants provided more detailed examples and even reached new insights themselves, demonstrating that they engaged with the topic on a deeper level.

This makes contextmapping particularly valuable for the current project. Here, I aim to uncover people's needs and values regarding social connection, a

concept that is inherently abstract and difficult to define. Utilizing generative sessions or incorporating elements of contextmapping can be especially beneficial in working with both older adult participants in Twente and relevant stakeholders. The method ensures a richer, more meaningful understanding of their perspectives, making it a fitting approach for this research.

To complement this, the theory shows that by exploring present experiences and past reflections, a clearer picture can emerge of an individual's personal goals and values, which they can carry forward into future actions. This makes contextmapping not only valuable for me as a designer to better understand the target group and stakeholders, but also potentially beneficial for older adults when applied within the designed intervention (see Fig. 14).

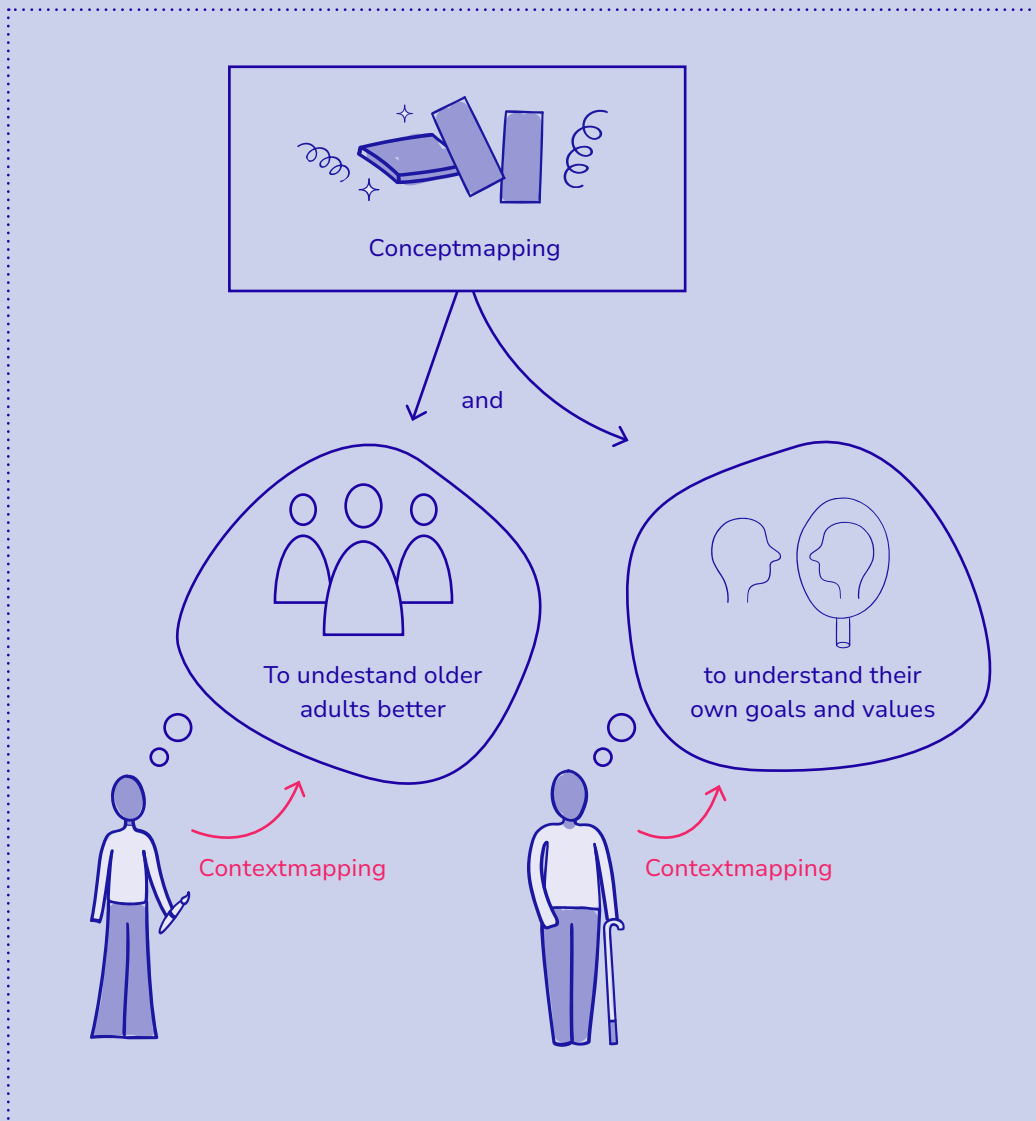


Fig. 14: Contextmapping can benefit both the designer and the older adults themselves.

## Key insights of the theoretical orientation

That I choose to take into account in this project

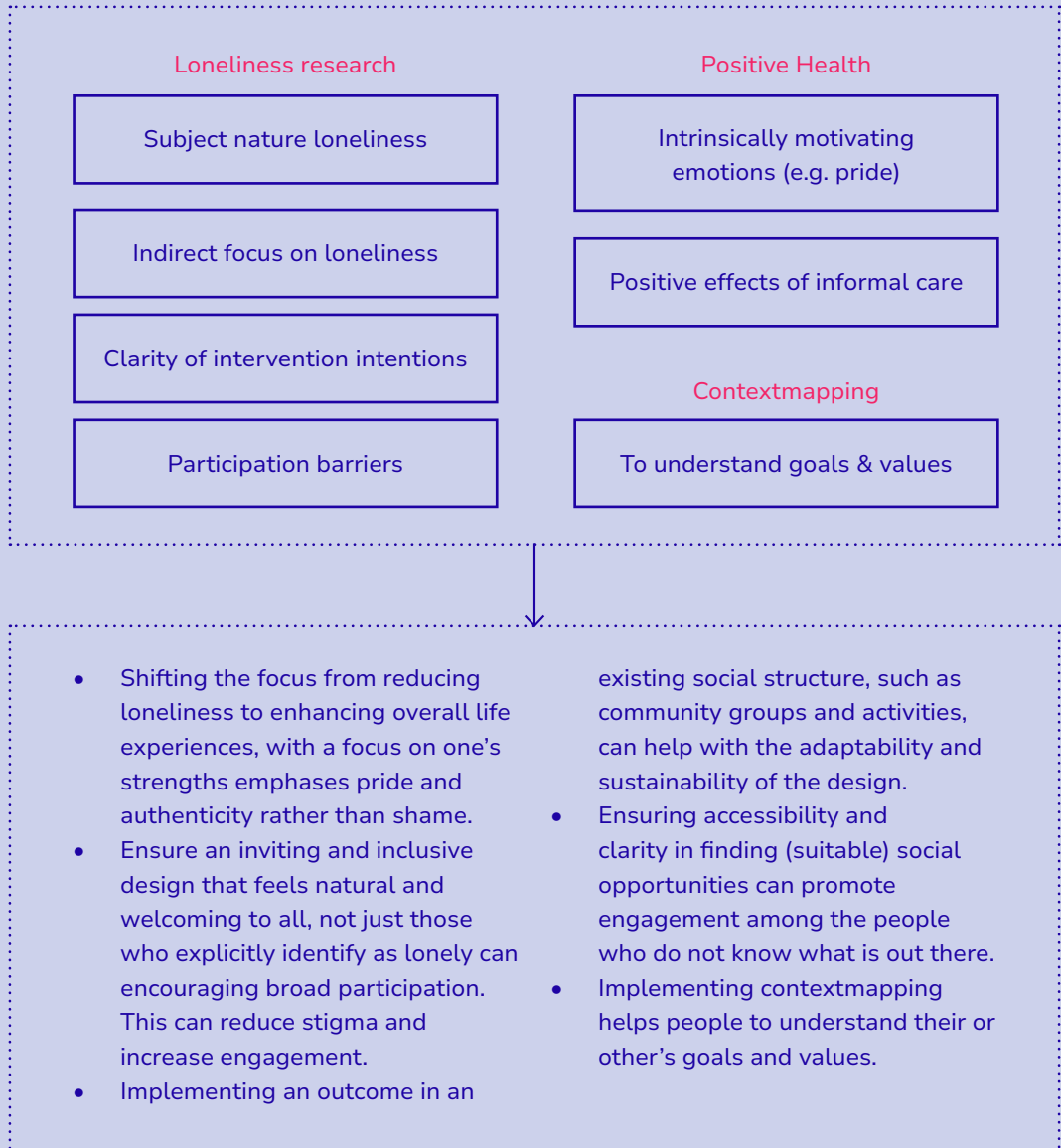


Fig. 15: Key insights I will take into account about Twente older adults, based on chapter 2 (see Fig. 8 on p. 31, Fig. 11 on p. 35 and Fig. 14 on p. 39).

## 04 Chapter conclusion

Loneliness is a highly subjective experience and is often accompanied by negative emotions such as shame. Research shows that directly focusing on loneliness and raising awareness about it does not necessarily solve the issue. For this reason, I have chosen to address loneliness indirectly, by focusing on enhancing a person's life through their strengths, according to Positive Health. This approach encourages intrinsically motivating emotions and inspires individuals to improve their lives, including their social connections, in a more positive and self-driven way. By using contextmapping, people can better clarify their personal goals and values, which helps them better understand how they want to shape their lives. This method also aligns well with the subjective nature of those who experience a lack of connection.

Additionally, leveraging existing, informal community structures can provide a solid foundation for the design process.

Fig. 15 summarizes the key insights from this chapter that I choose to take into account in this project.

In addition, several knowledge gaps have been identified:

- A clearer understanding of the

target group's specific needs and barriers to social engagement, including the cultural aspects unique to Twente.

- The need to establish a collaboration with a local organization, community, or group to ensure the design outcome is both practical and sustainable.

The next step involves field research to explore the lived experiences and cultural context of older adults in Twente, and to identify a suitable key actor.

# Chapter 3

## Field orientation

Understanding the older adults and  
finding the village supporters as key actor.

The field research consists of two main parts. field research.

The first part delves deeper into older adults' experiences with connectedness by interviewing them directly. A user-centered design approach facilitates direct interaction with the target audience, integrating their perspectives to align research outcomes with their needs (Baxter et al., 2015, Chapter 1). Engaging directly with older adults offers valuable insights into how their life experiences, emotions, challenges, and cultural backgrounds shape their sense of connectedness. To explore these factors, three interviews were conducted with different groups of older adults.

The second part of this chapter examines the process of finding the village supporters as a key actor for this thesis to ensure a lasting impact through the design intervention. By integrating this project with existing initiatives, there is a greater likelihood of achieving sustainable results.

The section details how these key actors were identified, their roles, and the initial discussions regarding their work with older adults.

Finally, the chapter concludes with a set of design guidelines derived from the

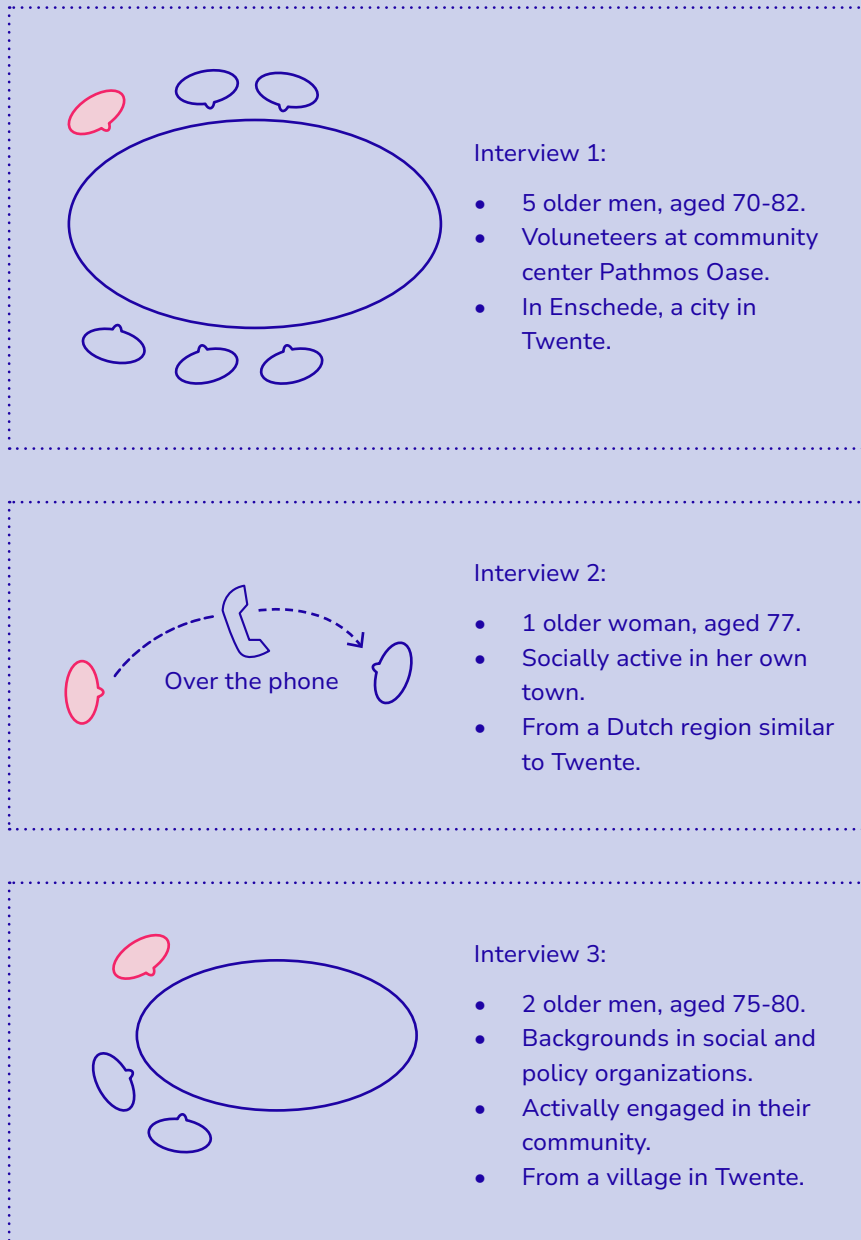


Fig. 16: The composition of the three interviews with older adults.

## 01 Interviews with older adults

I held three interviews with older adults, see Fig. 16. The interviews aimed to understand how the older adults form and maintain social relationships, the impact of community participation, and the influence of Twente's cultural characteristics on their social interactions.

The participants were primarily older adults who are socially active. I was unable to include socially isolated older adults for several reasons. Firstly, socially isolated older adults are particularly difficult to identify, as they often struggle to connect with their environment and are less engaged in their communities. Additionally, for ethical reasons, I could not actively seek out socially isolated older adults, as this could emphasize a deficit in their lives and potentially harm their mental health. Consequently, the participants I interviewed were all relatively open to communication and many are actively involved in their communities. While this represents a limitation, it also provides valuable insights from active older adults, helping to understand how they create and maintain their social networks.

- Interview 1: A discussion with five older men at a community center, some of whom have experienced

social isolation, offering insights into the role of shared spaces in maintaining social connections.

- Interview 2: An interview with an active older woman who maintains strong social connections, sharing her perspective on staying socially engaged.
- Interview 3: A conversation with two older men who have been active in social and volunteer roles, reflecting on their experiences in fostering community bonds.

I conducted the interviews using a semi-structured or unstructured format with open-ended questions. This approach allowed for flexibility, enabling the conversation to flow naturally and encouraging participants to share in-depth, detailed stories that provided valuable insights. Since articulating opinions, emotions, and experiences can sometimes be challenging (Sanders & Stappers, 2012), the interviews focused heavily on real-life examples to facilitate understanding and ensure concrete conclusions. For the interview with the five older men at the community center, I also used visual props to stimulate memories (Sanders & Stappers, 2012).

Interviews are a qualitative research method. Even a limited number of participants can yield rich and relevant

information (Baxter et al., 2015, Chapter 9). The three interviews led to rich insights of what older adults find important in term of social connection.

### **I. Key insights about the Twente older adults**

The key insights about older adults in Twente that inform this project are summarized in Fig. 17. These insights are grouped into two categories.

#### **What older adults value**

Older adults place high value on meaning in their activities, consistent with findings discussed in Ch. 2. They also emphasize the importance of casual and personal interaction. These interactions are characterized by their informal nature, a sense of equality, trust, and genuine attention, without expectations or obligations. Examples include having coffee with a neighbor, helping someone without expecting anything in return, or guiding someone toward something that truly suits them.

#### **Cultural characteristics and barriers**

Older adults in Twente tend to be modest and down-to-earth, often avoiding anything that feels excessive or showy. Social interaction often occurs within same-gender groups, men with

men, and women with women.

Common barriers include shyness, fear of judgment or responsibility, unawareness of social opportunities, and physical limitations.

The summaries of the three interviews that led to these insights are discussed in the following paragraphs. In-depth highlights from each interview are visualized in Fig. 19 on p. 52, Fig. 20 on p. 53 and Fig. 21 on p. 56.

## Twente older adults values

That I choose to focus on in this thesis

### Meaningful life

- Purpose
- Focus on strenghts (not on illness or shortcomings)
- Strong relationships with close connections

### Personal interactions

- Genuine personal attention
- Equal-level (no hierarchy)
- Familiar
- Word-of-mouth (trusted recommendations)

### Casual interactions

- Informal
- Obligation-free
- Non-transactional (expecting nothing in return)



## Take into account about Twente older adults

That I choose to focus on in this thesis

### Cultural aspects

- Calm, modest and down-to-earth (Twents)
- Traditional gendered interactions

### Barriers to social connection

- Shyness
- Fear of judgement (shame)
- Lack of awereness (unaware of scial opportunities)
- Physical limitations (mobility, sensory deterioration)
- Dislike heavy responsibilities

Fig. 17: Key insights I will take into account in this project, based on three interviews with older adults.

## 02 Interview 1: Five older men at a community center in Enschede

Through stakeholder Jeroen (Ch. 1, Par. 1), we arranged a meeting with a group of older adults at the Pathmos Oase community center in Enschede (see Fig. 18 on p. 52). Jeroen, who works to strengthen social connectedness in Twente, collaborates with Pathmos Oase to create initiatives that bring people together. Pathmos Oase, once a parish house, now serves as a welcoming space for locals. With its garden, chapel, vegetable garden, and terrace, it opens twice a week, offering a warm setting for coffee and conversation.

Five older men, aged between 67 and 81, agreed to take part. They are all retired, some still live with their partners, while others have lost theirs. Each of them is actively engaged with Pathmos Oase, and some have experienced periods where they felt a lack of social connection in their daily lives.

This particular group of participants brought several advantages:

- As a group rather than in one-on-one interviews, they could engage in discussions with one another, allowing for deeper insights and shared perspectives.
- These men are active members

of their community, providing an opportunity to learn how they maintain social engagement compared to their peers who are less involved.

- As Twente natives, they could share valuable insights into the region's culture and the traditions that still hold significance today.

### Interview set-up

The discussion was divided into three key areas:

1. Understanding the significance of Pathmos Oase for the participants.
2. Exploring Twente's cultural values.
3. Defining the meaning of social connection for the participants.

### Method

*Part 1: The significance of Patmos Oase* The first segment was a semi-structured interview (see Appendix A for the questions that were prepared). The objective was to understand what Pathmos Oase represents to the participants and how it contributes to their lives.

*Part 2: Exploring Twente's Cultural Values* To gain insight into the cultural values of Twente, I prepared a set of printed cards, each featuring a specific value (see Appendix B for the visual probes used). These values were

selected based on my observations during my time in Twente, where some cards attempt to align with the culture and others deliberately do not. This intentional mix allowed me to assess which values the participants identified as Twents, as well as which they disregarded, strengthening the validity of their selections. Additionally, I included several cards with common Twente expressions.

The participants were invited to examine the cards and identify which words or sayings they recognized as typically Twente. Providing visual tools can help trigger their memories (Sanders & Stappers, 2012). They were encouraged to discuss their thoughts and provide examples to illustrate how these expressions play a role in their daily lives, making the abstract values more concrete.

*Part 3: Discussing the Meaning of Social connection* To explore the participants' perspectives on social connection, I placed photo cards depicting various activities, such as group singing, walking, and shared meals, on the table. I selected one and shared a personal story about how that image reminded me of a meaningful relationship in my own life. With that example, I encouraged the participants to do the

same, leading to meaningful stories of their experiences.

Below are the key insights derived from the session. These findings integrate elements from all three discussion segments, as many themes naturally overlapped during the conversation.

### *Insights*

#### *The culture of Twente*

The power of people creating their own groups or activities and finding each other through familiar connections was visible. It feels comfortable, something that Twentenaren value. They are hospitable and often say, “Kom d'r bi'j” (“Come join us”), whether an acquaintance is stopping by through your back door or showing up at a gathering. This phrase is usually used within one's close circles, as Twentenaren are also reserved and modest. A common Twente saying is “Kieken wat't wot” (“Let's see what it becomes”), reflecting their inclination to take things slowly and see how they unfold. Additionally, Twentenaren are down-to-earth (they prefer no fuss) and calm, and are proud and quietly assertive about their own culture. They also hold an optimistic view of life, often saying, “'T hef nog nooit zo duuster west of 't weer wa wier licht” (“It has never been so dark that it didn't get

light again”), meaning that everything will be alright. These may seem like simple sayings, but Twentenaren have grown up with them and use them in fitting situations. Familiarity with a statement, after repeated exposure, can lead to a high sense of credibility or truthfulness, regardless of whether the information is true, false, or neutral. This phenomenon is explained by the illusory truth effect (Henderson et al., 2021). For Twentenaren, these sayings are not just words, they live by them. (Fig. 19 on p. 52 **Cultural aspects**).

#### *Involvement in Noaberschap*

The Twente temperament, grounded, calm, hospitable, yet reserved, aligns with the traditional values of Noaberschap. This lifestyle emphasizes togetherness and mutual support, embodying the idea of “ons kent ons” (“we know each other”). Getting to know your neighbors and chatting with them is something the interviewees continue to enjoy. They note that neighbors are sometimes busy or don’t seek conversation. However, one participant remarked that if he needs help from his younger neighbor with three children, she is always willing to assist him, and this clearly means a lot to him. Afterward, we briefly discussed generational differences. The men

observed that if you take time to speak with someone and get to know them, generational differences become less relevant. (Fig. 19 on p. 52 **Meaningful life**).

#### *Having a purpose*

For the participants, one of Pathmos Oase’s greatest values is that it provides them with a sense of purpose. They expressed that they appreciate activities that serve a function, such as tending the vegetable garden, maintaining the chapel, or preparing coffee and engaging with visitors. Simply attending is not enough, they want to contribute in a meaningful way. (Fig. 19 on p. 52 **Meaningful life**).

#### *Connecting each other*

The participants naturally refer and introduce one another to various activities. One participant, for example, joined a walking group after a fellow volunteer suggested it. When Pathmos Oase’s garden needed a beekeeper, one of the participants immediately thought of his neighbor across the street, who happened to be a beekeeper. Another participant, interested in hands-on projects, built a Nativity scene for the church and invited a friend skilled in woodworking to join him.

This pattern highlights an essential way older adults in Twente meet new

people: through personal referrals. When asked whether Twente's reserved nature makes individuals more likely to try something new if accompanied by a friend or family member, the participants unanimously agreed. (Fig. 19 on p. 52 **Personal interactions**).

### *Social support*

While all participants are socially active, they recognized that some individuals remain isolated. One suggested that these individuals may simply lack the desire to participate, while others believed that social barriers, such as shyness or unawareness of opportunities, prevent them from engaging. (Fig. 19 on p. 52 **Barriers**). They agreed that personal invitations from acquaintances could help lower these barriers, as social support reduces stress in new situations (Cohen & Wills, 1985). (Fig. 19 on p. 52 **Personal interactions**).

### *Making connections on their own*

The interviewees all lead busy lives and feel a strong sense of responsibility to stay engaged. When asked what they value most, they emphasized social contact. However, they approach it in different ways:

- One prefers spontaneity over structured activities, opting for

casual meetups rather than weekly commitments. He also uses a website to sign up for various social activities at his convenience.

- Another enjoys having a set schedule, participating in a choir and volunteering regularly.

(Fig. 19 on p. 52 **Cultural aspects**).

### **Conclusion**

The key insights from interview 1 can be found in Fig. 19 on p. 52.



Fig. 18: Interview 1 with five older men (left) and the visual probe cards (right).

To inform Fig. 17 on p. 47

## Twente older adults values

Based on interview 1

### Meaningful life

- A strong preference for engagements that serve a clear, meaningful **purpose**.

### Personal interactions

- Bonds strengthen as personal differences fade with **familiarity**.
- **Word-of-mouth** and trusted accompaniment significantly promotes trying new activities.

+

## Take into account about Twente older adults

Based on interview 1

### Cultural aspects

- **Calm, down-to-earth, modest**, and welcoming to family, friends, and neighbors.

### Barriers to social connection

- **Shyness**
- **Lack of awareness** of existing activities create multiple thresholds for joining activities.

Fig. 19: Key insights from interview 1, from the perspective of 5 older men of the community home Pathmos Oase.

To inform Fig. 17 on p. 47

## Twente older adults values

Based on interview 2

### Meaningful life

- Older adults value good relationships with their **close connections**.

### Casual interactions

- **Informal** social connections strengthen community bonds.

### Personal interactions

- Trust, created by **genuine, equal-level** and **familiar** interactions, creates comfort and deeper, meaningful connections.
- **Genuine** personal attention keeps social networks strong and fosters friendships.
- With **word-of-mouth**, information is effectively spread across small communities.

+

## Take into account about Twente older adults

Based on interview 2

### Cultural aspects

- Socializing often happens **within gender lines**, men with men, women with women.

### Barriers to social connection

- Designs must cater to **slower cognitive processing**, **clear text**, and **accessible audio**, and also consider **transport needs**.

Fig. 20: Key insights from interview 2, from the perspective of a socially active older woman.

## 03 Interview 2: A socially active older woman

The second interview I conducted was with my grandmother. It took place over the phone and was unstructured, allowing for a natural conversation about my grandmother's daily life and her observations of other older adults around her. She is over 75 years old and lives at home with her husband. She is not from Twente, but from another similar region in the Netherlands.

She is an active member of her community, participating in multiple associations and committees. She enjoys helping others and values having people around her. Because of her involvement in local activities and initiatives, she frequently interacts with different residents and sees various perspectives within her village.

### Insights

#### *Village activities and social engagement*

The participant lives in a vibrant village with many activities available to the older residents, such as a cooking night, senior gym, swimming, or a choir. Residents are kept informed about these activities through community bulletins, a village newspaper, and word-of-mouth. Which are all local and informal ways of informing the villagers. Additionally, she has observed that some residents take the initiative to start new activities, such

as chamber music sessions. Because of the informal network within the village, such ideas often come to fruition. (Fig. 20 on p. 53 **Casual interactions**).

#### *Supporting vulnerable residents*

There are also initiatives focused on supporting vulnerable members of the community. One example is the initiative 'Omkijken naar elkaar' (looking after each other), a church-led initiative in which my grandmother participates. Because the village has a strong sense of community, it is generally known who has been ill or recently lost a loved one, for example and needs some extra support or companionship. From time to time, this leads to new friendships as well. (Fig. 20 on p. 53 **Personal & Casual interactions**).

Additionally, individuals visited through this program are often invited to the next church service, where they can socialize over coffee afterward. My grandmother explained that people intentionally sit among different groups to speak with those who could use a conversation. Sometimes these conversations lead to new plans, such as forming small social groups or encouraging each other to join activities like senior gym. This demonstrates the power of informal social connections in strengthening community bonds. (Fig.

20 on p. 53 **Casual interactions**).

### *Considerations for designing for older adults*

The participant confirmed that cognitive processing slows down with age, making it essential to allow more time for decision-making and interactions. Additionally, many older individuals struggle with vision and hearing impairments, so text should be large and easy to read and audio should be clearly articulated. Mobility issues are another factor, as some older adults require assistance getting to certain locations. Another notable insight was that social interactions often remain gendered, men primarily socialize with men, and women with women, leading to separate activities, like senior swimming for woman. (Fig. 20 on p. 53 **Barriers & Cultural aspects**).

### *Personal priorities*

Beyond her active role in the village, the participant places great value on her family. While some community activities interest her, she chooses not to participate in all of them because she also enjoys spending time at home with her husband, and children when they visit. Older adults become happier and healthier through good contact with their close relationships (Martire & Franks, 2014). (Fig. 20 on p. 53

**Meaningful life**).

### *Importance of friends*

Additionally, my grandmother organizes private game nights with a group of friends. She experiences trust with this group of like-minded people that helps her to feel comfortable sharing personal concerns as well. She experiences this trust, because their interactions are genuine, familiar and without hierarchy, which lead to deeper connections. (Fig. 20 on p. 53 **Personal interactions**).

### **Limitations of the interview**

Since the interview was conducted over the phone, non-verbal cues were not observed. Additionally, the unstructured nature of the conversation meant that while it felt natural, some important aspects of aging might not have been fully addressed. Lastly, as the participant is not from Twente, it is crucial to compare these insights with those from Twente residents to determine which aspects are region-specific.

### **Conclusion**

The key insights from interview 2 can be found in Fig. 20 on p. 53.

To inform Fig. 17 on p. 47

## Twente older adults values

Based on interview 3

### Meaningful life

- Recognizing and utilizing their existing **interests or skills** brings fulfillment and happiness.

### Casual interactions

- Older adults appreciate being asked **informally** what kind of care they need or want.
- **Non-transactional** interactions promote (social) open-mindedness.

### Personal interactions

- Genuine help, **free from hierarchies** (caregiver and receiver), can positively impact their health.
- They try out new activities that they are **personally referred** to, since the referees are likely to know what activities are meaningful to them.
- **Genuine curiosity** can spark enthusiastic conversations.
- Social participation increases when they **personally invite each other**.

## Take into account about Twente older adults

Based on interview 3

### Cultural aspects

- Socializing often happens **within gender lines**, men with men, women with women.

### Barriers to social connection

- Many older adults are **unaware** of the services and activities available to them.

Fig. 21: Key insights from interview 3, from the perspective of 2 older men from Borne.

## 04 Interview 3: Two older men in Borne

To gain additional insights into the social connections of older adults, I conducted an interview with two men who have both been actively engaged in their communities. Their professional backgrounds in social and policy organizations provided valuable perspectives on what older adults find important.

The interview took place in the home of one of the participants in Borne, a village in Twente. The other participant kindly picked me up from the station. Over a cup of tea, we had an open conversation about their experiences. After the interview, we set the table and enjoyed lunch together, as the host took pleasure in preparing meals for his guests (see Fig. 22 on p. 61). This warm and welcoming atmosphere made the discussion open and accessible.

### Background of the participants

Both men are around 80 years old and retired. One lives with his wife, while the other has lost his spouse. One of them previously worked for the municipality and later transitioned into social work, while the other was a long-time director of several primary schools before moving into policy-making. Both participants are members of Platform Pouwer, a group that serves as an

advisory board for policies affecting older adults. They know each other from this platform. Additionally, they are involved in various associations, including the Catholic Union of the Elderly (KBO).

### Method

The interview was unstructured, with the goal of understanding how older adults form connections and what they need to establish and maintain these relationships. Their insights were largely based on personal experiences, their knowledge of their peers, and their expertise from advising policymakers on older adult affairs.

I brought visual cards to help the participants recollect their memories. However, the conversation flowed naturally and deeply on its own. The men provided rich examples and prompted each other to tell stories. Therefore, I did not use the visual tools. The interview was highly casual.

### Insights

#### *Need for informal care and support*

One of the participants has been involved in numerous projects aimed at helping people in ways that go beyond strict protocols. After his wife passed away, he gave lectures on his experience

as a caregiver, explaining how certain formal regulations did not always align with his wife's actual needs. They observed that care institutions sometimes prioritize administrative protocols over practical solutions or individual needs. They noticed older adults would appreciate being asked informally what kind of care they need or want. (Fig. 21 on p. 56 **Casual interactions**).

### *Personal attention and a sense of purpose*

One participant spoke about the 'Geluksroute' ('Happiness Route'), an initiative in which an older adult receives a small sum of money (approximately 450 euros) to spend on something that brings them joy. He shared the story of a man who had always dreamed of becoming a photographer but never had the means to buy a camera. After receiving one through this program, the man regained his sense of purpose, started taking photos around the village, and became much happier and engaged in his community. Another similar initiative, 'Welzijn op recept' ('Well-being on Prescription') in Borne, shifts the focus from addressing problems to helping people find activities that bring them fulfillment and happiness. (Fig. 21 on p. 56 **Meaningful life**).

Both initiatives also show how a personal focus, free from any social hierarchies, can have a great impact on their health. (Fig. 21 on p. 56 **Personal interactions**).

### *Personal referrals*

One participant shared an example of a highly educated woman who felt dissatisfied with casual coffee gatherings, where conversations were often limited to complaints and health issues. She was encouraged to join a study group instead, where she found more intellectually stimulating discussions and a better social fit. The lady found an activity that is now meaningful to her, by personal referrals. (Fig. 21 on p. 56 **Meaningful life & Personal interactions**).

### *Lack of awareness about available resources*

The participants noted that many older adults are unaware of the services and activities available to them. For example, some are eligible for discounts on activities through minimum-income policies but remain uninformed. This lack of visibility means that well-intended initiatives do not always reach the people they aim to support. (Fig. 21 on p. 56 **Barriers**).

### *Present genuine curiosity*

Presenting genuine curiosity is valued among existing and new interactions, including situations where someone wants to offer help. It is important to approach the interaction on equal footing, ensuring that the person receiving support feels respected and understood. One participant shared how he managed to connect with a reserved man by asking, “What did you do in the past?” When the man responded that he had worked on an oil platform, the participant admitted he knew nothing about it, prompting an hour-and-a-half-long conversation where the man enthusiastically shared his experiences. Genuine curiosity is key. (Fig. 21 on p. 56 **Personal interactions**)

### *Reducing expectations*

One participant shared an example of a man who avoided healthcare services altogether. A small gesture, receiving a set of his favorite foreign organ music, helped him slowly regain trust. He initially doubted the offer, but over time, he learned nothing in return was expected from him. He became more open to community involvement and even started attending church gatherings again. Non-transactional interactions promote (social) open-mindedness. (Fig. 21 on p. 56 **Casual interactions**).

### *Gendered socialization patterns*

The participants observed that men tend to socialize with men and women with women. Mixed-gender interactions occur less frequently in social activities among older adults. This was also mentioned in interview 2. (Fig. 21 on p. 56 **Cultural aspects**)

### *Enable the execution of strengths or interests*

The participants emphasized the importance of recognizing and utilizing older adults’ existing skills. This aligns with the concept of Positive Health (see Ch. 2, Par. 2). One participant shared how his wife, who suffered from acquired brain injury after a car accident, retained her ability to paint. With his support, she even gave painting lessons. This made her happy. In another case, a woman who enjoyed attending lectures stopped going because she could no longer take notes. Despite a care provider advising against it, her husband insisted on taking notes for her so she could continue attending. (Fig. 21 on p. 56 **Meaningful life & Personal interactions**).

### *Connecting each other*

Social participation increases when people personally invite each other. This happens a lot among the older adults. For example, one participant

## Chapter 3: Field orientation

and his wife often invite their neighbor to join them on outings, such as visiting a museum, which helps the neighbor to stay socially active. This was also mentioned in interview 1. (Fig. 21 on p. 56 **Personal interactions**).

### **Personal insight of the interview**

I left this conversation feeling inspired. Many of the solutions to the challenges older adults face are not complex but rely on the willingness of community members to offer informal support. The significance of casual, human-to-human connections stood out to me, and I am eager to incorporate this insight into my work.

### **Conclusion**

The key insights from interview 3 can be found in Fig. 21 on p. 56.



*Fig. 22: After the interview with the two active older men in Borne.*

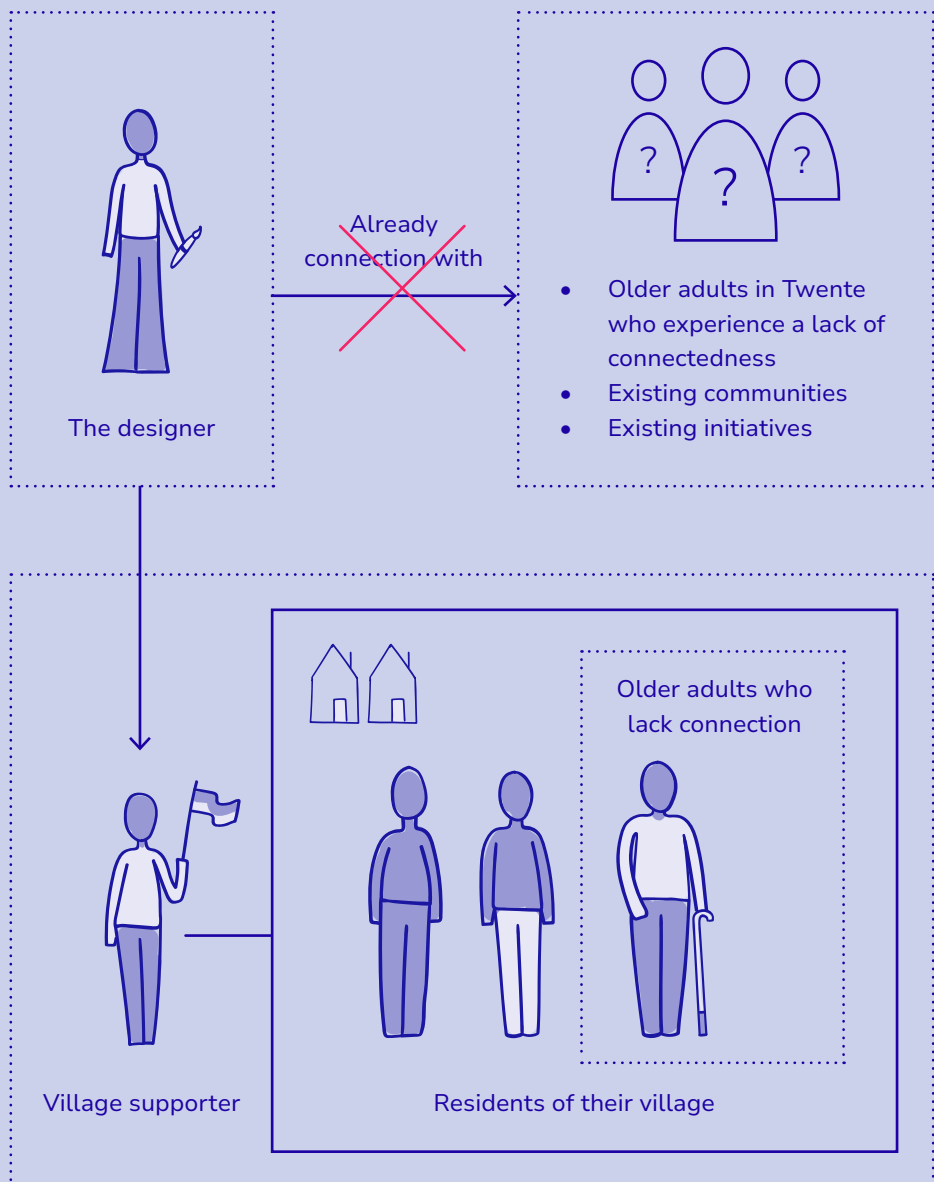


Fig. 23: Reaching the older adults who lack connection through the village supporters.

## 05 Finding the key actor: The village supporters

### I. Relevance of finding a key actor

The first part of this chapter provided an initial understanding of older adults, highlighting the diversity in their actions, beliefs, and needs. Within this broad group, I chose to focus specifically on those experiencing a lack of social connectedness. However, I do not have direct access to these individuals. It would be ethically inappropriate to seek them out directly, and none are currently involved in this project (as previously mentioned in Ch. 3, Par. 1). Additionally, I do not have any pre-existing relationships with communities or initiatives in Twente that have the time or capacity to engage with my thesis project (see upper section of Fig. 23). The second part of this chapter focuses on identifying the village supporters as key actors, an important leverage point in this thesis project.

To effectively support older adults in Twente who experience disconnection, it is essential to collaborate with a stakeholder who could serve as a bridge to these individuals and help sustain the project's outcomes. As introduced in chapter 1, I established contact with three village supporters (dorpsondersteuners) who are well positioned to fulfill this role (their role is described in the next paragraph).

Through the village supporters, I can design for the older adults in their villages who are missing meaningful social contact (see lower section of Fig. 23).

### II. Conference on citizen initiatives

In my search for a suitable stakeholder, I attended the Citizen Initiative Day (Dag van het Burgerinitiatief, 2024) at the University of Twente. This event brought together researchers, citizens, and healthcare professionals to explore community-led initiatives through various presentations and networking opportunities.

The conference was highly inspiring, showcasing many success stories driven by shared personal values and a desire to improve local social environments. Participants demonstrated strong **intrinsic motivation**, persevering despite financial limitations or bureaucratic challenges. This intrinsic drive is an important element to incorporate into the design outcomes of this project to ensure sustainability and genuine engagement.

While I was also open to meeting older adults who might later test the to-be-designed intervention of this thesis project, I did not encounter suitable

participants at the conference.

During the conference, I learned about the role of **village supporters** through two professionals from WijzOud who train and support them in Twente (WijzOud in Twente, 2023). Their presentation (Workshop Dorpsondersteuners – Dag Van Het Burgerinitiatief, 2024) explained that village supporters strengthen community life by coordinating informal care, linking social and medical services, and supporting local activities. Selected by their communities, they serve as accessible points of contact for residents, offering guidance and assistance. Currently, around eight village supporters operate in the Twente region (WijzOud in Twente, 2023).

In addition to gaining knowledge about village supporters, I gathered several important insights through conversations at the event, which are summarized in Fig. 24. I also discovered the concept of precautionary circles.

### *Precautionary Circles*

Another inspiring concept introduced at the event was that of precautionary circles (Workshop Voorzorgcirkels – Dag Van Het Burgerinitiatief, 2024). This initiative encourages neighbors to form small support groups where

they exchange essential information for emergencies and meet regularly to check in on one another. They also offer help with practical tasks such as home repairs or childcare. The concept is rooted in the traditional practice of Noaberschap (or Naoberschap), which historically fostered strong informal neighborly ties in the provinces of Twente and Drenthe. Although precautionary circles are currently implemented mainly in Flevoland, they reflect a renewed appreciation for community-driven support systems. The success of this initiative highlights **the strength of informal networks**.

### **III. Understanding the role of village supporters**

The primary goal of village supporters is to enhance the livability of their communities. They achieve this by maintaining informal contact with residents and assisting them with housing, healthcare, and well-being questions. Additionally, they take a holistic approach by developing social infrastructures tailored to the village's needs. These include community facilities, key social connections, local networks, and initiatives to foster a socially sustainable community. Village supporters prioritize the residents

## Meaningful insights I drew about citizen initiatives

From conversations I held with people at the event



It is important to recognize that people act from different roles and that one therefore should approach new collaborations without judgment.

From NLZVE ('Nederland Zorgt Voor Elkaar')

While people have an innate willingness to help, they often need a small push to take action.

From 'Precautionary circles'



People need to get to know each first, then build trust and only then people can truly connect. It is important to remember that trust plays an important role in building meaningful relationships.

A social worker

Gossip is common among older adults in smaller towns. Direct conversations should be encouraged rather than discussions *about* others, as gossip can hinder individuals from joining social activities.

From a citizens' initiated community center



Fig. 24: Insights I gained from other participants I talked to at the Citizen Initiative conference.

themselves, encouraging self-reliance and mutual support. To identify their needs, rather than assuming them, they actively engage with residents through conversations and participation in village meetings. The village supporters also collaborate with a local working group to stay closely connected to the actual needs of the community. (WijzOud in Twente, 2023).

### Origin of the village supporters

Across the Netherlands, residents have increasingly taken the initiative to improve the livability of their villages and neighborhoods. They established committees and foundations aimed at fostering a more caring and connected community. Since 2012, various informal networks have appointed village supporters (*dorpsondersteuners*) to coordinate these efforts and serve as central points of contact for residents. (WijzOud in Twente, 2023).

### Funding of the village supporters

The funding for village supporters varies significantly. Some receive a volunteer stipend, while others hold part-time paid positions, often funded by the municipality. Additional costs, such as office space, are usually covered by grants from non-governmental organizations. The formal employer of

a village supporter strongly differs as well; it might be a village cooperative, the municipality, a welfare organization, or a healthcare institution. However, what matters most is that the day-to-day leadership lies within the village or neighborhood itself, typically managed through a local council or a community care cooperative. (WijzOud in Twente, 2023).

### Impact of the village supporters

Because every village has unique demands, the role of a village supporter strongly varies from one community to another. Due to their deep connection with the community, village supporters help bridge the gap between residents and formal care providers. Their involvement reduces the workload of professionals, such as general practitioners, and helps lower overall healthcare costs. The University of Groningen evaluated the village supporters (2020) and it confirms the positive social and economic impact of their work. It shows that the village supporters improve coordination between formal and informal care, strengthen social structures, and enhance relationships between residents, government agencies, and healthcare providers.

### IV. Defining the key actor

Since 2022, around eight village supporters have been appointed across various villages in the Twente region (WijzOud in Twente, 2023). With their deep knowledge of local activities and direct relationships with residents, they are well positioned to help older adults strengthen their social connections. By working together, we can focus on addressing existing gaps in the social experiences of older adults in their villages and explore opportunities for improvement.

#### Contacting the village supporters of Twente

I reached out to the two professionals responsible for training and supporting village supporters in Twente. After clearly explaining the potential value of a collaboration between myself and the village supporters, they agreed to contact the network on my behalf. They asked whether the village supporters would be interested in helping the older adults in their villages through a joint effort with me. To support this outreach, I created a supporting poster (see Appendix C) that outlined the purpose of the project and explained how we could contribute together. The invitation was informal and non-binding, simply

offering an opportunity to meet and explore potential collaboration.

The outreach emphasized that their contribution to this project adapts to their needs to ensure mutual benefit and to avoid creating any unnecessary workload. Three village supporters expressed interest and agreed to take part in this thesis project.

The next paragraph will describe the first contact with these three village supporters.

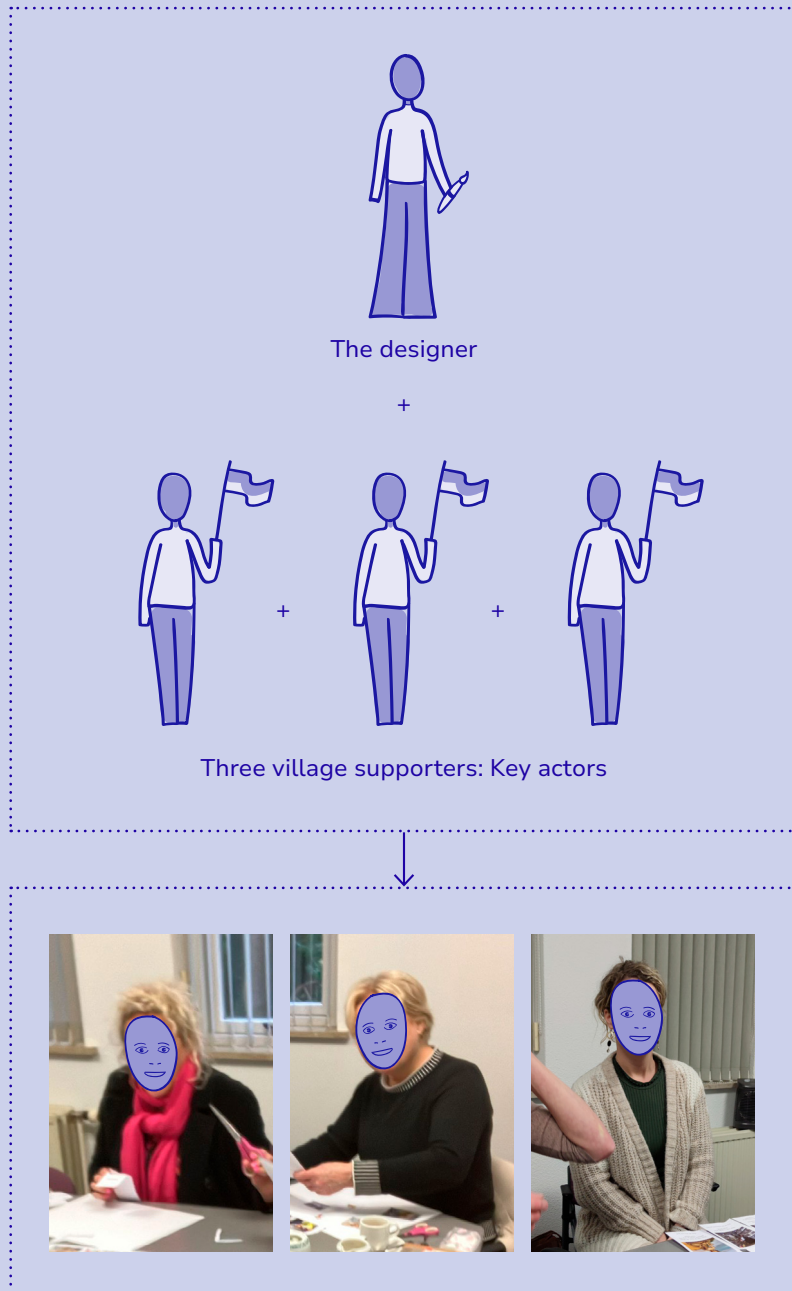


Fig. 25: The key actors of this thesis project: Three village supporters active in Twente.

## 06 Initial meeting with the three village supporters

I scheduled a meeting with the three village supporters that agreed to be part of this project (see Fig. 25). From this point forward, references to village supporters in this thesis report generally refer to these three village supporters.

My first meeting with them took place at the village hall in Deurningen on November 25, over a cup of coffee. The atmosphere was relaxed, and the village supporters were curious about my approach.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, each village has different needs, and every village supporter works differently. Therefore, I wanted to get to know the three village supporters, their activities, their approaches and the challenges they face through an open conversation. The focus was on gathering concrete examples, as these better illustrate abstract situations and create a clearer picture of their work. We discussed the work of the village supporters and talked about the difficulties elderly people in their villages experience in finding more social connection.

Since the village supporters had never worked with a social designer before, I explained the types of projects I undertake and that the outcome of this

collaboration was still open. This could be a game, a workshop, a tool, or a marketing approach, for example. The final direction will be determined based on our shared insights, ensuring that not only the elderly in their villages benefit from the results, but that the village supporters themselves also support the outcome.

### *Background of the three village supporters*

The village supporters vary in age, between 30 and 50, and are all selected by the informal committees of their respective villages. They are contracted for different hours per week; around 10, 12 and 28 hours a week. One of them has been active as a village supporter for two years, while the other two took on this role a year ago. Despite the varying work hours, they all express a constant sense of involvement with the village. The village is alive, and their work does not strictly end after working hours. This makes their role flexible as some weeks are more intense, while others are quieter.

### *Insights from the Interview*

#### *Visibility in the village*

The three village supporters place great importance on their visibility within the community. None of them live in the

villages where they work, which allows them to remain neutral and open to all stories without being associated with any particular group.

They attend village gatherings and events such as the Easter fire, village festivals, and church meetings. They also distribute flyers and appear in the village newspaper. Additionally, they visit sports clubs to enhance their visibility. By being regularly present, they become more well-known and approachable. This also leads to spontaneous referrals from villagers: “Can you visit my neighbor? He is dealing with something.” Or “Can you talk to my mother? She is becoming forgetful.”

In this way, the village supporters keep a pulse on the community and remain alert to potential help requests. Despite their already established networks, they continue to actively expand their contacts.

#### *Facilitating role and activities of the village supporters*

Beyond being visible, village supporters also facilitate new initiatives. One of them, for example, helped establish a community center by bringing people together to keep it running. She invited an elderly woman to visit: “The lady

didn’t want to just come and observe, but she did want to have something to do. I encourage that. Residents don’t need to become official volunteers, as that often feels like an obligation. No, everyone is welcome to help. This woman, for instance, was happy to make decorations.”

Many elderly individuals see volunteering as a big responsibility. That’s why the village supporters prefer to call it “just doing something together,” as this sounds more casual and inviting.

Another example illustrates how village supporters informally connect people: “An 83-year-old woman was worried about her garden. A 40-year-old Syrian man struggled to find work due to the language barrier. My colleague connected them. Now, the man mows her lawn, and the woman’s daughter, who is a translator, helps him with his Dutch. **All of this happened locally, without the involvement of professionals.**”

A different village supporter spoke about a rather lonely man with whom she had had a pleasant conversation. She had let him know he could always call her, but he never did. Later, at a village gathering, she met him again,

and he enjoyed the conversation. He remarked, “I’m not really someone who likes to call.” The village supporter suggested stopping by now and then, which he agreed on. This highlights the strength of the informal approach of village supporters. Because they are simply present and expect nothing in return, people feel more comfortable reaching out to them. In contrast, care professionals are often only accessible through formal channels, which creates an additional barrier.

Village supporters maintain close relationships with residents and enjoy doing so. One of them, for instance, always takes an elderly woman to the open dining table. This woman also receives support from care institutions, but they do not visit weekly and often don’t have a real-life picture of her well-being. The village supporter does and keeps an eye on her.

The village supporters pointed out that people first need to be sure that no obligations come with their help. Not everyone wants to talk to them out of fear that it might lead to expectations. By repeatedly visiting and simply chatting, they notice that people gradually start to trust them and open up. One village supporter suggested to a hesitant woman, “Shall I just come by

for a cup of coffee and talk?” The woman agreed. Once she realized that nothing was expected of her, she talked for a long time about herself instead.

#### *Challenges and opportunities in the villages*

We discussed various challenges that the village supporters experience. They, for example, have trouble bringing together residents who struggle to get along due to a lack of trust. People who don’t know each other often don’t trust each other and are difficult to bring together. Residents don’t always see each other’s perspectives or remain stuck in their own way of thinking, making it difficult to establish new connections.

The village supporters operate based on the concept of positive health (Ch. 2, Par. 2). They focus on residents’ strengths rather than their limitations. Occasionally, they find it challenging to implement the positive health mindset. The provided guidelines, such as existing tools from the Institute for Positive Health (*Jouw Positieve Gezondheid*, 2024), do not always work for them because they struggle to find the right moment to introduce these tools.

Additionally, the village supporters notice that shame plays a role in the

villages. This shame stems from a fear of being judged by fellow residents. “An 80-year-old man in my village doesn’t take walks because he’s afraid others will wonder if he has nothing better to do.” This issue is especially present in small villages where everyone knows each other.

Lastly, the village supporters also mentioned that some older residents could benefit from help or more social connection. However, they struggle to reach these individuals, partly due to the mentioned shame.

### Conclusion

Fig. 26 shows that the village supporters have a meaningful role in their respective villages. They focus on maintaining visibility within the villages, fostering a healthy community, and supporting residents in finding meaningful aspects of their lives. The main gap I identified together with the village supporters is that they are not always able to reach older adults who could greatly benefit from their support. Combined with the goal of this thesis to foster more connection for older adults who experience a lack of it, I choose to focus on this gap that the village supporters experience.

The village supporters also shared several insights about what older adults value, which align with the findings summarized in Fig. 17 on p. 47, such as the importance of finding meaning in life and engaging in contact without expectations, in genuine ways. Fig. 27 highlights a few additional insights shared by the village supporters, which I consider important to take into account throughout this thesis as well.

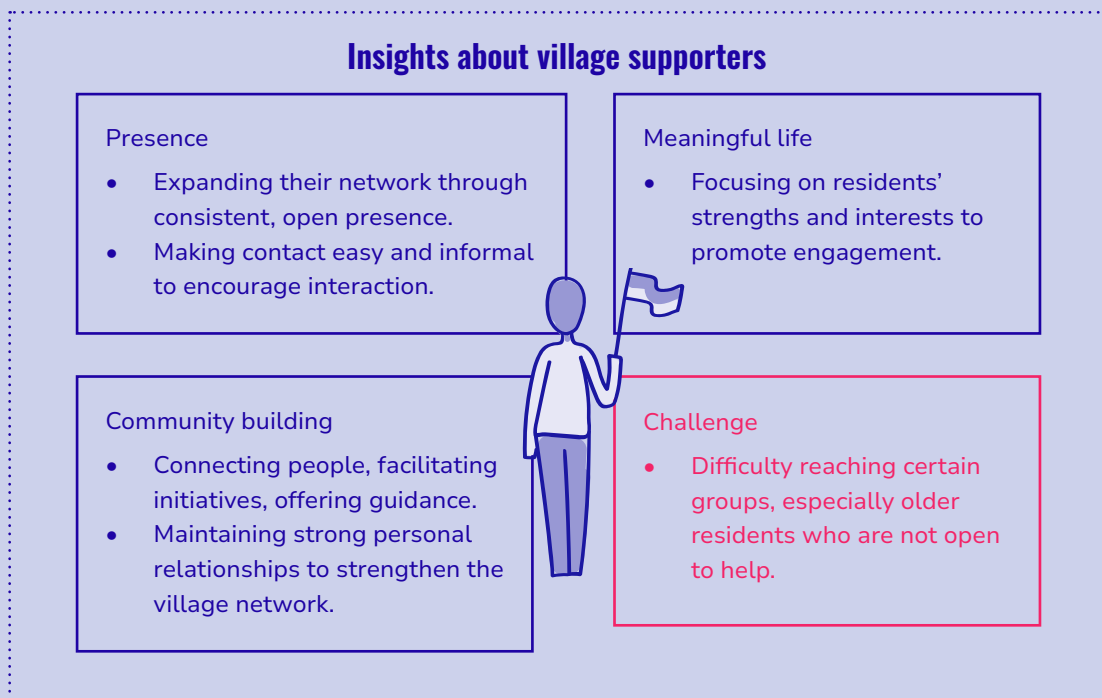


Fig. 26: Key insights from the initial meeting with three village supporters.

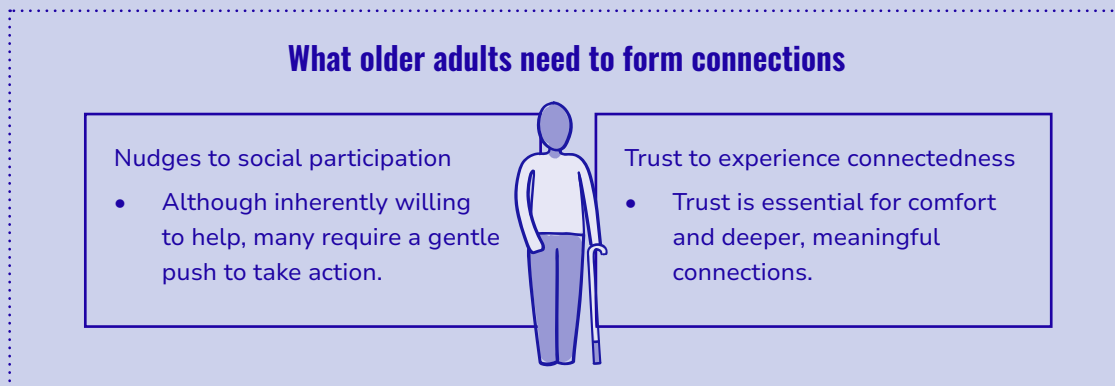


Fig. 27: Additinal insights about older adults from the perspective of three village supporters.

## Key insights about older adults in Twente

That I choose to take into account in this project

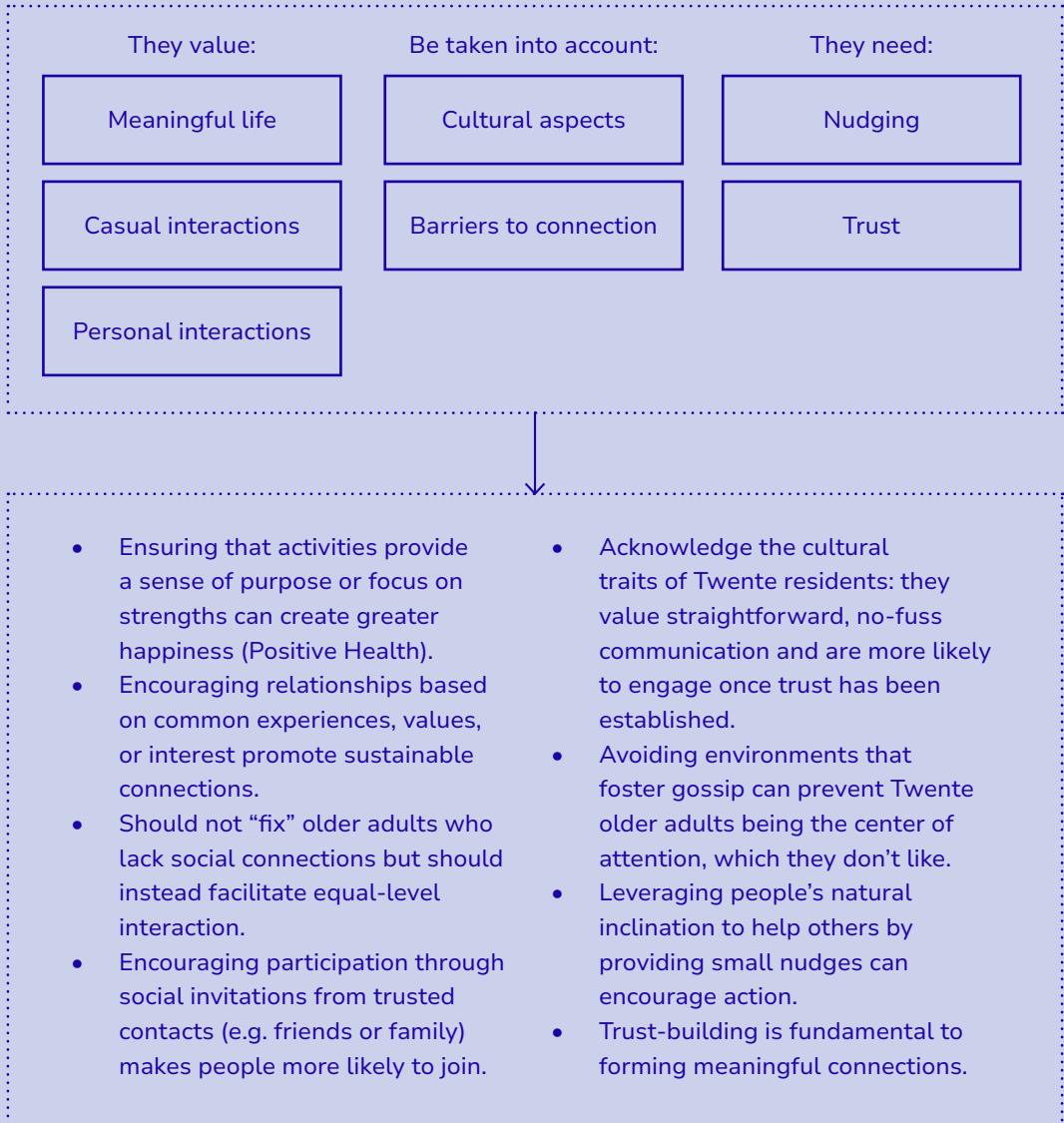


Fig. 28: Key insights I will take into account about Twente older adults, based on chapter 3 (see Fig. 17 on p. 47 and Fig. 27 on p. 73).

## 07 Chapter conclusion

Conversations with older adults provided valuable insights into the factors that influence their social connections. Trust plays a fundamental role in forming meaningful relationships, and older adults highly value having a sense of purpose in their lives. They are more likely to participate in activities when accompanied by a friend or family member and prefer environments that feel welcoming and safe. Additionally, they favor mutual exchanges over interactions that position them as recipients of help. The cultural traits of Twente residents also shape their social behavior, as they tend to be reserved and take time to engage with others.

Fig. 28 highlights the key insights of this chapter, which lead to an expansion of the design guidelines introduced in chapter 2.

The field study also led to a collaboration with village supporters. Their role focuses on enhancing village life. They operate informally, offering a listening ear, connecting residents to existing initiatives or services, and facilitating new activities. They make this possible by being highly visible in the village, joining village councils and meetings, for example. Selected by the village, they serve as trusted figures who are well-informed about local

opportunities. Among the network of village supporters active in different Twente villages, three have agreed to collaborate in supporting older adults in their communities in finding more meaningful connections.

During the initial meeting with the village supporters, they shared what they believe is important to older adults, which aligned with insights from conversations with the older adults themselves. Additionally, **the village supporters noted that they cannot always reach those who could use some help**, highlighting a challenge that will be explored further in the next chapter.

However, the broad scope of older adults in these villages makes it difficult to develop a targeted and effective design solution. To ensure feasibility and impact, it is needed to **define a more specific focus within this demographic**. Simultaneously, the village supporters must see value in the final outcome, enabling them to integrate and sustain it within their communities. The next phase will refine the project's scope to create a design solution that is both actionable and meaningful, benefiting both the village supporters and the older adults they support.

# **Chapter 4**

## **Narrowing down the target group**

From older adults to homebound older  
adults and their trusted contacts.

The initial design goal is:

*'Design an intervention to improve the feeling of being connected, thereby enhancing the well-being of older adults living in Twente.'*

However, I found that both *'feeling connected'* and *'older adults in Twente'* are too broad to support a feasible and actionable solution space. Therefore, based on the findings of the literature and field research I will specify the project's scope by identifying a specific target group.

The insights gained from chapter 3 provide a clear understanding of the behaviors, social interactions, desires, and challenges faced by older adults in Twente. However, this demographic is diverse, with varying needs and preferences regarding social connection, making it impractical to design for the entire group. The older adults in Twente can be categorized into smaller subgroups with distinct characteristics. This chapter aims to identify the specific subgroup that should be prioritized in this thesis and defines its unique attributes.

Narrowing down the target group is done through an exploration of various interaction types that could foster social connections, an empathy map

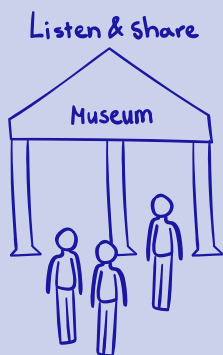
that examines the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors of the older adult who lack connection and a detailed profile of this older adult. Based on these explorations, the decision is made to focus on homebound older adults, those who remain behind their front doors, often caught in routine and hesitant to engage in new experiences. This chapter further explores the specific characteristics of this group, laying the foundation for targeted design solutions.



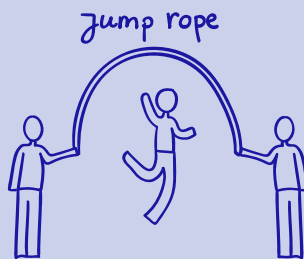
- + Personal
- + Casual
- Meaningful



- + Meaningful
- Personal
- Casual



- + Personal
- Casual
- Meaningful

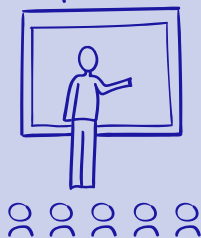


- + Personal
- + Casual
- Meaningful



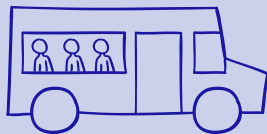
- + Casual
- + Meaningful
- Personal

Good presentation



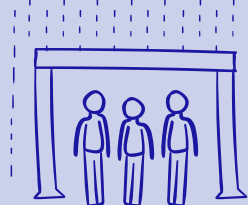
- + Meaningful
- Personal
- Casual

Transfer during travel



- + Casual
- Personal
- Meaningful

Shelter from rain toget



- + Casual
- Personal
- Meaningful

Fig. 29: Eight unsuitable interaction visions.

# 01 Understanding the older adult

## I. Brainstorming different interaction visions of the Twente older adult values

An interaction vision helps define the emotional and experiential goals a design should evoke. It often begins by analyzing a familiar but unrelated situation and translating its emotional qualities into product characteristics (Pasman et al., 2011). This tool visualizes the abstract emotional impact a product should create. Since interactions naturally elicit emotions, these responses can guide the development of features that evoke similar feelings in users.

By identifying an interaction vision that aligns with the values of older adults in Twente, potential design directions can be explored. Key guiding questions, based on chapter 3's insights (see Fig. 28 on p. 74), include:

- What types of interactions foster a **meaningful life**, and both **personal** and **casual interactions**?
- Which forms of interaction are **culturally suitable for older adults in Twente** and help reduce communication **barriers**?

I brainstormed eight emotional translations (Fig. 29) that could support social connection among older adults. However, none effectively combined

casual and personal interaction while also fostering meaning. This indicated a need for change in the design approach.

At this point, I had not yet focused specifically on socially disconnected older adults. I approached the topic from the broader perspective that everyone can benefit from more connection and a fulfilling life, in line with the concept of Positive Health (Ch. 2, Par. 2). Yet this exploration showed that the design process requires a clearer, more specific target group.

As established in the research, the experience of social disconnection is highly subjective, and older adults differ in their social needs. Therefore, I decided to deepen my understanding of this group.

## II. Empathy map of the Twente older adult who lacks connection

To gain better insight into older adults who feel socially disconnected, I created an empathy map. This tool helps explore the emotional landscape and day-to-day experiences of this group (Gibbons, 2024). While there are various methods to create an empathy map, I chose to focus on four key dimensions: what they see, hear, do, and think & feel.

Fig. 30 shows the empathy map I

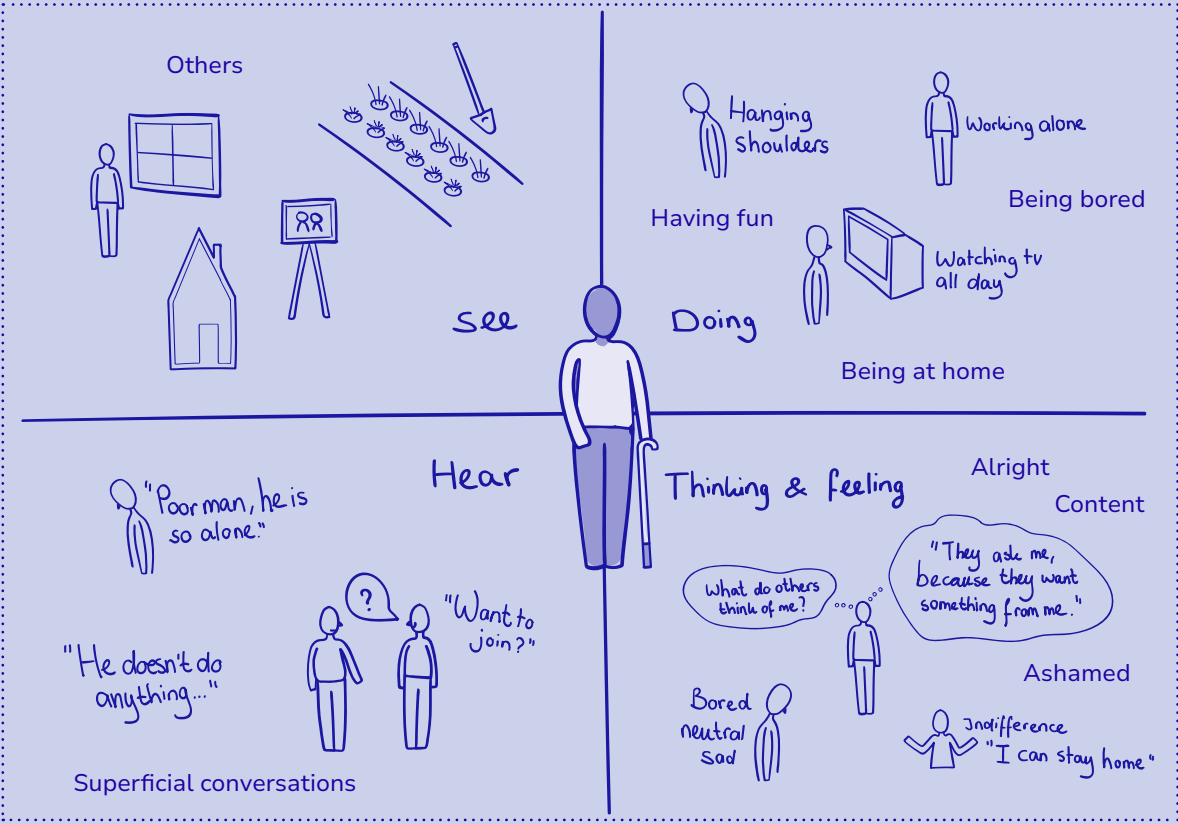


Fig. 30: Empathy map of older adults who experience a lack of connection.

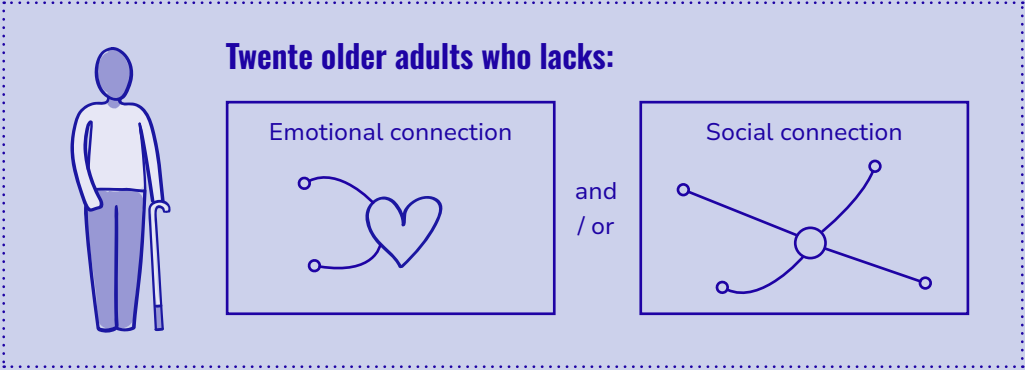


Fig. 31: Older adults can lack emotional and/or social connection.

developed. Because my goal was to understand the broad spectrum of emotions and behaviors among socially isolated older adults, a detailed or exhaustive map was not necessary. During the process, I observed that these individuals display a wide range of behaviors and attitudes: from shy to indifferent, and from socially withdrawn to actively engaged yet disconnected. To further humanize these insights, I created a detailed profile to represent this diversity more concretely.

### **III. Profile of the Twente older adult who lacks connection**

A clearer picture of socially disconnected older adults can be formed through a concrete example. This is illustrated with a short narrative based on the insights from chapters 2 and 3.

#### **The story of Klaas:**

To illustrate this, I introduce a fictional character: Klaas. Klaas is 70 years old and retired. His wife recently passed away. While they did not have many friends, this never bothered them because they had each other. Now that his wife is gone, Klaas has very few people around him. In this example Klaas feels both emotional and social disconnection (Fig. 31).

#### *Social disconnection:*

Klaas doesn't know how to connect with others. He is no longer used to making new friends. While he would like to build sustainable friendships, he doesn't know how to go about it. Should he go out? He has no idea what opportunities exist. If he does find an activity, should he go alone? Or would it be better not to go at all? Many activities do not feel inclusive for people his age, making him feel unwelcome. Klaas encounters multiple barriers to socializing.

#### *Emotional disconnection:*

Even if Klaas does go out and meet new people, he might still struggle with meaningful connections. Conversations often remain superficial. He no longer has someone with whom he shares a deep, trusted bond like he had with his wife. Klaas doesn't know where to find people who truly understand him or how to build deep connections.

Writing this story highlighted the diverse ways in which socially disconnected older adults feel and behave. Broadly, they can be categorized into three groups, as outlined in the following section.

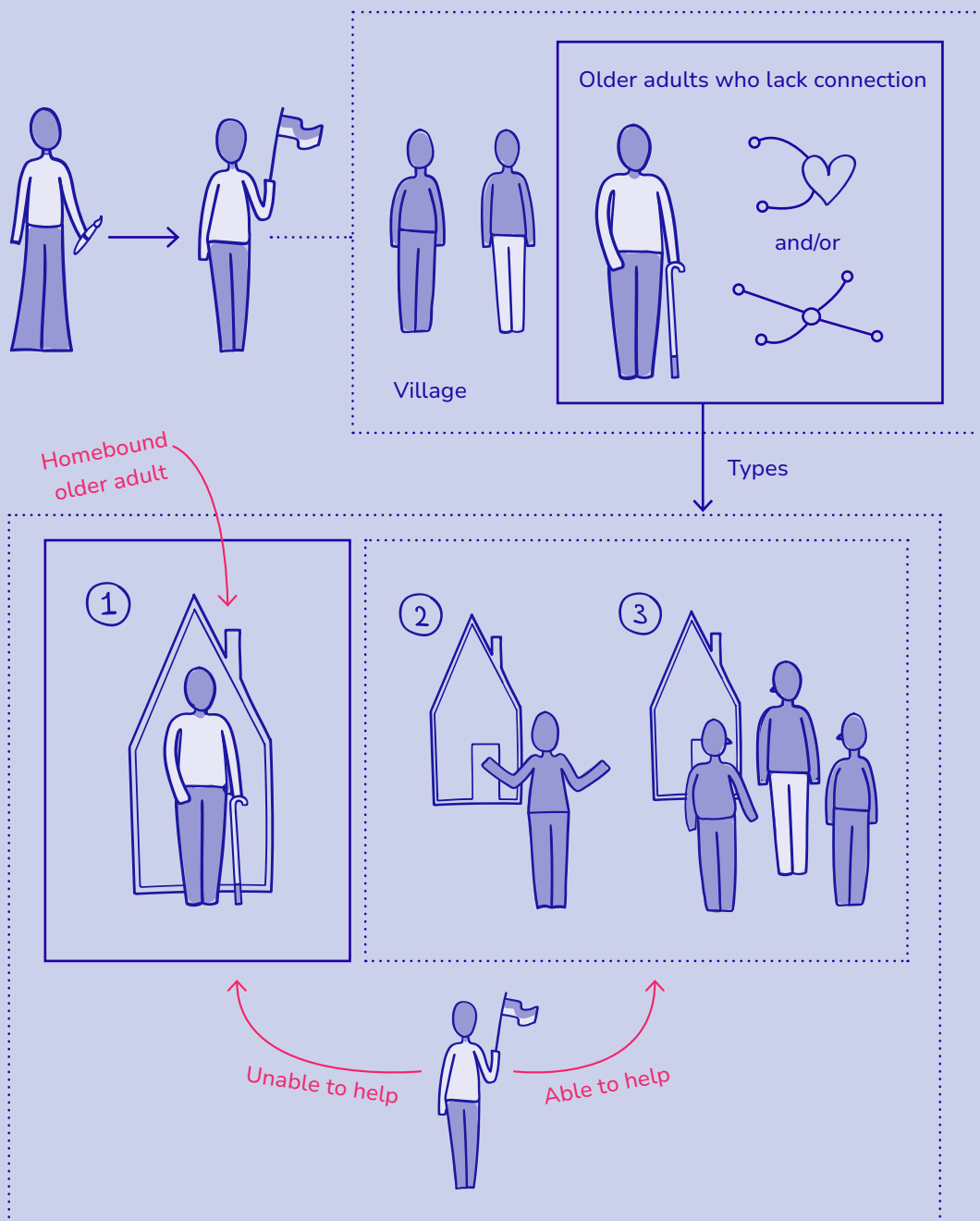


Fig. 32: Types of connection.

## 02 Types of connection of the older adult

Based on the insights gained, I have defined three overarching scenarios that describe varying levels of social engagement among older adults who experience a lack of connection (see Fig. 32):

- Connection type 1: The older adult remains within their own familiar circle, does not seek new connections, and tends to stick to routine. Although they feel socially isolated they are hesitant to try new experiences.
- Connection type 2: The older adult is open to social contact but is either unaware of available opportunities or feels uncertain about participating, such as not knowing whether an activity is suitable for their age or interests.
- Connection type 3: The older adult takes part in social activities, but the interactions they experience remain superficial.

Within each of these connection types, individuals may feel emotionally disconnected (due to a lack of depth in relationships), socially disconnected (due to insufficient contact), or both.

### Focusing on connection type 1

Village supporters are skilled at assisting their residents and can

respond to specific social needs, once initial contact with them is made. The older adults of connection type 2 and 3 are open to help from the village supporter. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, the village supporters face challenges in reaching those who stay behind their front doors (connection type 1). This group is often overlooked because they do not explicitly ask for help.

For this reason, the focus of this project is on connection type 1. These individuals can be described as **homebound older adults**. Although this group is difficult to reach, the informal and trusted role of village supporters within the community offers a promising bridge. This makes it worthwhile to explore possible interventions tailored to their situation.



Fig. 33: The designer with the three village supporters.



Fig. 34: The table during the contextmapping session.

## 03 Understanding the homebound older adult: Contextmapping with village supporters

Following the previous meeting, several themes were discussed, but the most prominent was the challenge of engaging older adults who are difficult to reach through village supporters. As one of the village supporters aptly said during the initial meeting: “How do you get behind that front door?” This question directly ties into the central focus of my graduation project.

To gain deeper insights into the subgroup, homebound older adults, I invited the three village supporters to participate in an interactive session. The session took place at the village hall in Deurningen. Upon arrival, I laid out blank sheets, scissors, and markers, which immediately piqued the curiosity of the attendees.

### Setup

1. A brief presentation on the concept of the homebound older adult
2. Each participant created a poster reflecting their understanding of this group in their village
3. Poster discussion and brainstorming on how to reach and engage homebound older adults

### Method

*Part 1:* I began by explaining how I identified the subgroup “homebound older adults” and how I would describe

them (as detailed in Ch. 4, Par. 2). This introduction was designed to ensure the village supporters understood the spectrum of social connection and disconnection, with a specific focus on the first type during the creative activity.

*Part 2:* Village supporters possess valuable, often tacit knowledge of their communities through informal contact. To help make this implicit understanding explicit, I used context mapping techniques. Each participant received an A3 sheet, scissors, tape, two pages of images, and one page of words related to social connection. I explained the task: “Use these images and words to visually express how you believe you could reach and support homebound older adults. Feel free to add your own drawings, notes, or collaged elements, whatever works for you.” I emphasized that the interpretation of the materials was up to them and intended to inspire creativity.

Initially, I started creating a collage myself to spark ideas and remain low profile, but I soon shifted focus to observing and asking questions. Eventually, I stopped working on my own poster. While the participants worked, I asked about homebound older adults they know, gathering real-life examples. The conversation helped stimulate their reflections and ideas.

## The village supporters meet concerned contacts and hesitant homebound older adults

The concerned neighbor. A woman noticed that her older male neighbor seemed lonely and had aged noticeably. She had once brought something over to his home, and he remarked, "You could have just put it in the mailbox." She responded casually, "I'll just have a coffee with you," and did exactly that. The village supporter then encouraged the woman to ask if she would be allowed to visit, though the woman doubted he would be receptive.

Every now and then, the village supporters notice that some homebound older adults are hesitant if it comes to 'help'.

A village supporter shared that a daughter once approached her, expressing concern for her mother and suggesting the VS visit her. The VS did, but the mother did not open the door for her. The daughter speculated this might be because the mother could no longer make coffee independently, which she viewed as the norm, leading to embarrassment.

When someone cannot meet the expected social norms, they feel ashamed and are less likely to accept help from strangers.

A VS mentioned a man in the village whom several residents worry about. Through a neighbor, the VS discovered the man still meets with a friend who lives across the street. Since the friend occasionally attends local meal gatherings, the VS asked him if he would consider taking his homebound friend along with him.

The village supporters might indirectly be able to provide help.

Fig. 35: Examples from the village supporters about the homebound older adults in their villages.

## Chapter 4: Narrowing down the target group

*Part 3:* We discussed the posters. This provided insights into their knowledge and encouraged the participants to reflect on their own understanding of the homebound individuals in their communities. After discussing the posters, we held a general discussion on how homebound older adults could be most effectively supported.

### Insights

*Insights from part 2 (During the activity)*  
We discussed the homebound individuals they know. All three village supporters confirmed they are aware of

several in their respective communities. Fig. 35 shares some of the stories they told about these homebound older adults.

These stories highlight that the village supporters are familiar with concerned community members who express worries about older individuals they know. The homebound older adults may experience feelings of shame and hesitation when it comes to accepting help. As such, the village supporters may be more effective in offering support through indirect approaches.



Fig. 36: Example of a created poster.

### *Insights from part 3 (Discussion)*

Once the posters were completed (an example can be seen in Fig. 36, all three posters with accompanying summaries are available in Appendix D), we discussed how the village supporters believe homebound older adults might be encouraged to come out from behind their front doors.

### Poster Discussions

Most of what the village supporters shared about what homebound older adults value in terms of contact aligned with the findings presented in chapter 3. A few additional considerations were emphasized. Fig. 37 provides a summary of the key points from the poster discussions. The top section of the figure briefly outlines how the village supporters envision initiating contact with homebound individuals. The lower section highlights both the key insights from Chapter 3 (left-hand side) and the specific points the village supporters emphasized (right-hand side).

### *General Discussion on Homebound Older Adults*

As I anticipated, and as was confirmed by the village supporters, they are indeed capable of supporting homebound older adults once initial contact has been established. However, creating that first point of contact

remains a key challenge. We explored potential pathways to reach and support homebound older adults.

The discussion highlighted the value of leveraging existing social networks (neighbors, family members, or local acquaintances) as a bridge to the homebound. Personal referrals and word-of-mouth proved especially effective for encouraging older adults to try new things. This supports the findings from chapter 3.

Two key approaches emerged for reaching homebound individuals through existing networks, as visualised in Fig. 38 on p. 91:

- Through healthcare professionals who can refer them to village supporters.
- Through trusted contacts already within their social network.

Since healthcare collaboration is a longer-term path and beyond the project's scope, I chose to focus on trusted contacts as the most feasible and immediate bridge to the homebound older adults.

**“Neighbors and fellow villagers can truly play a meaningful role.** However, they may not always know how to help, may lack confidence, or may simply be unwilling to intervene,” one village



Small gestures, informal encounters, sincere conversations.

Using existing networks and word-of-mouth to initiate contact.

Different approaches for men or women.

Shared history (past jobs, local films, etc.) are strong connectors.

Practical and action-oriented with casual drop-ins and gentle nudges.

Build low-threshold relationships.

Focus on the individual and their individual needs and keep the ownership with the older adults.

Focus on meaning.



According to the village supporters, the key insights from chapter 3 also apply to the homebound older adults.

- Meaningful life
- Personal interactions
- Casual interactions
- Cultural aspects
- Social barriers

The village supporters highlight multiple points about connecting to the homebound older adults:

- **Tempt** the homebounds to connect through what they **find important** (e.g. in their network or past).
- Help them to find their **purpose** and **empower** them through their **skills and interests**.
- Remember the gender-based interactions.
- Lower social barriers by having trusted contacts **take them along**.
- Built **trust and safety** by adhering to given promises.



Fig. 37: What homebound older adults find important.

supporter explained. Therefore, I want to design an intervention that will help the trusted contacts help the homebound older adults in finding more connection.

Unlike professionals, trusted contacts are unlikely to probe deeply or ask what kind of support the older adult may need. Village supporters, however, are trained to recognize subtle signals and follow up with the right questions to provide meaningful support. This indicates that it might be wise for the intervention to encourage homebound older adults to connect with the village supporters. The village supporters share that this can be achieved if the trusted contact just casually checks in with the homebound older adult, simply is present, and gently encourages them to engage with village supporters.

One village supporter noted a limitation: Homebound individuals often feel more comfortable saying “no” to those they know well, making it easier to decline help when offered informally. To reduce this barrier, the village supporters suggested that trusted contacts could mention the availability of a village supporter in a low-pressure, informal way, framing it as a casual visit rather than a formal or professional service. This could make the idea of receiving support feel less intimidating.

“What if that intermediary could offer help themselves?” I asked. The village supporters agreed this would be ideal. In fact, it’s what they would ultimately want.

The next paragraph outlines how I plan to center the involvement of trusted contacts in my approach.

**Via whom can the homebound older adults be helped to experience more connectedness?**

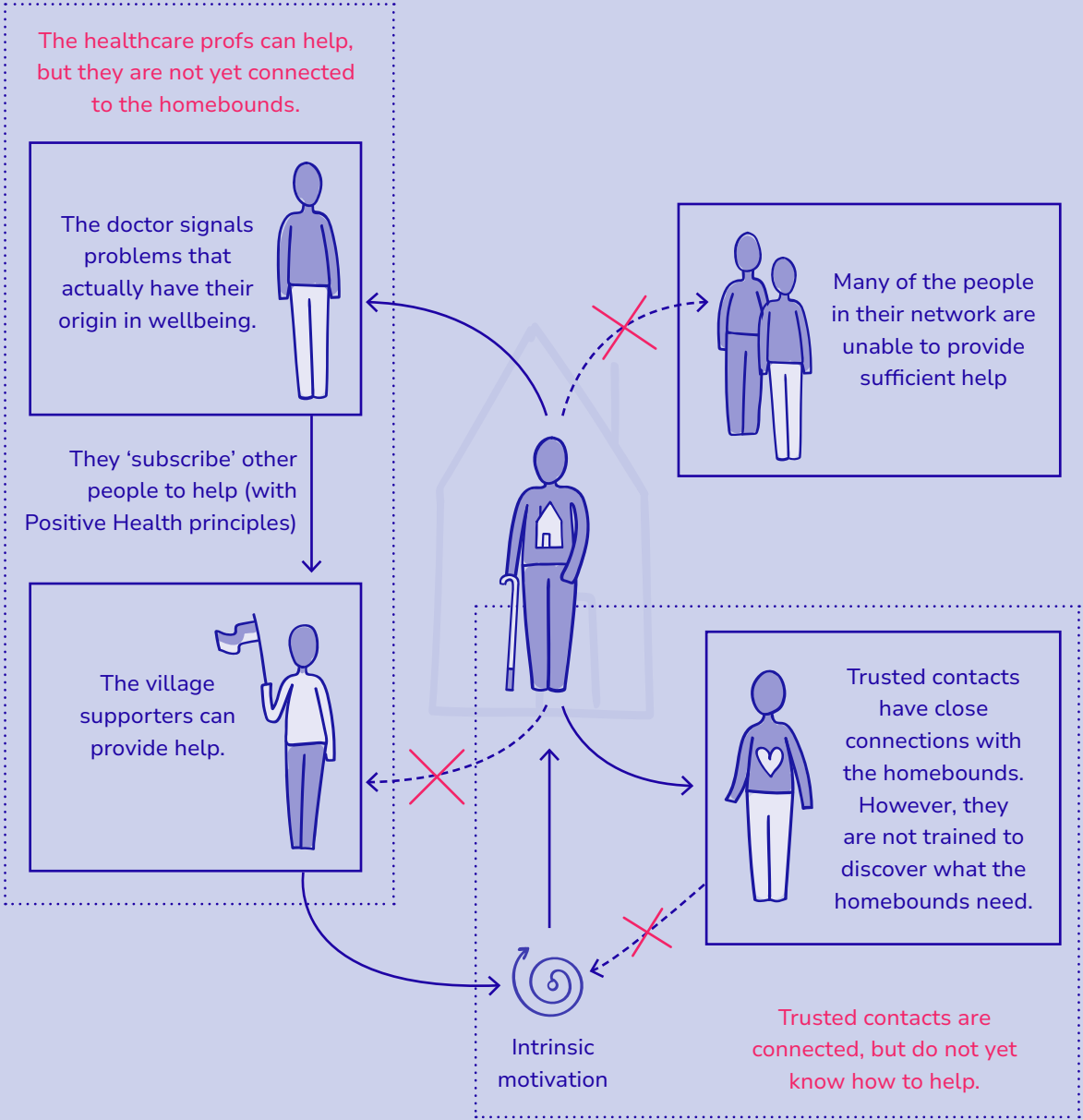


Fig. 38: The gaps (crosses) in having other people help the homebound older adults.

### Possible trusted contacts

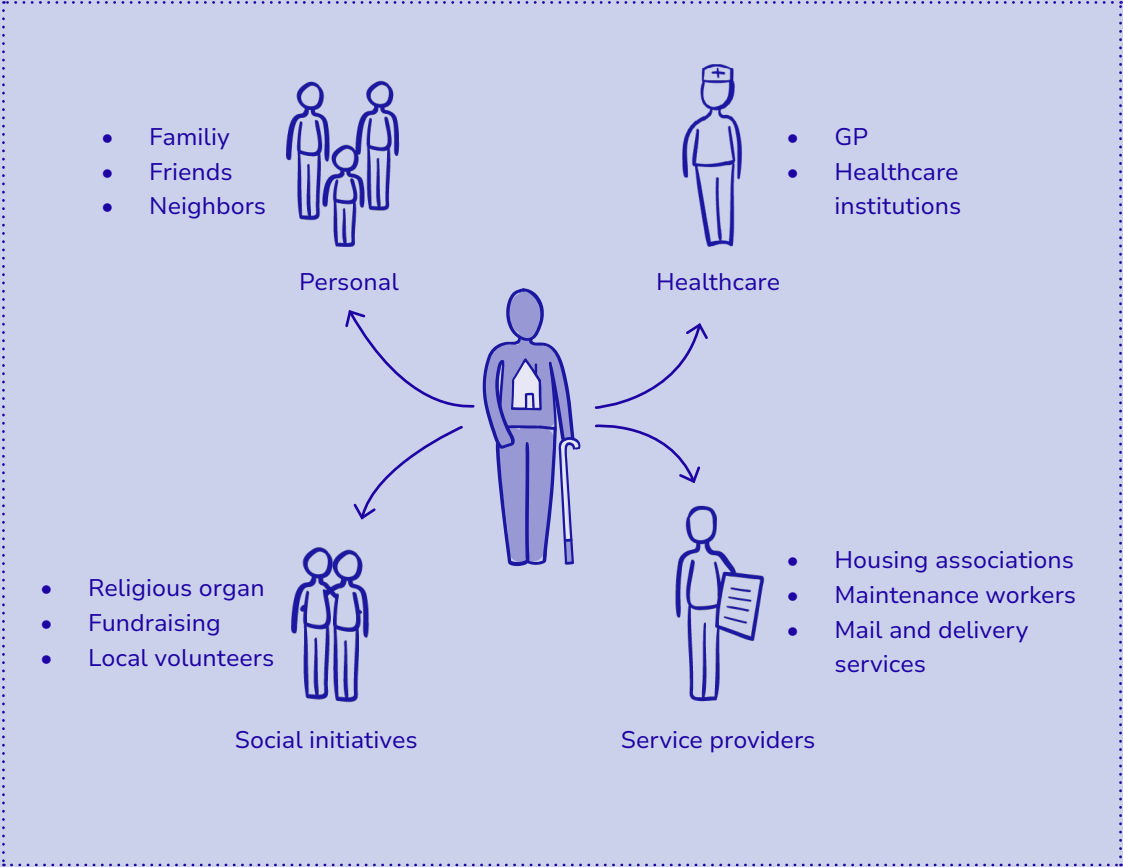


Fig. 39: Possible trusted contacts in the network of homebound older adults.

## 04 Understanding the homebound older adults: Helping them through their trusted contacts

As established in Ch. 4, Par. 3 trusted contacts can play an important role in the lives of homebound older adults. While they are not healthcare professionals, with the guidance and support of village supporters, they can gain the tools to offer meaningful assistance.

### Who is a trusted contact?

**Trusted contacts** are individuals who are already within the social circles of homebound older adults and have occasional contact with them. This varies depending on the individual and may include family members, friends, neighbors, or even the mail carrier or a familiar home care worker (Fig. 39). These individuals already have an existing relationship with the homebound older adult and can support and encourage them to step out of their isolation. Together, they can begin to uncover what the homebound person truly needs in terms of social connection.

The trusted contact offers support in a personal and casual way, engaging in a natural interaction that pays attention to the older adult's sense of meaning without it feeling forced or agenda-driven.

Fig. 40 shares a few example stories of how people can support each other

through personal, informal interactions, based on the conversations I had with and about older adults.

Fig. 41 provides an overview of the various types of relationships that I consider to fall under the category of 'trusted contacts' for homebound older adults.

Based on the three interviews (chapter 3)

## Example stories

With homebound older adults

A woman received support after an accident that left her with permanent brain damage. With guidance, she discovered she could still draw, and eventually even began teaching others.

With the **help of a loved one**, she discovered what she was still capable of and was empowered by their support.

A man enjoyed silence but also liked being outdoors. He was referred to a walking group that walks in silence.

People who knew him well suggested something that suited his preferences. Because **he trusted them**, he was open to trying it.

Every time a man and his wife visit a museum, they invite their neighbor along. Although the neighbor would never go alone, he often joins them.

When someone **personally invites** another person to join, the likelihood of participation increases.

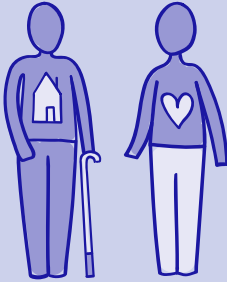
A man who never went outside was visited at home by someone from his church. The visitor spoke kindly, without pressure. They discovered the man loved organ music. Later, he received a CD featuring a composer he admired. He didn't have to do anything, it was simply a gift. The man was so moved that he started attending church again.

Approaching someone **without expecting or needing anything in return** can open the door to genuine and honest connection.

Fig. 40: Illustrative stories of homebound older adult connections that show the value of their trusted contacts.

## Example relationships

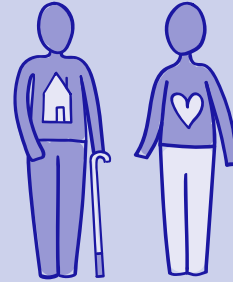
Between homebound older adults and their trusted contacts



Klaas

Piet

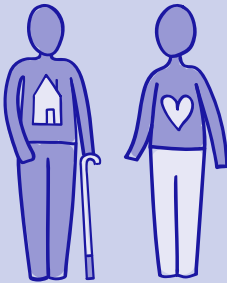
Neighbors who don't know each other very well, but always exchange greetings. Piet occasionally comes over for coffee. Piet enjoys chatting, while Klaas can come across rather absent.



Grietje

Marleen

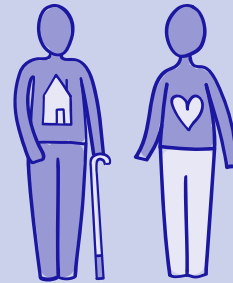
Mother and daughter who are in frequent contact, though their interactions remain superficial. The mother is quite stubborn.



Mrs. de Wit

Village supporter

A friendly relationship. They sometimes have coffee together. Mrs. de Wit is enthusiastic but also hesitant, her insecurity makes her slow to take initiative.



Henk

Bakker family

Neighbors. The Bakker family regularly invites Henk to join them at the museum. However, they don't engage in much conversation. Henk is gentle, kind, but very shy.

Fig. 41: Interaction dynamics between homebound older adults and their trusted contacts.

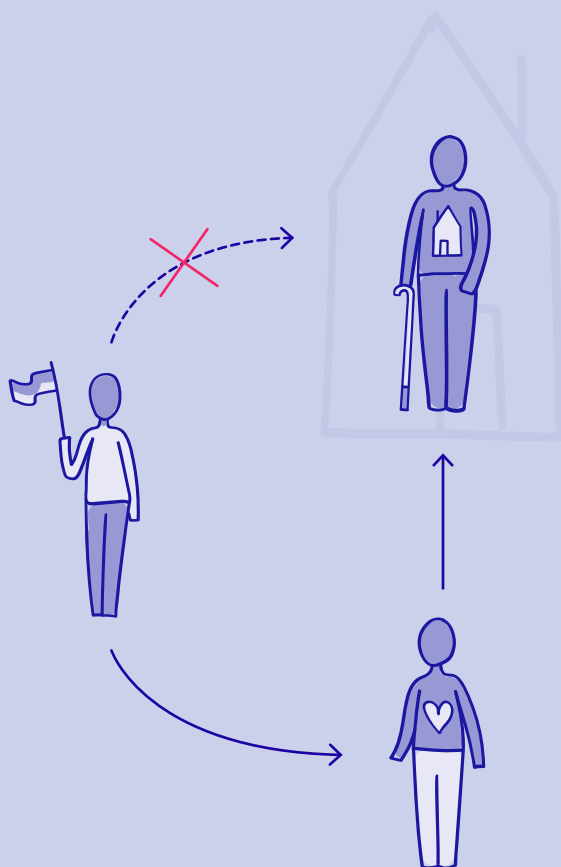


Fig. 42: Indirect link between village supporters and homebound older adults.

## 05 Chapter conclusion

The villages of the village supporters are filled with all kinds of people. They include a group of older adults who experience a lack of connectedness. While village supporters are well-equipped to help them build meaningful relationships, there remains a specific group they struggle to reach: homebound older adults. The **homebound older adults** have become set in their routines, rarely go outside or seek new experiences, despite experiencing a lack of connection. Village supporters, trained to listen and guide individuals toward new opportunities, struggle to reach this group directly.

An important role, therefore, lies with the **trusted contacts** of homebound older adults (see Fig. 42). They are described as those within the social circles of the homebound with whom they have built some rapport, such as family members or friends. Interviews with older adults showed that they are far more willing to explore new activities or visit places when encouraged or accompanied by someone they trust. This **trust** is essential in connecting homebound older adults with new social opportunities, ultimately improving their overall well-being.

The next step is to explore potential

solutions that align with the needs of homebound older adults. Chapter 5 will delve into the synthesis of the design, leading to the development of an initial concept aimed at fostering social connections.

# Chapter 5

## Concept ideation

The ideation process of coming to the  
concept of a question-based card game

Chapter 5 further clarifies the design goal, connects an interaction vision to it and introduces the initial concept direction for the design. Through discussions with various professionals, potential design outcomes were explored to support homebound older adults in fostering social connections. From the insights of chapter 4, combined with input from a group of design professionals, I identified multiple design directions. I then revised these directions and discussed them with the village supporters, leading to the selection of a concept centered around a skills and interests-based card game. The end of the chapter shows how the concept is further refined into a question card game designed for homebound older adults to play with their trusted contacts.

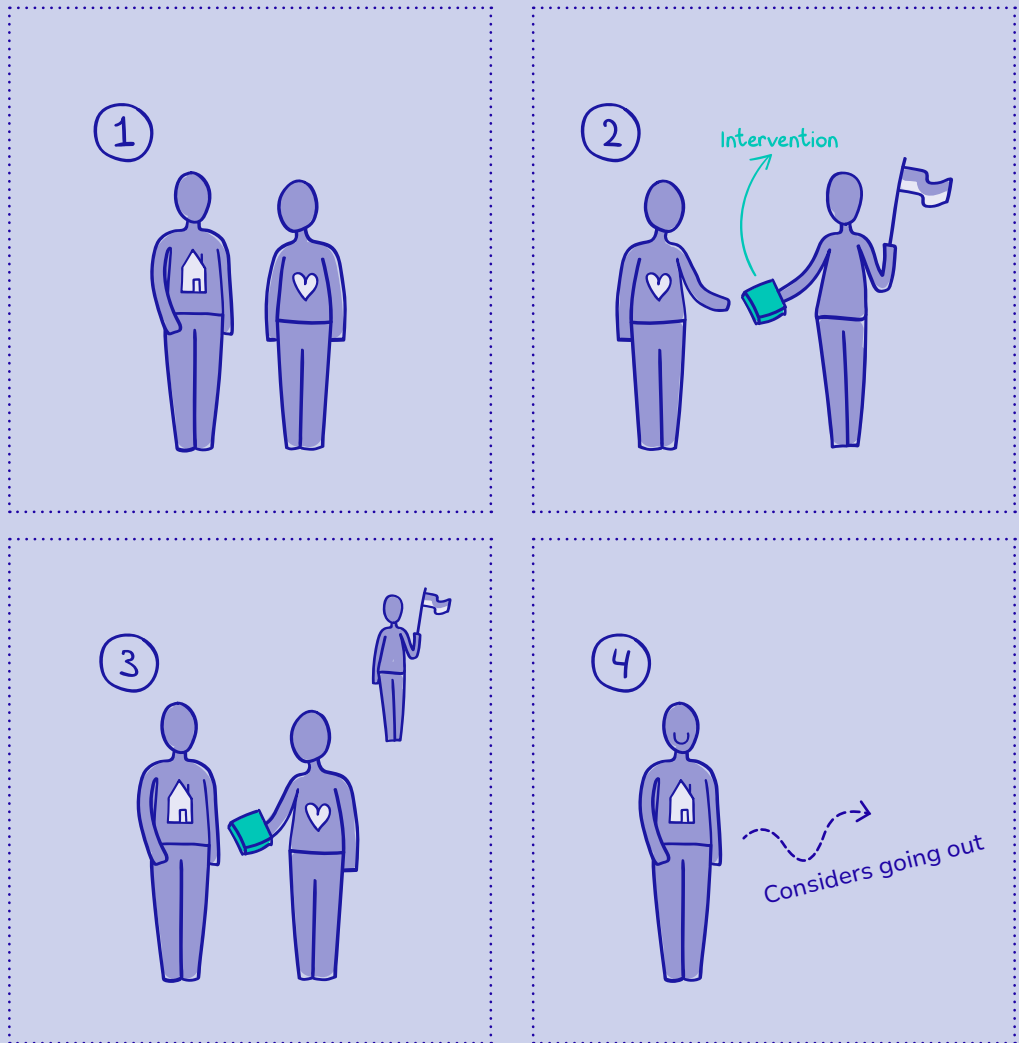


Fig. 43: A visual representation of the design goal.

# 01 Clarifying the design intention

Chapter 4 highlighted that it is difficult for trusted contacts to provide in-depth support to homebound older adults on their own. The intervention to be designed aims to guide the trusted contacts in this process. Therefore, this section explains how the design goal from chapter 1 can be interpreted and introduces an associated interaction vision to guide the design process.

## I. Clarifying the design goal

I aim to design an intervention that supports trusted contacts in helping homebound older adults, while taking into account the importance of personal and casual interactions, and maintaining a focus on fostering a meaningful life. The design goal is visualized in Fig. 44.

The envisioned interaction process is illustrated in Fig. 43:

1. The homebound older adult has trusted contacts in their environment.
2. Village supporters have shared that it is common for someone to approach them with concerns about e.g. a neighbor, parent, or friend. The village supporter provides the designed **intervention** to the trusted contact, ...
3. ... who then introduces it to the homebound older adult. It is used.
4. Ultimately, the homebound older adult feels heard and encouraged to step outside their immediate social circle.

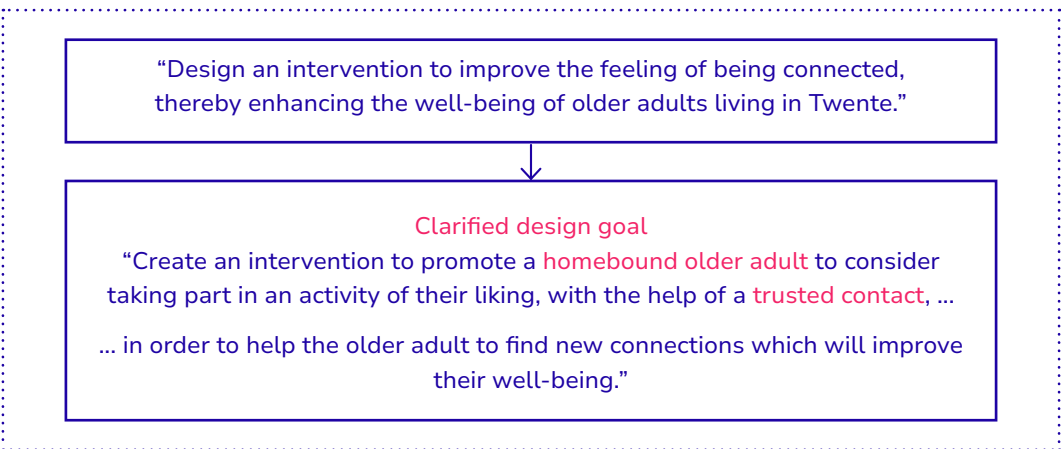


Fig. 44: The clarified design goal.



The interaction vision can be described as: Finding your old radio. The radio feels **familiar** and you are **curious** if the radio still works. You are willing to try, despite the fact that it might not work. You have no expectations. It is slightly exciting, and you feel **enthusiastic** about trying it out. You found it in your own house, that feels familiar and **casual**.

*Fig. 45: The interaction vision; what the user should feel when interacting with the intervention.*

## II. Formulating the interaction vision

In Chapter 4, an initial brainstorming session explored potential interaction visions. Now that the specific target group has been defined, a suitable interaction vision can be formulated, expressing the desired emotions of the homebound older adult in relation to the intervention.

Fig. 45 shows how it feels to find your old radio. The product should evoke these same emotions. When the homebound older adult encounters the intervention, it should feel **familiar** and **casual**. It should spark **enthusiasm** and **curiosity** about what it can offer. The user should feel encouraged to try it out (**curious**), while also understanding that the experience might not bring him anything. The experience is open-ended, without specific expectations or obligations (**casual**).

This interaction vision serves as a guiding principle in evaluating whether future design concepts align with the intended emotional experience.

## Conclusion

Understanding the design goal and the emotions that the intervention should evoke, the first design concepts can now

be developed.

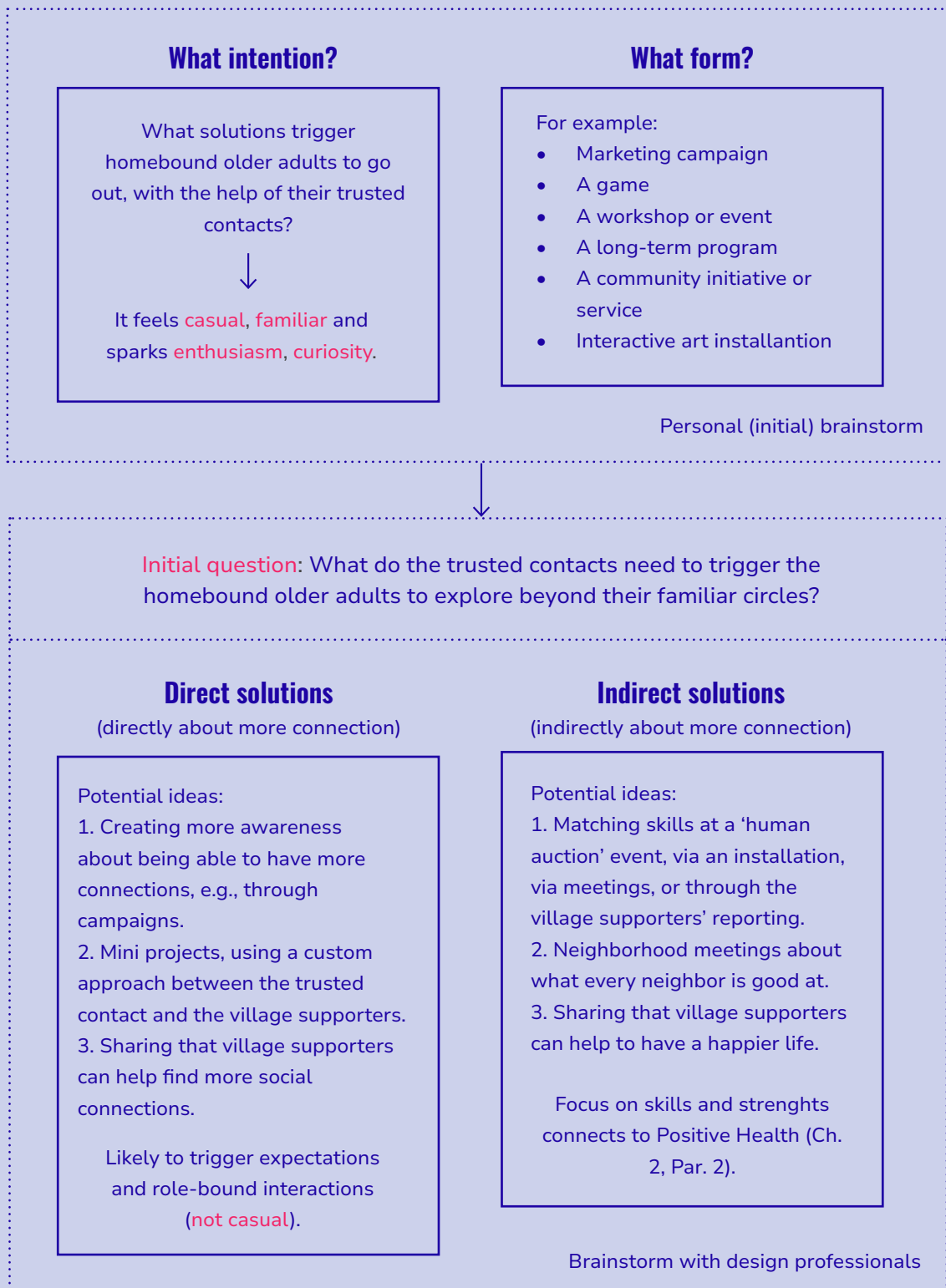


Fig. 46: The initial concept exploration

## 03 Initial concept exploration and selection

The goal of this initial concept exploration is to gain a clearer understanding of the types of concepts that align with the design goal and interaction vision.

### I. Initial design brainstorm

It is decided that the intervention should come across casual and familiar, evoking a sense of enthusiasm and curiosity in the homebound older adult. I recognized that there are numerous possible design forms to achieving this goal, as illustrated in the upper section of Fig. 46.

### II. Design brainstorm with design professionals

To explore suitable design forms, I conducted a brainstorming session with three design professionals specialised in conceptual and social design (see Fig. 47). We aimed to answer the question of how a trusted contact can successfully encourage a homebound older adult to engage socially. It became evident that there are both direct and indirect solutions for fostering social connections through the support of trusted contacts (see lower section of Fig. 46).

A **direct approach** explicitly focuses

on increasing social connections.

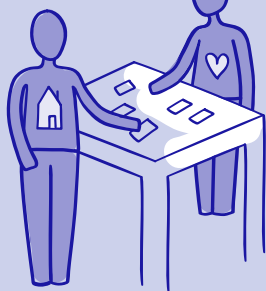
While straightforward, this method immediately highlights the need for connection, which may unintentionally place older adults in a position where they feel they are lacking something. This approach risks making them feel uncomfortable or even offended.

During the brainstorming session, we identified an alternative **indirect approach** that centers around sharing personal strengths and skills. By emphasizing what individuals are good at, whether through workshops, gatherings, or other activities, this method offers a way to bring people together without focusing on a perceived deficiency. However, not every concept within this category will necessarily feel familiar or inviting to homebound older adults.



Fig. 47: Concept exploration with three design professionals.

① Skill-themed game



Between trusted contact and homebound older adults

② Internal skill-list



③ Campaign succes stories



For in the entire village

④ General awerence



⑤ Skill event



For groups

⑥ Custom approach



Between trusted contact and VS

Fig. 48: The six initial concepts.

### III. Initial concept selection

The initial concept explorations led to the development of six concepts. In all concepts, the trusted contacts play a central role. Fig. 48 illustrates the six concepts. In some of the concepts the trusted contacts have a connecting role between the village supporters and homebound older adults. In others, the trusted contacts are guided to help the homebounds directly.

**Concept 1:** A skill-themed game. The trusted contact plays this game with the homebound older adult, encouraging them to explore existing activities and discover related skills. The idea is that this realization will inspire enthusiasm and openness toward engaging in (social) activities outside the home. The trusted contact can also remind the older adult that a village supporter is available to help them find suitable activities.

**Concept 2:** An interactive skills database maintained by village supporters. When a concerned resident (trusted contact) reaches out, they can collaborate with the village supporter to identify the homebound older adult's interests and abilities. The village supporter can then use this list to connect individuals based on their strengths.

**Concept 3:** A village-wide marketing campaign sharing success stories of village supporters fostering connections, targeting trusted contacts to encourage outreach to them by homebound older adults.

**Concept 4:** A broader initiative to raise awareness about village supporters and their role, ensuring trusted contacts understand their value and can introduce homebound older adults to them.

**Concept 5:** An event or workshop where trusted contacts bring homebound older adults. The event centers around personal skills, functioning as a fair where participants can discover how their abilities might benefit others.

**Concept 6:** A toolkit for village supporters and trusted contacts, offering tailored strategies to encourage homebound older adults to step outside their usual social circles and engage with new people.



Fig. 49: Initial concept discussion with the village supporters.



### Interaction vision elements

Should feel **casual**, **familiar** and spark **enthusiasm**, **curiosity**.

- It focuses on skills and interests (which promotes pride and empowerment, par X), sparks **enthusiasm**.
- Games are fun, low-threshold to play, sparks **curiosity**.
- Will be played with **familiar** people, in a **familiar** setting, that is pleasant and **casual**.
- It is concrete, as it will be linked to existing events and activities.

### Discussion with the village supporters

- They are interested in the idea. A tool in the form of a game is new to them.
- Linking the game to existing activities can help identify missing activities in their villages.
- Their willingness to use the product depends heavily on its final form.
- Being able to share their thoughts and concerns throughout the design process gives them enough confidence to choose this concept.

Fig. 50: The concept direction: Skill-themed game.

#### IV. Discussion of concept selection with village supporters

The village supporters have an in-depth understanding of their community members and the activities that contribute to a more livable village. This enables them to provide well-informed opinions on which concepts best support social connections for homebound older adults while aligning with their existing work.

I shared the concepts (Fig. 49) with the three village supporters, after which the discussion led to the following conclusions about the six concepts (see Fig. 48 on p. 106):

**Concept 1** stood out to the village supporters. The game can encourage homebound older adults in a playful, informal way and provide village supporters with insights into which activities are appreciated and which might still be missing in their villages. Moreover, a game is a format of a tool they do not yet have.

**Concept 2** focuses on collectively gathering knowledge about community members. The village supporters already engage in this practice to some extent and they expressed doubts about whether a tool would add long-term value, as their current approach is

sufficient for their needs.

**Concepts 3 and 4** aim to increase awareness of village supporters within the community. While this is important and could be improved, the village supporters are already actively working on this aspect.

**Concepts 5 and 6** were considered interesting but too extensive for the project's duration. Additionally, finding enough participants to properly test these concepts would be challenging.

#### V. Chosen concept direction: Skill-themed game

The skill-themed game aligns with the core values of the interaction vision (see Fig. 50, left). It is an **indirect** way to help homebound older adults to find more connection through finding interesting activities to do. Moreover, the village supporters found the concept appealing because it is new, enjoyable, and might offer fresh insights into potential gaps in village activities. Despite some uncertainty about whether they will actively use the game, they expect that their direct involvement in the design process will increase the likelihood of the adoption (see Fig. 50, right).

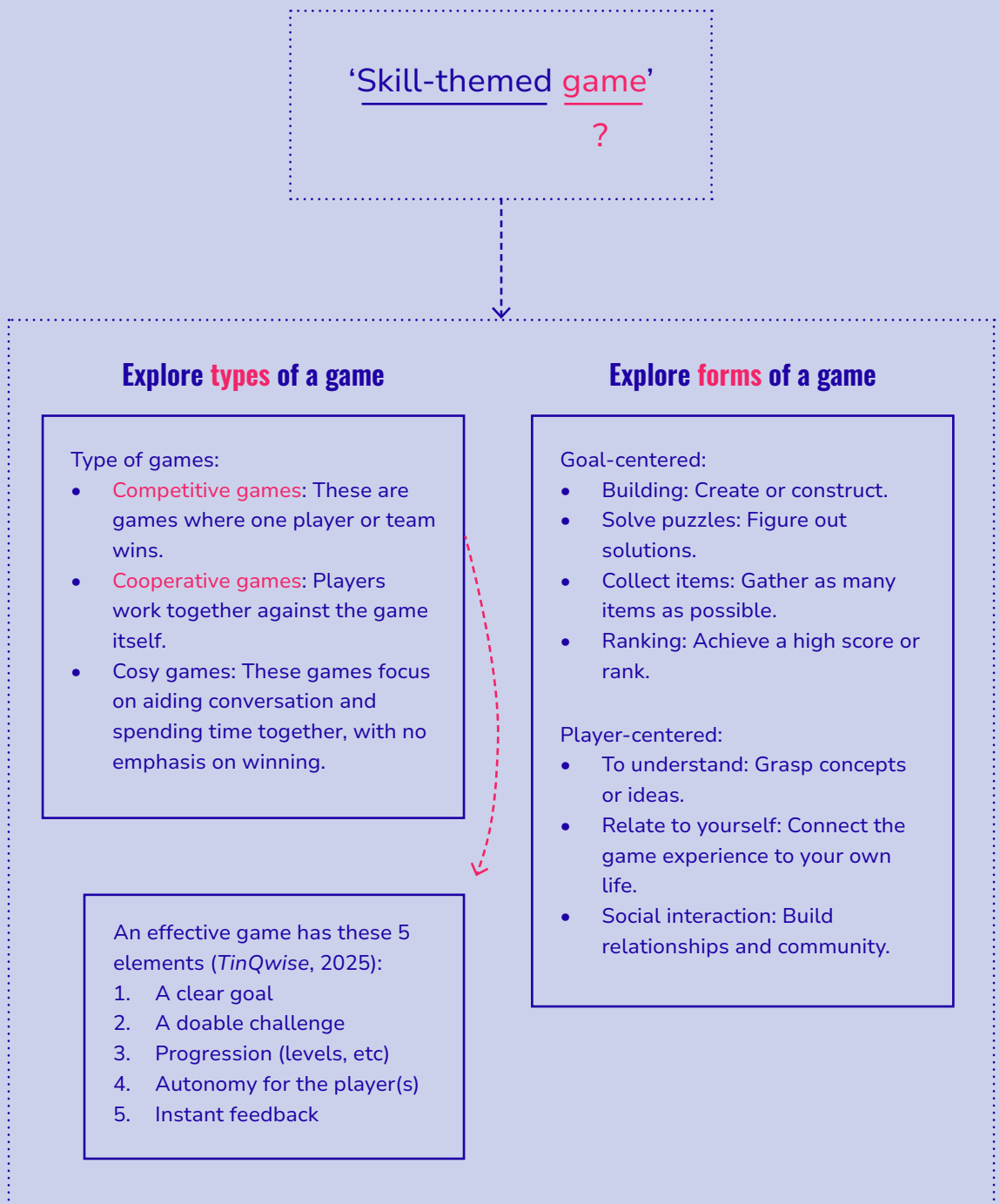


Fig. 51: Exploring different types and forms of a 'game'.

## 04 Exploration on a skill-themed game

To understand the potential of a skill-themed game, I conducted a short exploratory study. This included personal brainstorming and discussions with four fellow design students. The findings are summarized below.

### I. Exploring the types and forms of a 'Game'

Games can take many forms and serve a range of purposes. To guide my thinking around possible directions for a skill-themed game, I created an overview (see Fig. 51) of different game types and formats.

Game types vary significantly. In addition to the classic competitive format where players face off against each other, there are also cooperative games in which players work together toward a shared goal. Additionally, some games are not centered on winning at all; these are often referred to as “cozy games.” A relatively new genre, cozy games are digital games that focus on relaxation, non-violence, and emotional comfort. Their goals are typically open-ended, emphasizing self-expression and exploration over competition (Lambertsen, 2024; Spalding, 2024). This could be translated into physical games, as well.

Reflecting on the interaction vision (see Ch. 5, Par. 1), I aim to design a game that sparks enthusiasm and curiosity. I took this into account when creating the concepts.

The game formats refer to the delivery and structure of these types and were a valuable source of inspiration for forming various game concepts, which I elaborate on in the following paragraph.

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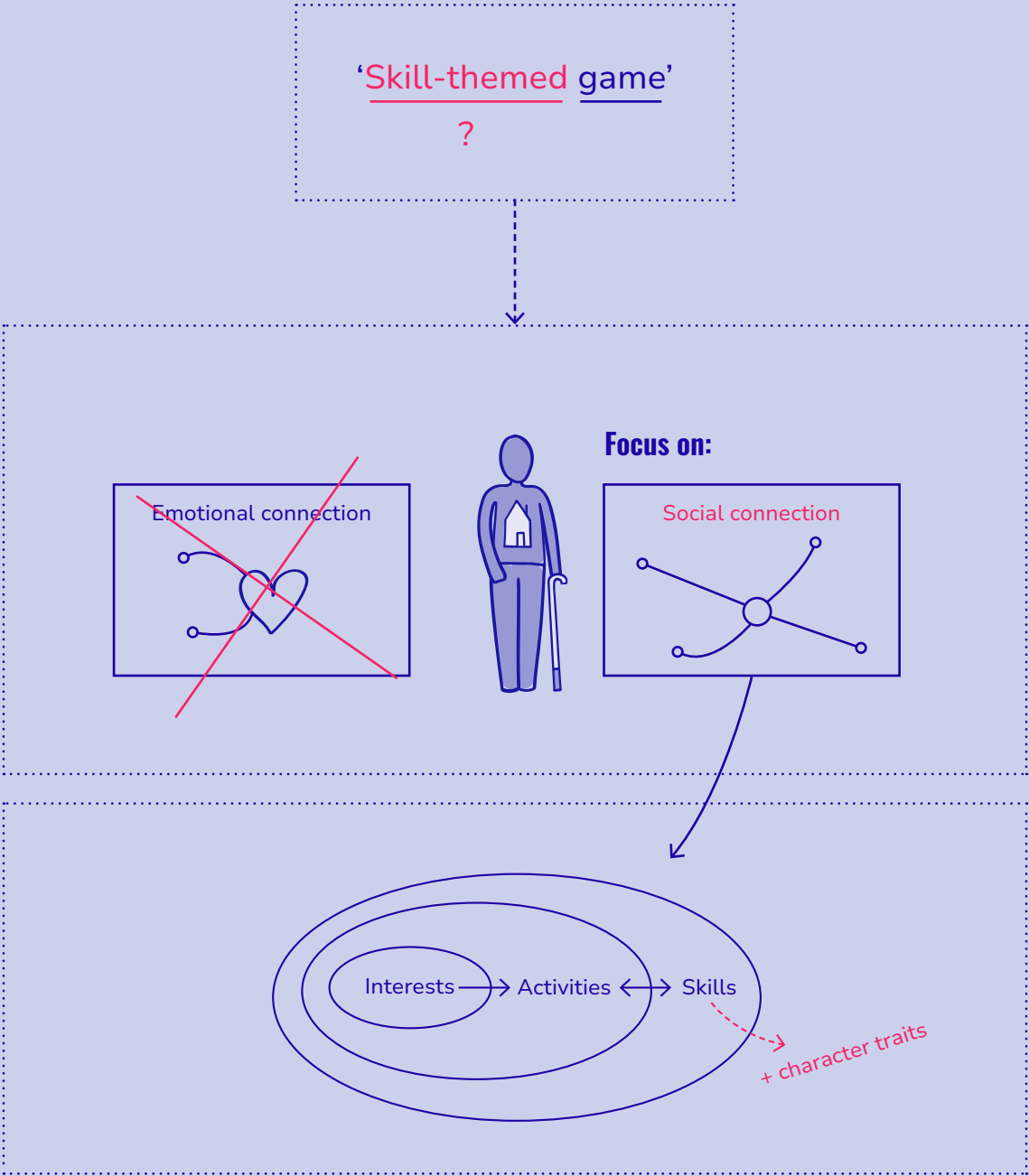


Fig. 52: The meaning of a 'skill-themed' game.

## II. Exploring the meaning of 'Skill-themed'

For this design, I chose to focus specifically on social connection. While emotional connection is also important, designing for both simultaneously will be too complex. Social connection is about increasing the number of connections and thus being open to and meeting new people. **I want to encourage the homebound older adults who play the game to being open to try a new social activity, which aligns with their personal preferences.**

Since it is established that the village supporters are not always present to facilitate this process, and trusted contacts are not trained to ask homebound older adults what matters to them, I want the game itself to support this discovery process.

To better understand the relationship between skills and activities, I created an example spider diagram (see Appendix E) showing a wide range of activities alongside the skills or character traits they require. By "activities," I refer to a broad spectrum from organized events like senior fitness groups or one-time workshops (e.g., birdhouse crafting), to informal activities such as mowing a neighbor's lawn. Then, I linked these

activities to related interests (see Fig. 52 for a schematic overview). This taught me that to identify suitable activities, I can focus on skills, character traits and interests within the game.

## Conclusion

These insights, combined with the knowledge gained about different types of games, led to a brainstorming session that produced a range of early game-concept ideas which were refined into nine conceptual directions, which are discussed in the next paragraph.

### 1. Building a village ('Catan')



### 2. Quartet game



### 3. Life path game ('Levensweg')



### 4. 'Guess! Who am I?'

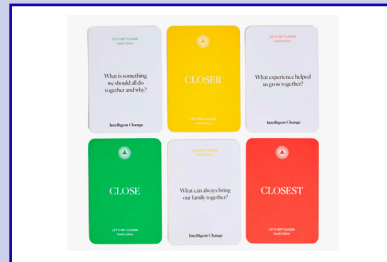


Familiar game concepts

### 5. Contextmapping game



### 6. Question game



Fun reflection

### 7. Talk + fold-out sheet



### 8. Fun form



### 9. Supplementing art



Casual reflection

Fig. 53: Nine conceptual forms of a skill-themed game.

## 05 Conceptual forms of a skill-themed game

I developed nine concept directions, see Fig. 53, with the intention of feeling casual and personal while also prompting meaningful reflections, aligned with what older adults value (see Ch. 3, Par. 7). Additionally, each concept aims to spark enthusiasm and curiosity, as outlined in the interaction vision (see Ch. 5, Par. 1).

Each game encourages players to think about which skills and interests align with certain activities, with the goal of inspiring them to consider what types of activities they might enjoy themselves.

**Concepts 1–4** are inspired by existing games, which can evoke excitement through familiarity. In these concepts, elements of well-known games are replaced with themes of interests, skills, and activities.

**Concepts 5–6** focus more deeply on personal reflection regarding interests, skills, and activities. By encouraging players to reflect on these themes together, the game fosters not only self-awareness but also shared enthusiasm as participants engage with each other's answers.

**Concepts 7–9** aim to lower the threshold for interaction with it while maintaining a clear link to existing village activities. These ideas incorporate playful

elements into an interactive format or art piece that encourages players to add their own interests, skills, and activity preferences. The simplicity of the format is designed to spark curiosity and engagement.

### Conclusion

To determine which forms are most effective, I will conduct testing.

However, fully developing and testing each individual concept is not realistic. Instead, I will extract the most promising elements from concepts and combine them into a new prototype for testing.

### Chosen elements of the nine conceptual forms:

- Easy to make and reproduce:  
paper-made physical game,  
so that the game can easily be  
spread and have a broad reach.
- Character traits and (existing)  
activities.
- Elements of existing games to  
spark familiarity and enthusiasm.

Fig. 54: Chosen conceptual elements to create concept 1.

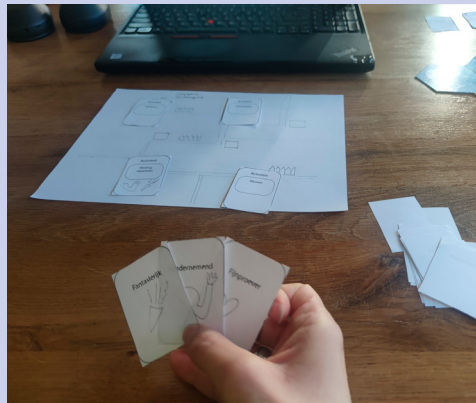


Fig. 55: Using existing games and cards with activities and  
qualities as a starting point to create concept 1.

## 08 Concept 1: A skill-themed card game

### I. Developing and defining concept 1

Given the limited timeframe, the feasibility of prototyping, and the number of available participants for testing, I chose to combine several key elements from the earlier concept explorations into one unified prototype (see Fig. 54).

The main objective is to test whether the game concept encourages players to reflect on which activities they might personally enjoy trying. Therefore, the focus of the test is primarily on the content, comprehension, and emotional response that the prototype elicits.

To begin, I drew inspiration from various well-known board games, analyzing their gameplay mechanics and elements. I also created and printed two sets of cards: one featuring different activities and another highlighting various personal traits. These became the foundation around which I designed the first concept (see Fig. 55).

#### Creating concept 1

In concept 1, players collaboratively select the appropriate qualities for different activities displayed in the center of the game board. I anticipated that the direct connection between qualities and activities, combined with

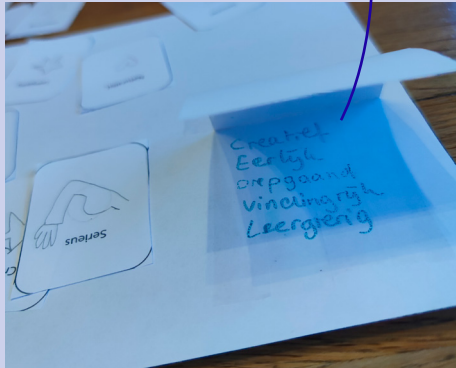
the discussion it encourages, would prompt players to reflect on their own qualities. Additionally, encountering various activities in the game might inspire them to consider which ones they would personally enjoy.

An added layer in the game involves players selecting a few qualities they associate with their fellow players before the game begins (see Fig. 56). During gameplay, participants try to identify and set aside the qualities they think others have picked for them. This extra layer is meant to be a playful and interactive challenge designed to provoke self-reflection even more.

### II. Testing concept 1

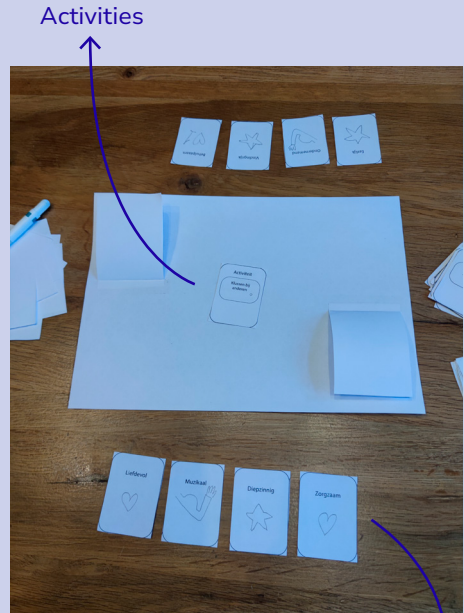
To test my assumptions, I conducted an initial playtest (see Fig. 57 and Fig. 58). Because the prototype was still in a very early stage and I primarily wanted to gather first impressions, I chose to test it with my mother. While she is not part of the target group, she could provide valuable feedback on the gameplay experience. I also participated in the playtest myself to observe and reflect on the interaction firsthand.

The results showed that the concept lacked depth and engagement. The task felt overly simple and failed to



Character traits fitting to the other player

Fig. 56: Character traits hidden for the other player until the end of the game.



Activities

Fig. 57: Concept 1.

Character traits



Fig. 58: Testing concept 1.

offer sufficient challenge. Most notably, there was little personal reflection during the game. Although we had some discussions about which qualities matched specific activities, these conversations remained superficial and did not lead to meaningful insights.

As a result, I decided to completely rethink the concept. Together with my father, and by actively incorporating physical elements from existing games (see Fig. 59), we created a more engaging format: a board game inspired by the layout of a classic goose board. The basic rules were straightforward, and the game became more compelling by adding activity cards that awarded extra points when players passed them with their tokens. Personal reflection was built into the game by allowing players to choose which activities to place on the board based on their own experiences and interests.

Around the same time I was developing this **new concept**, I had scheduled a meeting with two sociologists to gain insights from their perspective in the care domain. I planned to share the overall game idea involving qualities and activities. This meeting took place before the new concept was finalized. Based on their feedback, I concluded that this version still did not sufficiently engage

homebound older adults in meaningful reflection while remaining clear and accessible.

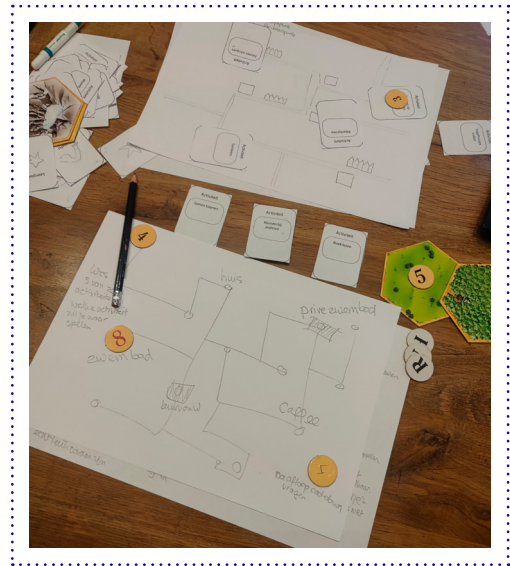


Fig. 59: Developing another concept.

The next paragraph shares the details and outcomes of the meeting with the two sociologists.

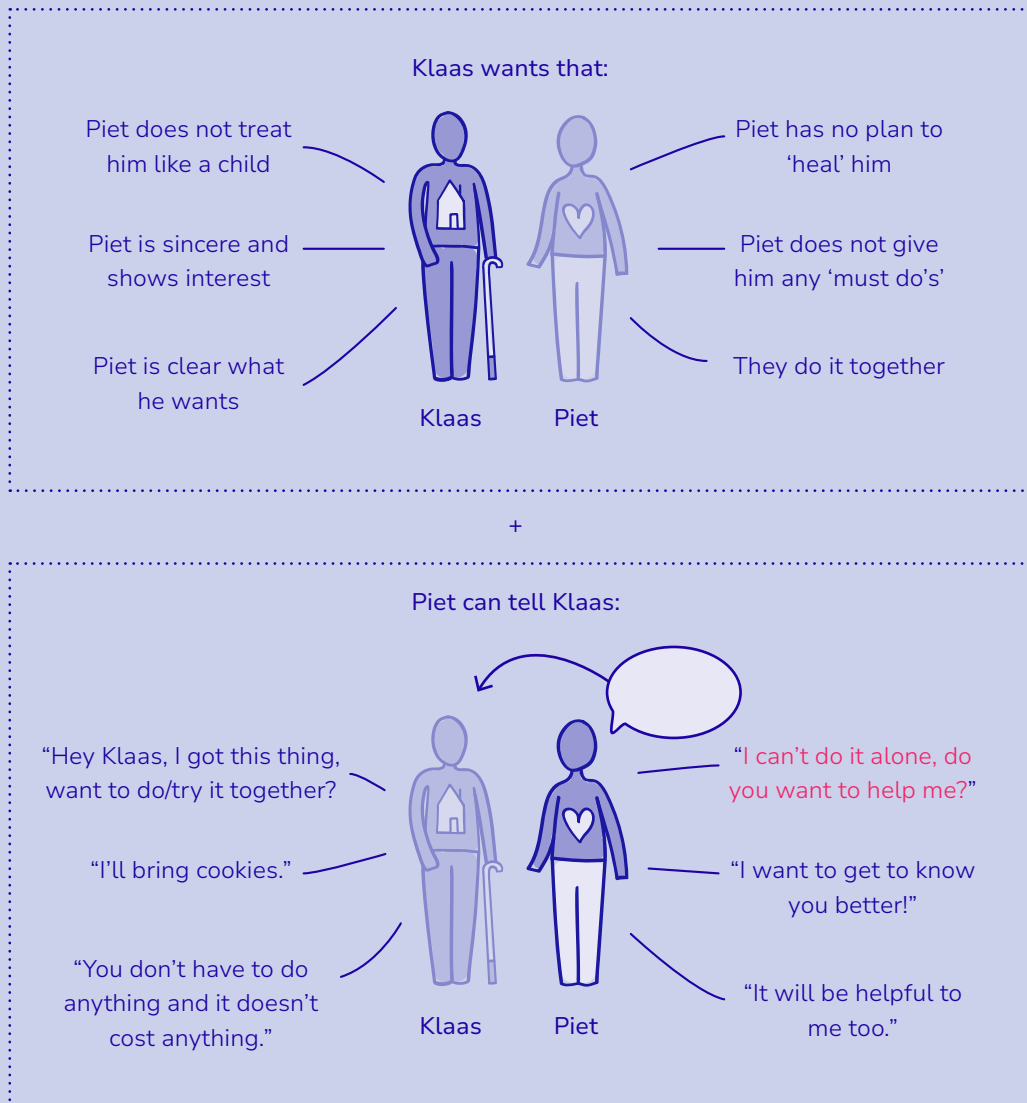


Fig. 60: How to communicate the game to the homebound older adult.

## 09 Content and communication of the game: Based on insights from two sociologists

How can a game be designed and introduced in a way that encourages homebound older adults to engage with it? To explore this question, I consulted with two sociologists. One had a background in enforcement and later worked as a neighborhood coordinator in the social sector, with training in conversation techniques and mediation. The other specialized in community organization and sociology and had extensive experience in community work and social programs. Both currently work at an organization focused on social impact and civic participation.

I presented the concept: a game designed for homebound older adults, intended to be played with a trusted contact who is concerned about their well-being. The game would be provided through the village supporter to the trusted contact.

When asked about their experience with socially disconnected individuals, both experts confirmed they regularly encountered such cases, often referring them to professionals. We discussed how to approach someone who may need more connection but is not open to discussing it. On account of this, they often cannot help. However, they do believe that support could come through indirect channels, confirming the

powerful role of a trusted contact.

We explored a scenario: a trusted contact (Piet) visits a homebound older adult (Klaas) and brings along the game. We discussed what Klaas wants when Piet contacts him, see Fig. 60. The sociologists emphasized that Piet should be open and personal, without hidden motives. For instance, he might say: “I got this game from that community worker and it actually seems fun. Want to try it with me over coffee?” One expert explained: “Saying ‘I want to help you’ won’t work. Instead, say something like, ‘I enjoy spending time with you and want to see what we can discover together.’” Piet might also say, “I think I’d enjoy this too, it’s for both of us.” He should emphasize being interested in Klaas and could even reframe the request by asking Klaas to help *him* with the game, which can increase the chance of participation.

### The game concept

Initially, I envisioned a light and familiar fun game, inspired by board games like *Life*, *Snakes and Ladders*, or *Monopoly*, built around themes like skills, qualities, and activities. However, the participants stressed the game shouldn’t be childish or mysterious, but rather straightforward about what

both players can gain. The participants advised keeping the game compact, easy to carry, and not overwhelming. See Fig. 61.

The game could present visual prompts and invite interpretation, for example in card form. A picture of a computer might spark responses like, “That’s not for me,” or, “I’ve always wanted to learn that.” This visual, exploratory method aligns with context mapping approach (Ch. 2, Par. 3), which shows that such techniques help individuals reflect on their preferences. A card showing birds in nature, for instance, might elicit, “That makes me happy,” and prompt going into nature more.

We concluded that Piet should clearly understand his role and be guided by the village supporter who first noticed the concern to ensure a smooth handoff. The game could also be used by professionals who already have established connections with homebound individuals. While developed with older adults in mind, the experts suggested the game may be valuable for other age groups as well.

Initially, the sociologists viewed the concept through the lens of professional intervention and loneliness. But as we explored the role of trusted contacts and

informal tools, their perspective shifted.

**They became genuinely enthusiastic about the potential of a game for use within informal networks** and expect it might be even more effective than formal outreach, especially when those channels are limited or resisted. Their growing enthusiasm was evident, and they expressed interest in staying involved as the project develops.



Easy to carry, clear,  
inspiring, not childish.

Fig. 61: What the game should be according to two sociologists.



Fig. 62: The revised interaction vision; what the homebound older adult should feel when interacting with the product.

## 10 Revised interaction vision

The previous version of the interaction vision (see Ch. 5, Par. 1) lacked the nuance needed to capture the emotions and experiences a homebound older adult might feel when the game is introduced, played, and reflected upon. For that reason, I developed a new interaction vision.

Fig. 62 (left side) illustrates the emotional tone evoked when someone finds back an old instrument (Fig. 63). The game should elicit the same kind of emotional response. The right side of Fig. 62 translates this feeling into the intended emotional journey for the homebound older adult.

The focus is on fostering feelings of pride and self-worth to promote motivation (see Fig. 10 on p. 35). The goal is to inspire enthusiasm from within, encouraging the older adult to try new activities that suit them.

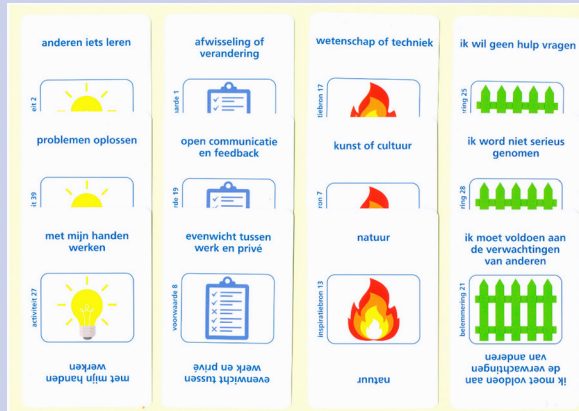
A conversation between a village supporter and a local resident illustrates this idea well, too. The village supporter asked the older woman about her past. She shared stories about her previous work and, through that reflection, connected it to her current interest in volunteering. By the end of the conversation, she felt excited and had made an appointment to meet with

a volunteer organization. The village supporter noted how the woman visibly lit up; there was a spark of energy and motivation in her as she spoke.

The insights from both the conversation with the sociologists (see Ch. 5, Par. 9) and this new interaction vision led to the development of concept 2, which is explained in the next section.



*Fig. 63: The interaction vision is like finding your old instrument (photo pexels.com).*



Question cards about skills and capabilities.



Conversation-guiding questions (health-related).



Question cards about new hobbies for gamers



Card game to discover which jobs fit you, mostly focused on which activities suit the player

Fig. 64: Examples of existing question card games.

## 11 Concept 2: A skill-themed question card game

The meeting with the sociologists highlighted a key insight: a game that is purely light-hearted and focused only on general skills or activities may not trigger the players to reflect on their own preferences and could come across as too childish. It also risks lacking clarity about why the game is worth playing. Initially, I was concerned that a more serious tone might be off-putting. However, supported by the newly developed interaction vision, I realized that a bit of hesitation at the start of playing the game is not necessarily problematic. Since the game is played between individuals who already know and trust each other, the initial discomfort tends to fade quickly.

A game that is simply “fun” may not be enough, it risks being seen as trivial or irrelevant. In contrast, a game designed to help both players discover something about themselves and one another gives the experience more direction and purpose. It can use that shared moment of reflection as a stepping stone, sparking intrinsic motivation for the homebound player to try new activities outside their usual environment. With this in mind, **concept 2 centers around a card-based question game that facilitates meaningful conversations.**

### I. Sharing the direction of a question card game with the village supporters

The fourth meeting with the village supporters had the goal to present the development of the skill-themed card game and to gauge whether they would recommend it to a trusted contact. At first, they admitted that suggesting such a game might feel awkward. However, after discussing it, they concluded that playing it themselves first would be the best way to overcome this barrier. If they enjoyed the experience, they would be more likely to share it with others.

We also discussed how the way the game is communicated to the trusted contact plays a crucial role in its acceptance. To be effective, the game must have a clear goal, be enjoyable to play, and inspire the players to consider new activities.

The village supporters emphasized the following preferences:

- **Simple rules:** It should be easy to pick up and remember. Avoid the “How did it work again?” scenario.
- **Familiarity and emotional resonance:** Ideally, the game would reflect local culture (perhaps including Twents dialect or expressions) and evoke memories that can emotionally energize players toward concrete

actions.

- **A call-to-action component:** An element or phase that encourages follow-up steps after the questions have been answered.

## II. Researching existing question games

In exploring existing question-based games, I found a few examples focused on capabilities or career exploration, aimed at helping players reflect on their strengths and interests (see Fig. 64). Although there were few reviews available, my personal experience with these games revealed that many had uninspiring designs, unchallenging questions, or complex rules. Another striking observation was the absence of photos on the cards. While this may be due to practical constraints, **including photos could enhance the experience**. According to context mapping theory (see Par. X), rich visual stimuli can spark meaningful interpretations, making it easier for players to express what resonates with them.

Most of the games found were clearly aimed at specific groups, such as employees, care home residents, or gamers exploring new digital hobbies. While these games may engage their intended audiences, their specialized themes often prevent them from being

used in other contexts where they could also be valuable. For example, a game designed for gamers might also inspire others to explore new activities, but its style may not appeal to different audiences (see Fig. 64 on p. 126, bottom left). For this reason, the game to be designed for this thesis, targeting homebound older adults, should have a **neutral appearance that appeals broadly**.

It also underscores the importance of **clear, informal communication to ensure the game reaches the intended users**. Currently, such games rarely reach older adults who could benefit from greater social connection. This was also highlighted during the sociologists meeting, where both participants confirmed they personally had never encountered such tools in their professional work in the social domain. This gap illustrates the potential of concept 2 to offer a fresh and accessible way to foster connection and engagement.

## III. Creating concept 2

The design guidelines that will inform the development of the game are outlined in Fig. 65. These guidelines will be translated into a two-part game

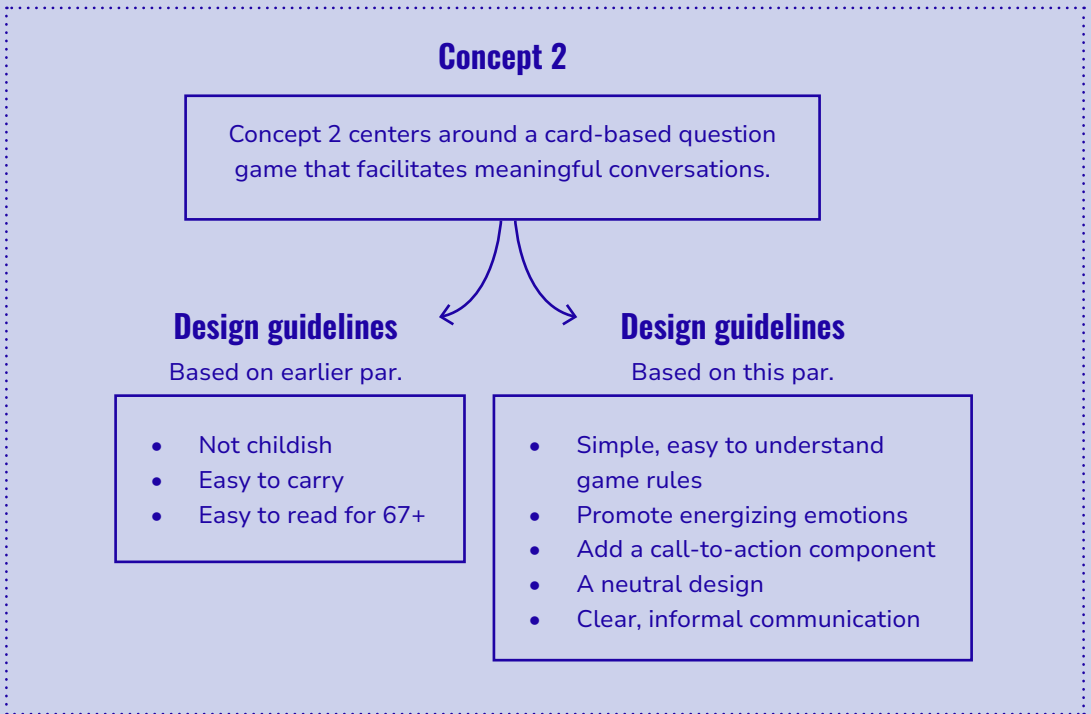


Fig. 65: Design guidelines based on previous knowledge, the last meeting with the village supporters and research to existing question card games.

structure.

As concluded in Ch. 5, Par. 4 'Exploration on a skill themed game', the game will focus on fostering social connection and encouraging homebound older adults, supported by their trusted contacts (through personal referrals or emotion support), **to consider** trying out new activities that suit them (Part 2). To achieve this, the first part of the game prompts players to **reflect on themselves and on each other** (Part 1). See Fig. 66 for a visual representation of this.

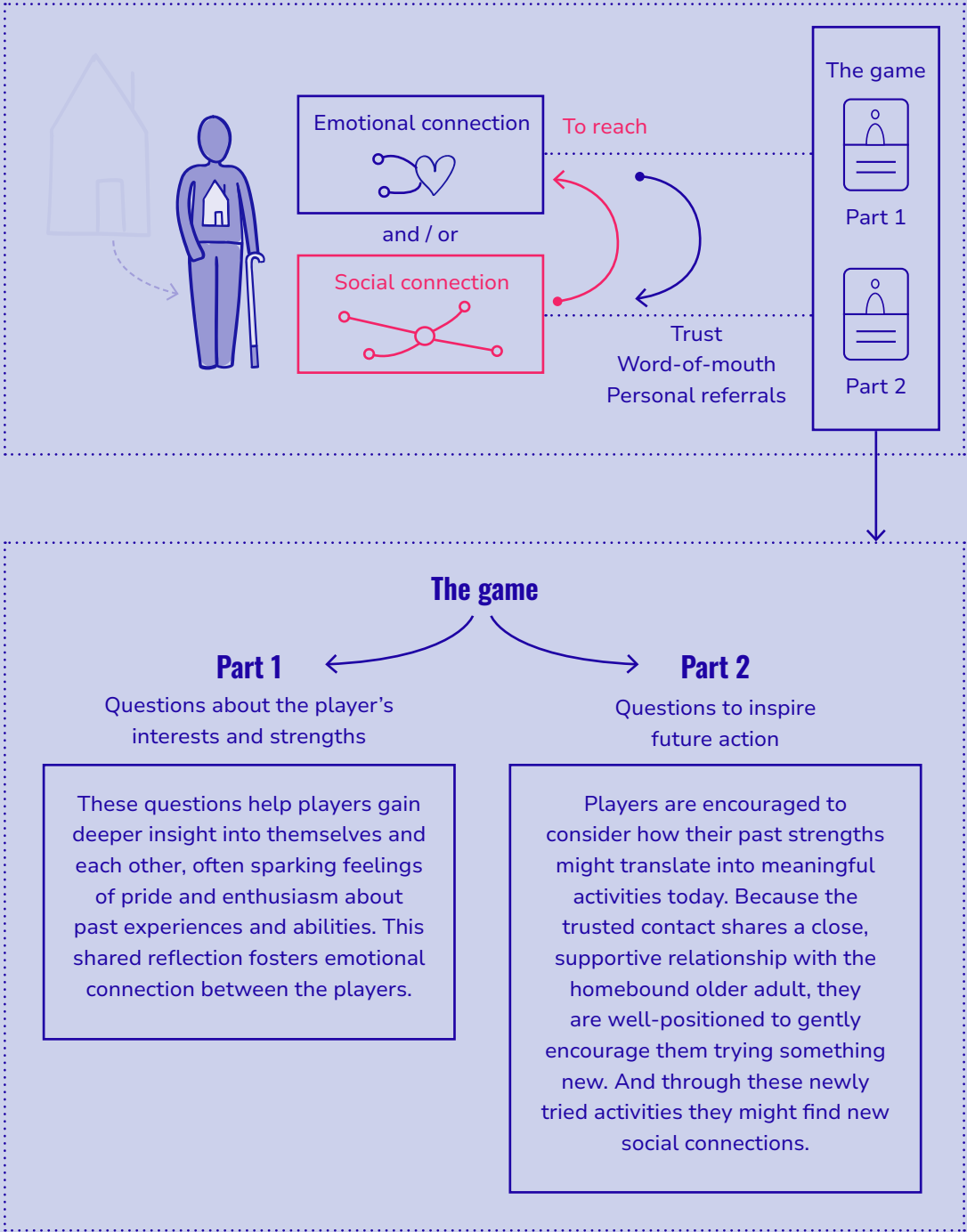


Fig. 66: The intention of concept 2, a question card game.

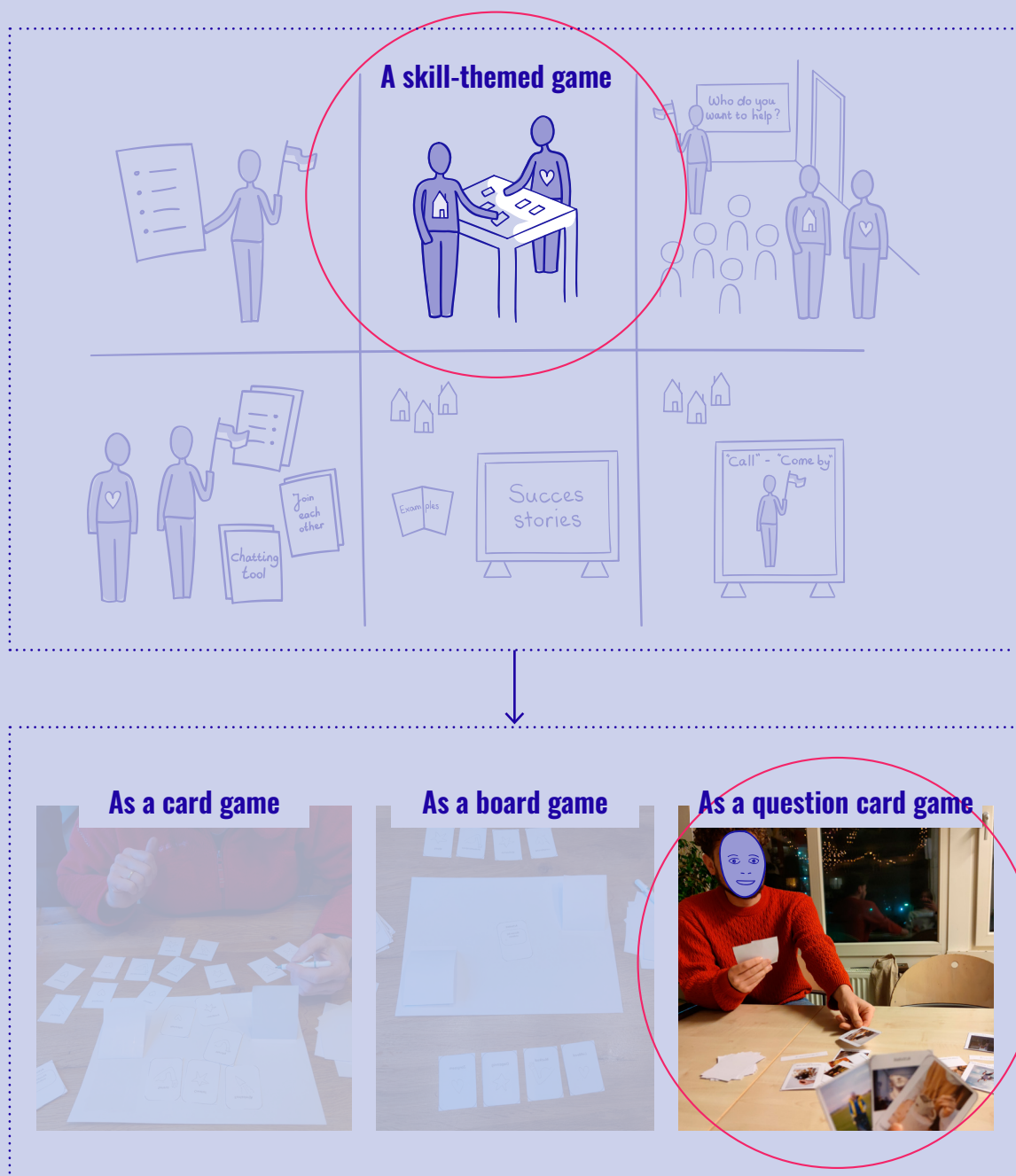


Fig. 67: The process of arriving at the concept of a skill-themed question card game.

## 12 Chapter conclusion

Chapter 5 outlined how I arrived at the concept of a question-based card game, designed for homebound older adults and their trusted contacts (see Fig. 67). The game aims to inspire players by highlighting their interests and strengths, in line with the principles of positive health. It encourages meaningful conversations in a familiar, low-pressure setting that respects older adults' preference for equal-level interactions. By avoiding a dynamic where one person is the helper and the other the recipient, the game fosters a sense of mutual engagement. Additionally, it is intentionally designed as a game without a competitive element to promote a pleasant conversation and avoid feeling childish.

The next chapter focuses on developing, testing, and refining different iterations of concept 2. This includes shaping the question content, the game rules, and the overall look and feel, ultimately leading to the final design.

# Chapter 6

## Concept iteration

From a game about skills to a conversation  
game called “What makes you happy?”

The previous chapter concluded with the formulation of the initial concept: a question card game. This chapter describes how the concept was further developed and refined through three rounds of iteration. These iterations involved testing the game, first with a housemate, then with two village supporters, and finally with a third village supporter and four members of her working group.

Throughout these iterations, I worked on the game's content, tested the materials and visual design of the cards, and created and refined the rulebook. Additionally, I discuss the importance of clear and effective communication of the game to trusted contacts and homebound older adults.

This development process led to a fourth version of the concept: the final design titled "Wat maakt je blij?" ("What makes you happy?").



Fig. 68: Example of the content of the question card game version 1.

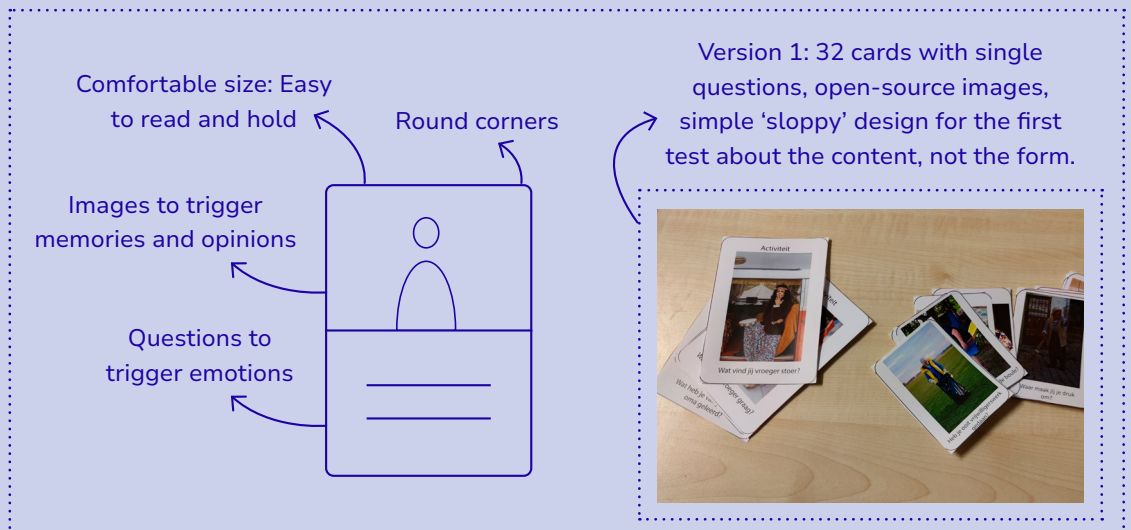


Fig. 69: Prototype 1 to test concept version 1.

# 01 A question card game: Version 1

## I. Developing and defining – Version 1

Concept 2 is specifically designed for homebound older adults and their trusted contacts. The aim is to create a game that feels enjoyable and engaging for all players, rather than presenting itself as a “helping tool.”

### Content development

The goal is for the game to feel like a shared journey of discovery. The questions are organized around themes such as activities, locations, objects, and other prompts intended to evoke emotions. Some questions explore positive or neutral topics, while others invite reflection on more negative experiences to encourage depth in the conversations.

Each card pairs a question with an image (see Fig. 68). A full list of the questions from version 1 and examples of card images can be found in Appendix F. The imagery includes individuals, pairs, or groups performing everyday tasks, as well as objects from daily life or they depict activities to subtly stimulate the players’ thoughts about potential activities they might enjoy. Some pictures are straightforward, while others leave room for interpretation (e.g., a roaring lion may evoke associations with zoos or emotions like anger). This

approach aligns with contextmapping approach (Ch. 2, Par. 3), encouraging players to engage creatively with their memories and emotions.

The game is also intended to include a second part that inspires players to take action. However, it is critical that this encouragement feels genuine rather than forced. Players should feel they are being offered sincere tools to explore new activities that suit them. For the first playtest, part 2 was not fully developed; only a few sample questions were introduced and discussed with the participant (Fig. 68, right side).

### Game cards

The cards needed to be easy for older adults to read and handle. Therefore, the cards need to contain large enough fonts and images, and have a comfortable card size (see Fig. 69). To evaluate usability, I printed various card sizes and discussed them with the participant (Fig. 69, right side).

### Game rules

The basic game rules are illustrated in Fig. 70:

- **Step 1:** Both players draw three cards.  
*Why:* To let players choose questions to ask that excite or

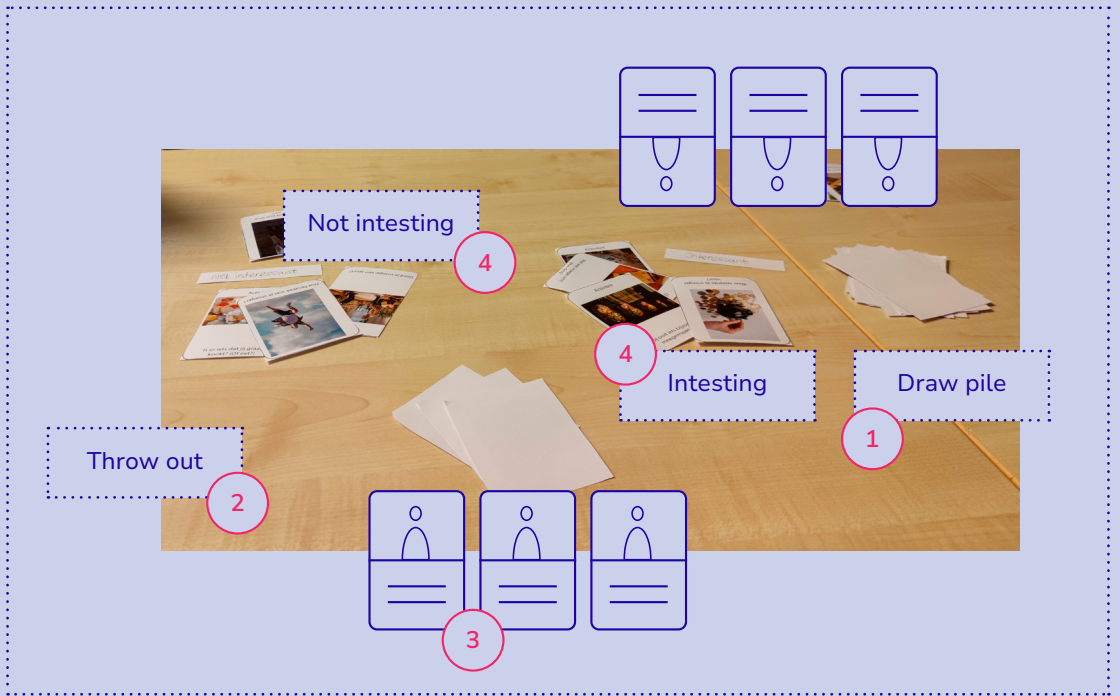


Fig. 70: The game set up.



Fig. 71: Playtest of prototype 1 (game concept version 1).

inspire them.

- **Step 2:** Optionally discard a card you do not like.  
*Why:* To maintain a pleasant conversation and avoid discomfort.
- **Step 3:** Pick a card and ask the other player the question.  
*Why:* This promotes sincerity, as players choose what they genuinely want to ask.
- **Step 4:** After answering, jointly decide whether the conversation was interesting.  
*Why:* This gives positive feedback and a natural cue to continue playing.

## II. Testing – Version 1

To test early assumptions, I conducted a first playtest (see Fig. 71). Given the prototype's early stage, I chose to test with my roommate to gather initial impressions. Although not part of the target group, he provided valuable feedback. I also participated actively to observe the interaction directly.

Below is a summary of key findings:

### Part 1 insights

The conversation was enjoyable, and we discovered new things about each other, despite being acquainted. As the game is intended to be played with people

who already know each other, this is a relevant finding.

However, the depth of answers varied greatly. Some responses remained superficial without any personal reflection (e.g., listing a favorite kitchen tool without explaining its significance). The questions often felt random. There was little exploration of the players' interests or future wishes, which is an important element for inspiring the players into action (See interaction vision, Ch. 5, Par. 10). Questions specifically targeting players' interests, skills, and aspirations were lacking. I expected these topics would arise naturally but found that structured prompting is necessary.

Some questions had a positive connotation, while others had a negative one. It felt uncomfortable to ask the negatively framed questions out of the blue, as they tended to evoke unpleasant emotions. Moreover, these questions were less effective in uncovering personal strengths or interests. For these reasons, I would like to remove them from the game.

### Game rules insights

- Discarding cards (step 2) was often forgotten, making its purpose unclear.

## Chapter 6: Concept iteration

- Allowing players to choose among three cards enhanced a sense of autonomy and sincerity in asking (step 3).
- Deciding whether a question was “interesting” (step 4) felt confusing and awkward, but placing cards on the “interesting” pile did provide positive reinforcement.

### *The Cards*

- The participant mentioned not focusing heavily on the images, but felt they made the cards feel more engaging.
- Different card sizes were tested. The smaller size was too difficult to read, leading to the choice of a larger format (approximately A6).

### Part 2 Insights

Finding appropriate prompts for part 2 proved challenging. The sample questions felt too direct and even impolite at times. Although **part 2 should encourage players toward action, it must not feel coercive**. Therefore, for version 2, players will be given the choice to continue to part 2 instead of it being a mandatory next step in the game, fostering intrinsic motivation rather than external pressure.

### Limitations

- Playing with the designer present

may have influenced spontaneity and honesty.

- The researcher’s experience in guiding conversations could have led to a smoother interaction than typical.
- Taking notes during play created moments of silence that might have affected the flow of conversation.

### Conclusion

Overall, version 1 of the game provides a good start for fruitful conversations and inspiring emotions.



## Question themes

### Part 1

What are you good at?  
**Skills**

What have you achieved?  
**Performance**

What makes you happy?  
**Interest**

What is meaningful for you?  
**Meaning**

What do you want to learn?  
**Aspirations**

What made you a better person?  
**Personal growth**



What makes your eyes spark?  
**Interaction vision**



What did you always enjoy doing?

What were you good at that make it so fun?

- What made you laugh? Why?
- What did you use to save for? Did you also buy that and what did that mean to you?

## Question themes

### Part 2

Opinions on places and activities in their village

Reflecting on their acquired emotions during part 1



Have them consider going out  
**Interaction vision**



What is your favorite place in your village?

Are there other places that remain you of this place?

- Would you like to have the activity folder of the village?
- What if there was someone who would like to think along?

+

Fig. 72: Question themes (upper section) and examples of the content (lower section) of the question card game version 2.

## 02 A question card game: Version 2

### I. Iterating and defining – Version 2

After playing version 1 of the game, I noticed that we, as players, were genuinely curious about each other's answers. This suggested that concept version 1 is a good starting point for further development and testing, in this case with the key actor.

#### Content development

Following the test of concept version 1, I revised the questions in part 1 to encourage players to reflect more deeply on themselves and what they value.

To achieve this, I structured the questions around six themes: skills, interests, aspirations, performance, meaning, and personal growth (Fig. 72, top left). These themes are grounded in theory:

- Skills: Focus on what someone can do, reflecting the principles of positive health (Ch. 2, Par. 2).
- Meaning and Aspirations: Addressing the desire for purpose, a strong wish among older adults (Ch. 3, Par. 7).
- Interests: Positive emotions support motivation and engagement (Ch. 2, Par. 2).
- Performance and Personal Growth:

Encouraging intrinsic motivation and promoting awareness of what already goes well in life (Ch. 2, Par. 2).

Examples of revised part 1 questions are shown in Fig. 72, bottom left.

Part 2 of the game (see Fig. 72, right side) was designed to help players explore what they could or would like to do in their village, using insights from part 1 as a foundation. I intentionally kept the questions broad, so as not to imply that players should change, but rather to inspire them to try new activities that resonate with them. To reinforce a sense of autonomy, players must choose to continue to part 2 on their own, rather than encountering these questions within part 1.

The game is titled: "Vink jouw vonk! En leer elkaar kennen" ("Find your spark! And get to know each other"). This reflects the interaction vision of encouraging enthusiasm about oneself as a way to foster action.

#### Game cards

The game cards were designed to be clear, uncluttered, and consistent in style. A visual distinction was made between part 1 (photos) and part 2 (icons) cards to help players recognize

Version 2: Part 1 has 40 cards with a question & a reflective question with open-source images.

Version 2: Part 2 has 36 cards with a question & a reflective question or a thought-provoking quote with open-source icons.



Wat vond jij altijd leuk om te doen vroeger?

Wat kon jij goed dat dat zo leuk maakte?



Wat deed je vroeger altijd graag voor een ander?

Wat betekende dat voor jou?



Welke plekken in het dorp vind je prettig?

Welke activiteiten zou je daar kunnen doen of ontdekken?

Fig. 73: Prototype 2 to test concept version 2.

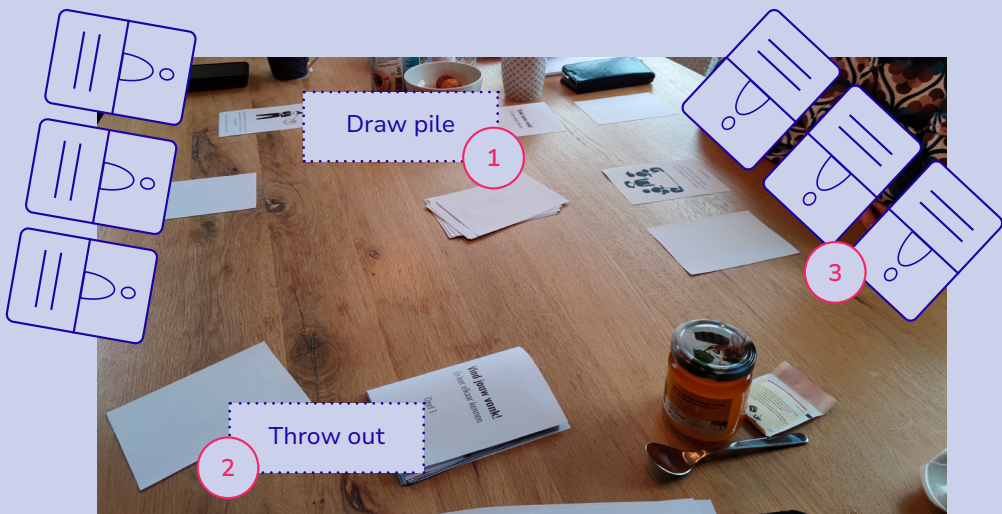


Fig. 74: The game set up.

the shift in question types. All cards used the same clean design and featured a text size suitable for older adults.

The images were selected to be clear and topic-relevant, open-source, and varied. They include both concrete and ambiguous visuals, covering common hobbies and encouraging interpretation.

Part 2 cards include icons to visually differentiate them from part 1 and reduce cognitive load, as these questions are more complex. Players needing inspiration are encouraged to refer back to the photos from part 1.

Fig. 73 shows the prototype used for the test of version 2.

### Game rules

The rules aim to clearly explain what to do in each part of the game. Players only move to part 2 if they feel ready to translate their reflections into actions. The game rules are split between part 1 and part 2 to emphasize that they are distinct stages (see Appendix G for the complete rulebook).

Basic rules (see Fig. 74 and Fig. 75):

- **Step 1:** Each player draws three cards.  
*Why:* To let players choose questions that inspire or interest

them.

- **Step 2:** Discard one card.  
*Why:* To avoid discomfort and leave extra cards for future sessions.
- **Step 3:** Choose one of the two cards left in their hand and ask the other player the question. Place the card face-up on the table.  
*Why:* This supports sincerity, as players choose what they genuinely want to ask. And the cards on the table can be used as inspiration in answering the following questions.

Once the draw pile is empty, players can either continue to part 2 or end the game, based on how inspired they feel.

## II. Testing – Version 2

To test version 2, I arranged a meeting with two of the three village supporters and asked them to play the game with each other (see Fig. 76). This gave them a feel for what playing with an acquaintance would be like. I observed the session without intervening. They played part 1 until I asked them to continue with part 2 after 25 minutes. They played part 2 for about 20 minutes. I did not answer any game-related questions to assess how well they could navigate the game independently.

Below is a summary of key findings:

### General insights

They enjoyed the game and naturally continued asking follow-up questions, likely due to their professional communication training. Even when an answer required thought, they always found something to say. The game helped facilitate deeper conversation: “It opens up a dialogue about what people really want in their village, something they wouldn’t normally discuss.” The game facilitated meaningful connections: “I enjoyed how enthusiastic you were about my stories; **it made me realize how nice those moments actually were.**” This illustrates the game’s ability to inspire reflection and positive conversations.

Despite their enjoyment, they feel hesitation to recommend the game to trusted contacts to play it with homebound older adults. They prefer to first try it with a villager themselves. One supporter expressed doubt: “Maybe I’m assuming too much, but I feel like people here wouldn’t be open to this.” However, both agreed that if residents did play, they would benefit from it. This highlights the need for a strong introduction and guidance when presenting the game.

### Game content insights

#### *Part 1*

They learned new things about each other, which surprised them. “Well, I would like to know more about you.” The other added, “Me too! **We’ll play this again, right?**”

#### *Part 2*

They found this part less relevant to their own busy lives, though one supporter was inspired to rethink her cooking group. It was noted that the game should be more inclusive of non-village residents. “What if they live in a city? Then the questions don’t apply to them anymore.”

#### *General content insights*

The reflective questions added depth to the conversation. Despite their natural inclination to ask follow-up questions, the reflective questions were also helpful.

They did not clearly understand the separation between part 1 and part 2, though they noticed some thematic shift. I still believe the distinction is important to let players first become inspired, and then, if they are ready, think about actions.

The title “Find Your Spark” was seen as abstract. Simpler titles like “What Makes You Happy?” or “Who Are You?” may

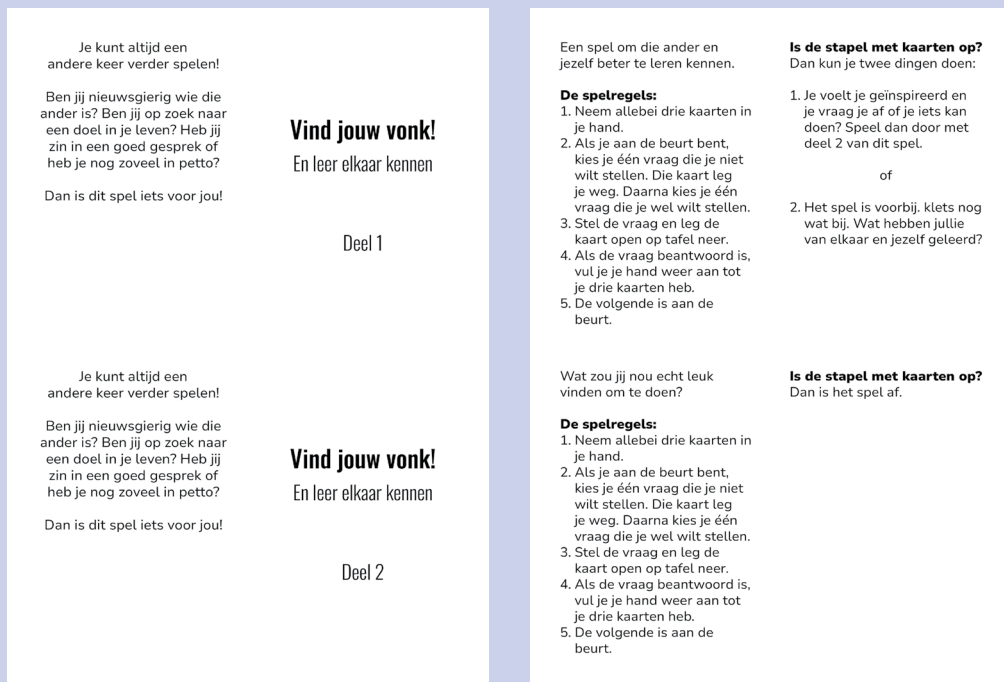


Fig. 75: The rulebook of concept version 2.



Fig. 76: Playtest of prototype 1 (game concept version 1).

resonate more with the target audience

### Game card insights

The cards were easy to read, though printed on standard A4 paper. While this contributed to a casual feel, the flimsy paper made them hard to handle. This led to too many cards on the table, making the space feel cluttered. Thicker cards would be able to be held in their hands, preventing clutter on the table.

### Game rule insights

The overall rules were clear. And questions they had about them, they could solve on their own. Also, they appreciated being able to discard cards for various reasons:

- Already knowing the answer.
- Not wanting to be asked that question themselves.
- Finding the question uninteresting.

However, there was some confusion about what to do with discarded cards.

### Improvements and actions

- Clarify the rules for discarding cards.
- Adjust part 2 to focus more on exploring preferences within activities.
- Revise rules to support games with more than two players.
- Make the game applicable beyond

village settings.

- Rename the game to a more straightforward title.
- Ensure village supporters and trusted contacts understand the game's value.

### Limitations

- Target group: The village supporters' professional backgrounds likely enhanced the depth of conversation, which may not generalize to others.
- Researcher presence: My role as observer may have influenced the players' behavior.

### Conclusion

The village supporters felt enthusiastic after playing the game but are hesitant to recommend it to trusted contacts for homebound older adults. They want to better understand their opinions first and are open to playing it with older adults in their village (see Fig. 77).

Further testing with the target group, homebound older adults, is essential to evaluate its effectiveness. At this stage, I did not have access to homebound older adults, but I was able to schedule a meeting with a working group linked to the third village supporter. These residents may act as trusted contacts for homebound older adults in their community.

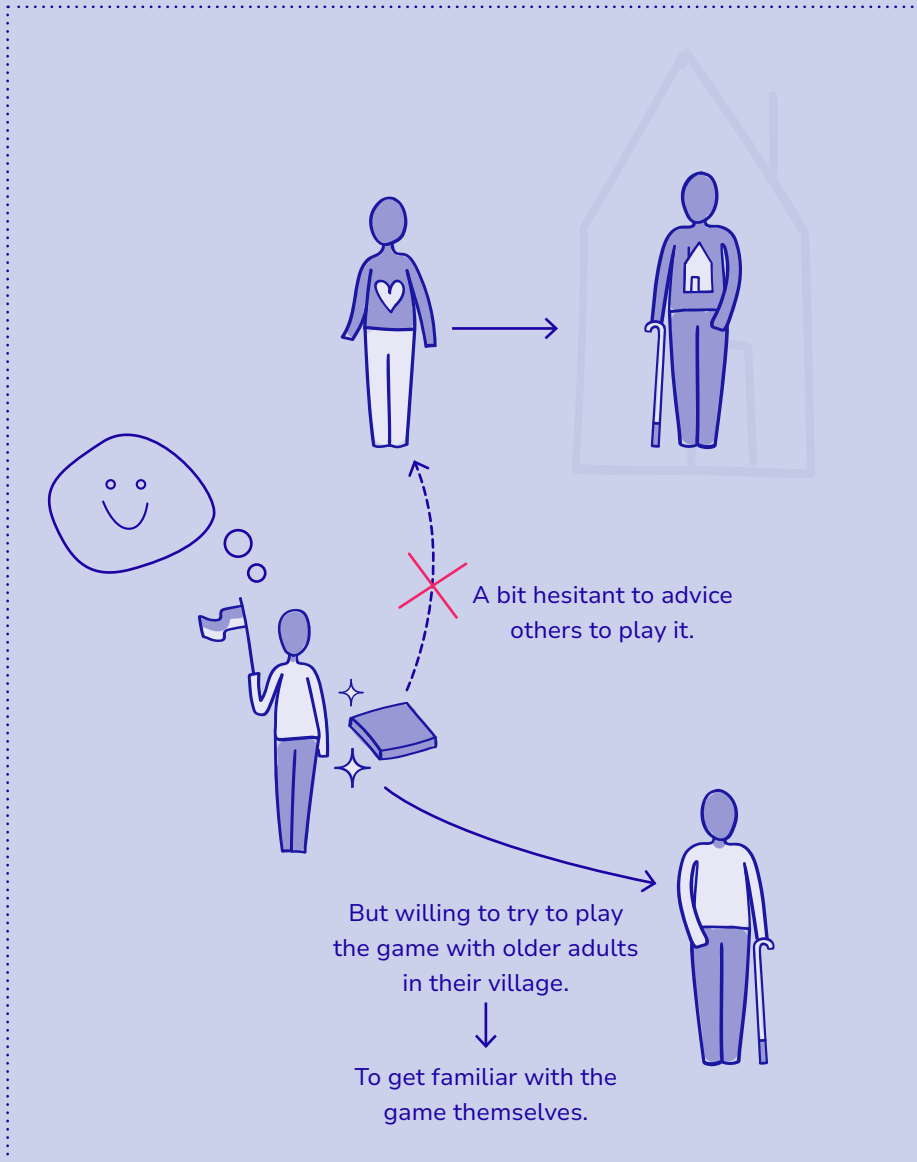


Fig. 77: After the playtest of concept version 2, the village supporters doubted advising the game to trusted contacts to play with homebound older adults.

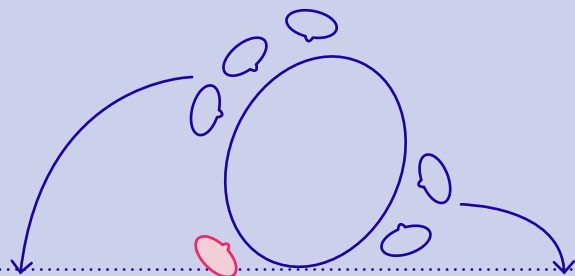


Fig. 78: Playtest of prototype 1 (game concept version 1).

## 03 A question card game: Version 3

### I. Iterating and defining – Version 3

Since the playtest of version 3 took place just one day after the version 2 test, the game content and cards remained unchanged. However, I updated the rulebook, which was manageable within the available time.

#### Game Rules

The complete rulebook can be found in Appendix H. In version 2, parts 1 and 2 had separate rulebooks, but there was some repetition that caused confusion. In version 3, I added references in part 2 to part 1 for overlapping components. Additionally, I included sections about the “Goal” and “Game setup” to provide players with more context. The rules were also rewritten to accommodate groups larger than two players. Lastly, the title of the game was changed from “Vind je vonk” (Find your spark) to “Wat maakt jou blij?” (What makes you happy?). This new title is more concrete and invites curiosity (“I want to discover that”), without sounding too heavy or off-putting.

### II. Testing – Version 3

I conducted a test session with the third village supporter and four members of her working group (see Fig. 78).

These participants know each other from occasional meetings but are otherwise not closely acquainted. My aim was to explore how the game would be received by people who could potentially serve as trusted contacts for homebound older adults. Below is a summary of the playtest:

The playtest setup can be found in Fig. 79. I observed the session without interfering. I did not answer any questions during gameplay to assess how independently the participants could use the game.

#### General insights

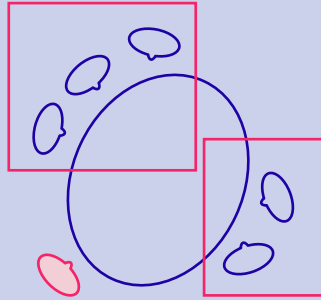
The first impression was positive. Participants found the game appropriate for getting to know others in a group setting. One participant noted, “A fun way to start talking in a different manner than usual.” When asked why they attended, some responded, “I was asked by someone I know (the village supporter) to help. And I enjoy playing games.” This underlines the importance of personal invitations and the desire to help others as motivation to participate.

#### Game content insights

##### Part 1

All participants enjoyed the first part of the game and reported feeling happy

**Group 1:** The village supporter + two work group members.



**Group 1:** Two work group members.

#### Test setup

- Splitting the group in two<sup>1</sup>
- Playing part 1 - 20 min
- Writing individual feedback part 1<sup>2</sup> - 5 min
- Playing part 2 - 15 min (see Fig. 80)
- Writing individual feedback part 1<sup>2</sup> - 5 min
- Semi-structured interview - 20 min

**Note 1:** Dividing participants into small groups allowed for testing with pairs and trio's.

**Note 2:** Participants were given blank sheets of paper to write their feedback. The designer posed questions that participants answered in writing. This captured their initial thoughts without group influence. (see Fig. 81).

Fig. 79: Playtest of prototype 1 (game concept version 1).



Fig. 80: During part 2 of the playtest of concept version 3.



Fig. 81: Written feedback given at the playtest of concept version 3.

afterward. One said, “It’s nice to recall those fond memories.”

### *Part 2*

The current questions are too focused on homebound older adults in villages, which might exclude other players like trusted contacts. Some players live in cities, are younger, or already lead active lives. If the game feels too targeted towards people needing help, it can come off as patronizing. The questions should support inclusive reflection for all players.

### **Game card insights**

The cards were considered clear and easy to read. One participant remarked, “I don’t need my reading glasses; this is perfectly readable.”

### **Game rule insights**

Participants preferred having a single, unified rulebook instead of one for each part. This would align the game more closely with common board game formats and make it easier to understand.

### **Insights about connecting the game to homebound older adults**

When asked whether they knew any homebound older adults with whom they would like to play the game, the

participants were generally hesitant.

This is likely due to several factors: uncertainty about the game’s purpose, discomfort with identifying homebound older adults (as “vulnerable” individuals), or simply not knowing someone who fits that description.

Crucially, the game should not be framed as a tool to “fix” someone or help them out of loneliness. That framing risks making trusted contacts feel responsible for diagnosing or intervening in others’ lives, which can feel unethical or awkward. Therefore, I kept the explanation of why to play the game with homebound older adults in their circles on the level of “It is nice getting to know them better.”

I learned two things:

- Trusted contacts need a clearer explanation of why they might play this game with someone. Showing the need to find an ethical way to communicate the game.
- The game’s original model, being introduced through a village supporter who already knows someone in need, is more effective than asking people to actively seek out someone to help.

Some participants did see potential: “Depending on the context, I’d use this

game, like when visiting my aunt in a care home.”

The game was also seen as useful for getting to know colleagues or volunteer groups better, showing its potential for broader application.

### Limitations

- Homogeneous group: All participants in this test were women, which may have influenced the results.
- Researcher’s presence: Some participants appeared hesitant to discuss deeper questions, likely due to being observed.

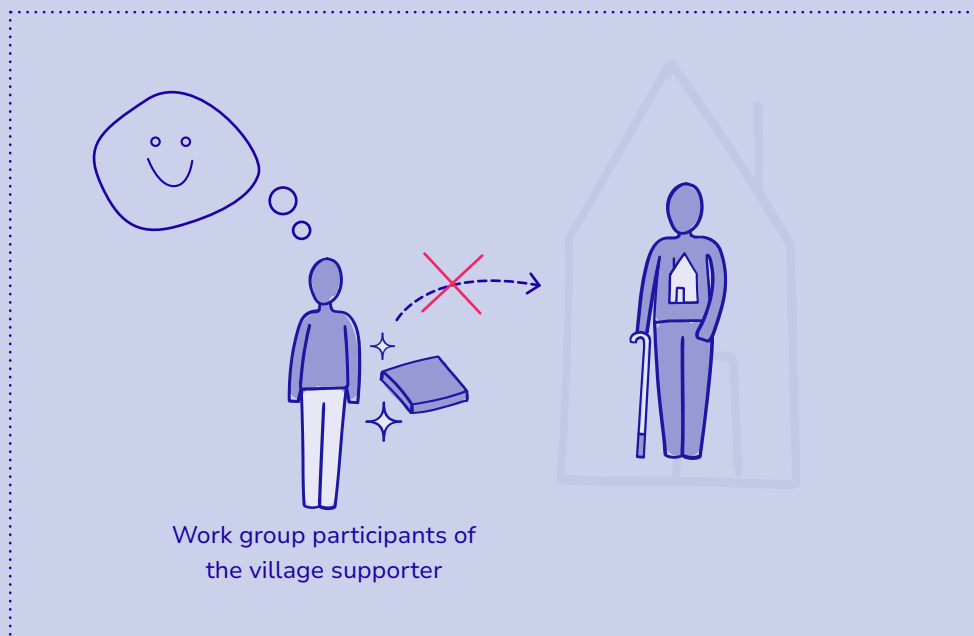
### Conclusion

The main conclusions are:

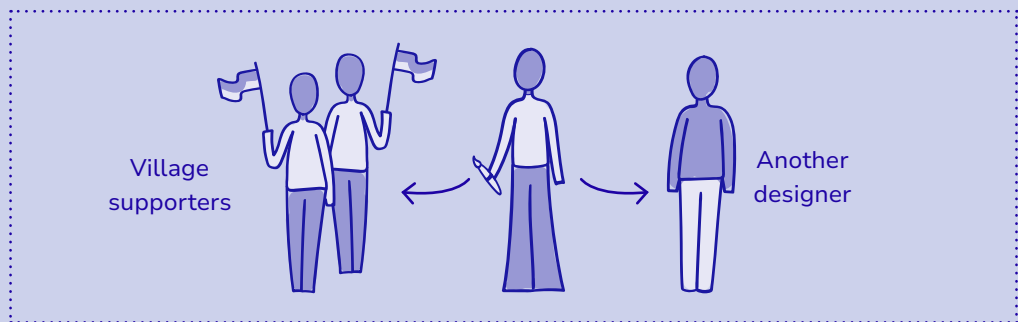
- Participants had meaningful conversations and learned new things about each other, even though they were already somewhat acquainted.
- Part 2 was less applicable to them due to their already full lives, showing the need for a change in part 2 so that trusted contacts can play along with the homebound older adults, in part 2, as well.
- Participants did not feel fully comfortable initiating the game with homebound older adults in their

networks, which suggests a need for improved communication about the game’s intent, without framing the homebound player as someone who needs fixing (see Fig. 82).

- The test also showed that simply asking trusted contacts to identify someone in their network yields little result. The original idea, that someone approaches a village supporter with concerns about someone they know, remains the most promising entry point for this intervention.



*Fig. 82: The work group participants are unsure why they should play the game with homebound older adults they know, despite enjoying the game themselves.*



## Iterating on the look

1

Is er iets wat je altijd al een keer had willen leren?  
+  
Waarom leek of lijkt je dat leuk om te leren?

Is er iets wat je altijd al een keer had willen leren?  
Waarom leek of lijkt je dat leuk om te leren?

Is er iets wat je altijd al een keer had willen leren?  
Waarom leek of lijkt je dat leuk om te leren?

Is er iets wat je altijd al een keer had willen leren?  
Waarom leek of lijkt je dat leuk om te leren?

For the seven different designs, see Appendix I.

No margin problems with printing, clean and professional design. High contrasts, easy to read.

## Iterating on the feel

| Coated paper                                                                                                   | Specialty paper                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nothing fancy</li> <li>Lamination possible (adds durability)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly textured paper, nice feel and grip in the hand</li> <li>Luxurious appearance</li> <li>Lamination not possible</li> </ul> |
| <div>Glossy laminate</div> <div>Matte laminate</div>                                                           | <div>Sustainable (wood chips or plant residues)</div> <div>Rough texture</div>                                                                                         |

Higher durability, since it is laminated. No glares or reflections, since it is matte paper.

Fig. 83: I discussed different visual designs and suitable paper types with the village supporters and another designer.

## 04 Concept version 4: The final design

The fourth version of the game concept represents the final design for this thesis project. Below is a description of the key decisions and refinements that shaped this final version.

### I. Game appearance and materials

To determine the appropriate visual style and material for the game, I explored multiple visual design directions and ordered paper samples to access a suitable material (see Fig. 83).

For the look and feel, I created seven different graphic design concepts (see Appendix I). I also ordered sample books and selected four types of paper, each printed with one of the visual design concepts. These samples were reviewed in two sessions: one with the village supporters (see Fig. 84) and one with another designer. The focus of these sessions was to reflect on and evaluate:

- Visual design: readability, clarity, aesthetics, and print result
- Tactile experience: durability, texture, finish, print quality, and cost

The village supporters did not express strong preferences, suggesting no significant concerns about the suitability of the designs or materials for older adults in their communities. The conversation with the other designer,

however, revealed several valuable insights:

#### Summary of key considerations:

##### *The Look*

- Borders are tricky due to printer margins and are error-prone
- Blue text on light blue backgrounds might compromise readability
- An entirely blue background can be visually harsh and tiring for older adults
- Clearly marking each card as part 1 or part 2 improves usability
- A white background, though initially feared to be too stark, turned out to be calming and readable when printed



Fig. 84: Discussing the different visual designs with the village supporters.



Fig. 85: The final design (concept version 4).

### *The Feel*

- Matte finishes address brightness concerns from white backgrounds
- Preference for textured over smooth finishes to offer better grip
- Glossy paper can create distracting reflections, especially for older players
- Laminated paper offers protection from dirt, smudges, and wear, enhancing longevity
- Specialty papers offered little added value, so lamination became the priority

Based on the feedback, I chose the leftmost design in Fig. 83 on p. 156. See Fig. 85 for the front and back designs of game part 1 and 2. For the material I chose matte laminated paper.

## II. Game content and game rules

### Updated content

Based on feedback from testing sessions with village supporters and workgroup participants, I revised the question cards as follows:

#### *Part 1*

- Removed the word “vroeger” (in the past) from most questions to allow broader interpretations. For example: ‘What did you always

enjoy doing for others in the past?’ became ‘What did you always enjoy doing for others?’

- Reviewed and adjusted photos:
- Removed images that were overly specific or lacked interpretive space (e.g., a man jumping in the air with no context)
- Balanced representation across age groups (older adults, adults, youth)
- Ensured ethnic diversity to avoid targeting one demographic
- Reduced image repetition (e.g., too many water/swimming-related pictures)
- Strengthened the link between images and questions that were unclear

#### *Part 2*

- Rephrased location-based questions to be inclusive of urban and rural contexts. For example: ‘What is your favorite place in the village?’ became ‘Which places in your area do you find pleasant?’
- Removed overly similar or redundant questions

### Updated rulebook

Until now, each game part had a separate rulebook, which remained confusing. The rules have now been combined into one comprehensive booklet. A “Purpose” section was added



Fig. 86: The look and feel of the final design.



Fig. 87: The final design in use.

to clarify why players are playing the game together. See Appendix J for the final rulebook.

### III. The final design

All these improvements and decisions lead up to the final design. See Fig. 86 on p. 160 and Fig. 87 on p. 161 for photos showing the look and feel of the final design, as well as its use in practice.

### IV. Communicating the game to a trusted contact

As learned from the earlier test sessions (see Ch. 6, Par. 2-3), it's essential for potential trusted contacts to understand why they might play this game with a homebound older adult, without portraying the latter in a negative light.

To support this, I drafted a sample message that village supporters can share with potential trusted contacts. The full text is included in Appendix K. The highlights of a communication example can be found in Fig. 88. It focuses on the following guidelines:

- Identifying someone: Ask if they know someone who seems “a bit off lately”.
- Introducing the game: Present it as a

casual, shared experience.

- Emphasizing equality: Make it clear that everyone asks and answers.
- Building credibility: Note the game's proven ability to spark meaningful conversations.
- Lowering barriers: Stress how easy and natural the game is to use.

It remains uncertain whether the village supporters will be able to internalize these guidelines and actually apply them in practice. Similarly, it is difficult to assess their effectiveness. However, I believe in their potential, as they are strongly grounded in the insights from Ch. 2 and Ch. 3, so, for example, it emphasizes a casual and personal tone.



Fig. 88: Highlights of a guideline-based communication story for introducing the game to trusted contacts.

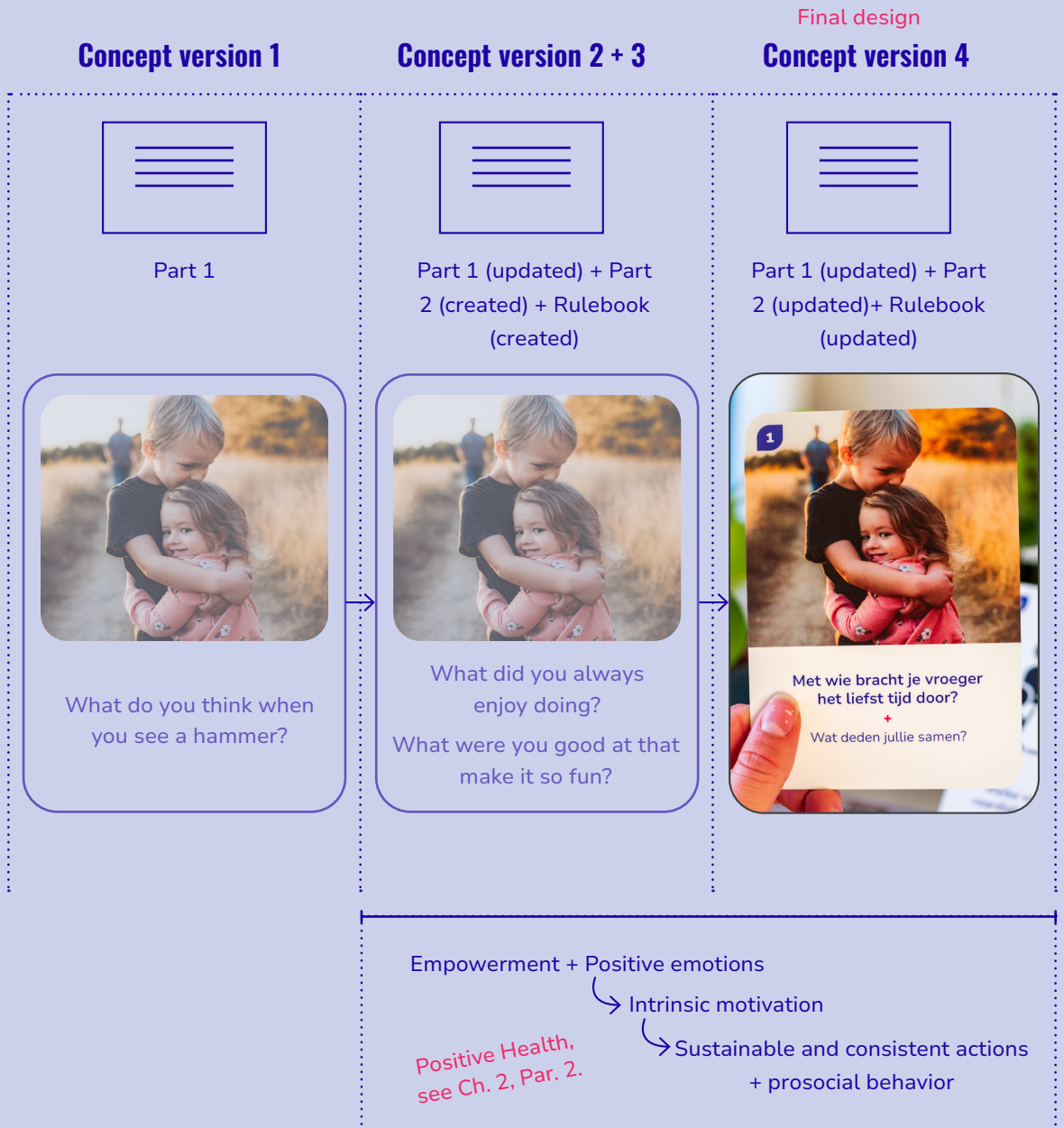


Fig. 89: The different concept versions.

## 05 Chapter conclusion

The development of the question card game culminated in the conversation game “What makes you happy?” (see Fig. 89), that invites players to reflect on memories and emotions. Part 1 explores themes like skills, interests, aspirations, performance, meaning, and personal growth. Part 2 encourages players to consider how these reflections might inspire present or future activities.

The game evolved over three iterative design rounds, each followed by a playtest. In the first round, I played the prototype with a housemate to gain a basic sense of the gameplay. While the game successfully triggered engaging stories and offered a space for sharing, it lacked opportunities for individual reflection. This reflection is crucial for sparking players' intrinsic motivation to take action aligned with their personal values and desires (see Fig. 89, lower section).

In response, reflective follow-up questions were added in concept versions 2 and 3. These versions were tested with two village supporters and four working group members with the third village supporter. The added sub-questions led to deeper conversations and more meaningful self-reflection. The playtests, which I observed, were experienced as exciting and inspiring.

Participants were pleasantly surprised to learn new things about each other and to reflect on the positive aspects of their lives, which brought them joy. They did not come to consider any further actions, most likely because of their already busy lives.

After version 2, the village supporters still struggled to imagine how the game would resonate with local residents. Similarly, in version 3, working group members found it hard to see why they would use the game with a homebound older adult. These reactions highlighted a key insight: communication and framing of the game are as important as the game itself.

As a first step toward improving communication, I created guidelines to help village supporters explain to trusted contacts why they might play the game with a homebound older adult, without implying the older adult needs help, thereby avoiding negative connotations.

The next step involves testing the final design of the game, evaluating its intended emotional and social impact, and assessing both the communication to trusted contacts and to homebound older adults.

# Chapter 7

## Final design evaluation

Evaluate whether the game 'What makes you happy?' encourages homebound older adults to consider social action

This chapter presents the evaluation of the final design. It begins with an explanation of the evaluation plan, including its objectives, evaluation criteria, and test setup. In total, five playtests were conducted, carried out by three village supporters and two trusted contacts.

The playtests aimed to evaluate the player experience, game design and usability, the game's impact, and the facilitation and communication of the game. The chapter then presents the overall outcomes of the five playtests, followed by in-depth summaries of each session.



Fig. 90: Evaluation criteria to evaluate the final design.

# 01 Evaluation plan

## I. Goal of the evaluation

As described in Ch. 5, Par. 11, I chose to focus on strengthening social connections (more connections) through leveraging emotional bonding (deeper connections) during gameplay. This emotional reinforcement is intended to increase the persuasive power of a trusted contact when encouraging the older adult to engage in social activities.

I organized five playtests and aimed to evaluate:

- Whether the game fosters emotional bonding between players.
- Whether this emotional bonding increases the influence of trusted contacts.
- Whether homebound older adults become more open to trying new social activities, now or in the future.

### *The evaluation criteria*

Due to time constraints, long-term effects couldn't be measured, so the **evaluation centered on the immediate emotional depth experienced and participants' openness to new social opportunities** (see Fig. 92 on p. 171).

Another goal was to understand current communication around the game and develop guidelines for future communication, both from village

supporters to trusted contacts, and from trusted contacts to homebound older adults.

The playtests also evaluated the usability of the game itself and the overall player experience: Can players understand the rules? Is the game playable? Do they enjoy themselves?

Thus, the evaluation criteria can be found in Fig. 90.

## II. Setup

Due to ethical limitations, I could not directly recruit homebound older adults. Nonetheless, I was able to gather valuable insights through my existing network, which includes village supporters, potential trusted contacts, non-homebound older adults, and findings from earlier research (see Fig. 91 on p. 171).

The village supporters conducted playtests, selecting participants themselves. Because proactive recruitment differs from the game's intended organic spread, they were not expected to reach homebound individuals. Instead, they played with older adults who could offer relevant feedback.

I also reached out to two people who

played the game with older adults in their circles. This helped simulate realistic interactions with potential trusted contacts and provided further insight into how older adults respond to the game.

The evaluation setup can be found in Fig. 92.

### The participants

An overview of the participants, how I instructed them and what game version they used for playtesting can be found in Fig. 93 on p. 172.

#### *Participant summary:*

- Village supporter 1 played with a socially active older woman who interacts with homebound individuals. The village supporter chose to play the game with this woman to see if she would like to play the game with her acquaintances as a trusted contact.
- Village supporter 2 chose to play the game with a woman from her village who tends to be quite pessimistic and socially inactive. Although, the woman occasionally engages in activities due to the encouragement of the village supporter. The main reason for the village supporter to approach this woman was to see if it could steer their conversation more

positively and inspire her.

The village supporter also introduced the game to another woman, who declined. She believes this was due to the woman's declining interest in their professional based relationship. A different response might have occurred if someone she trusted had approached her.

- Village Supporter 3 played with a shy, reserved man, curious to see whether the game could draw him out more than their usual conversations. Out of her own curiosity, she also tested the game with two younger adults and her friend group (these are discussed separately).
- A friend of mine played the game with his grandfather (along with his sister), a socially active older man.
- A colleague arranged a session with his sister and brother-in-law. He described them as socially reserved and not prone to deep conversations.

The playtests took place at the co-players homes across the Twente region. I provided the game and the rulebook, deliberately avoiding verbal explanation. This allowed me to assess how well the gameplay and its communication held up without my influence, and how

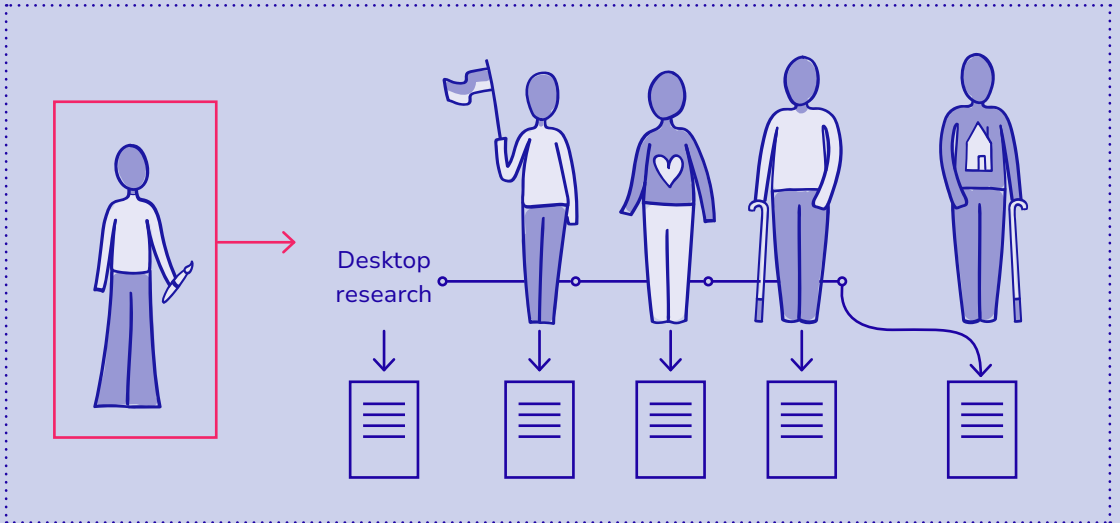


Fig. 91: I can make assumptions about homebound older adults based on knowledge gained about them from others.

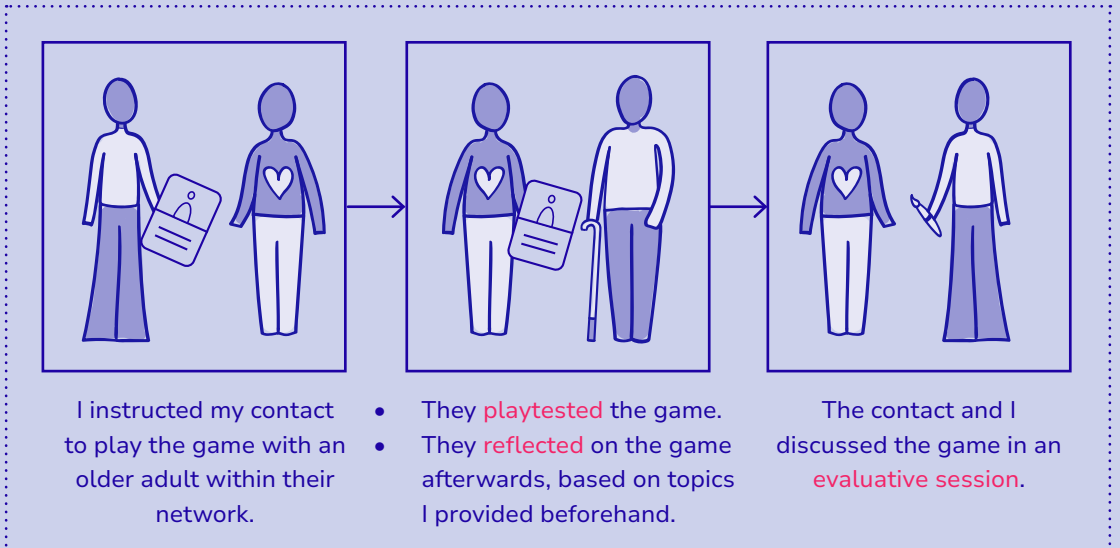


Fig. 92: Setup of the playtests and evaluation sessions.

## Playtests by village supporters

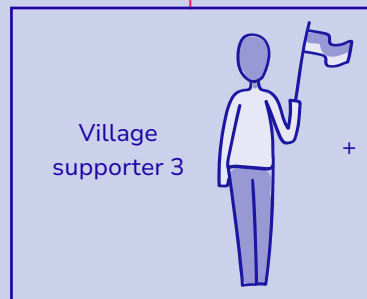
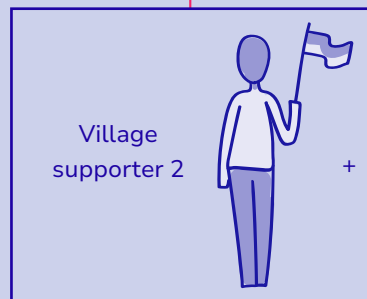
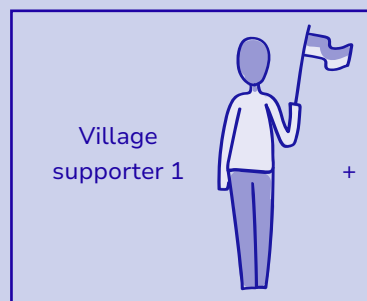
Goal: Learn how the village supporters and the older adults use and perceive the game.

Asked to:

- Play with 67+ villagers .
- Find trusted contacts to play the game with 67+ people within their circles. However, the village supporters did not find them, because of the short timeframe to do so (~two weeks).
- Evaluate the game with the players afterward, with evaluative questions I had provided.
- Have an evaluative session with me to discuss the playtest.

Desired:

- Involvement of homebound adults, though not expected due to time and ethical constraints.

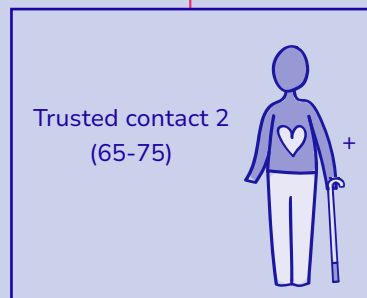
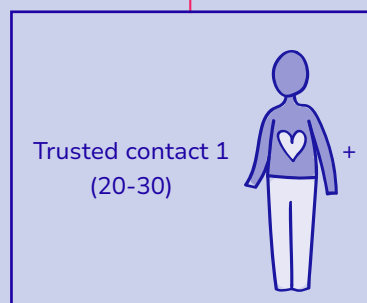


## Playtests by trusted contacts

Goal: Learn how the trusted contacts and the older adults use and perceive the game.

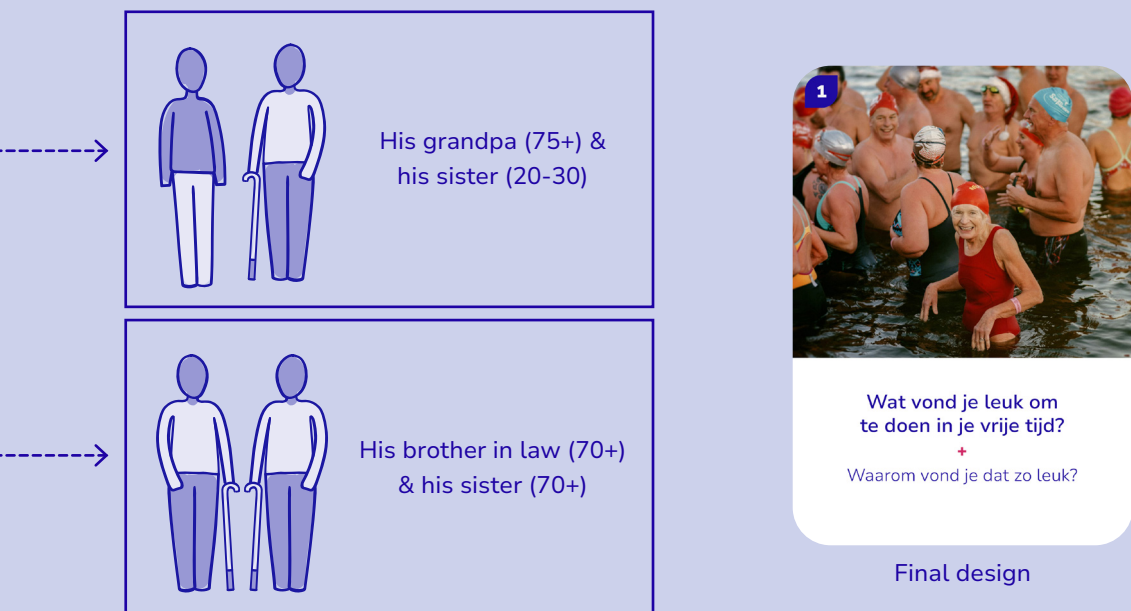
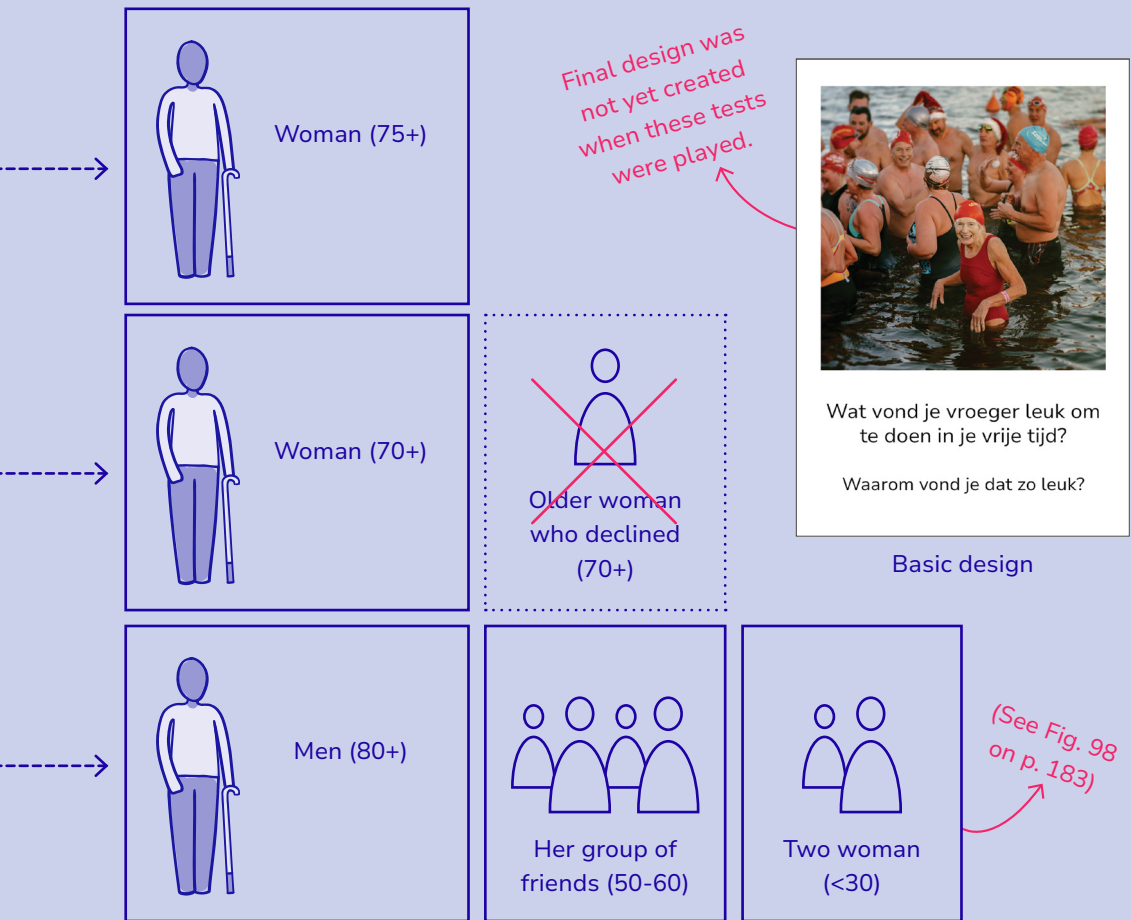
Asked to:

- Play with 67+ relative or friend.
- Avoid mentioning the project's academic origin (to simulate real-life use).
- Evaluate the game with the players afterward, with evaluative questions I had provided.
- Have an evaluative session with me to discuss the playtest.



Contacts of the designer

Fig. 93: I will test the short term effects of the game + the use of the game.



natural the play experience felt for the participants.

I chose not to attend the playtests for several reasons:

- To preserve a casual, personal atmosphere (as advised in Ch. 3, Par. 7).
- To avoid influencing the session with my presence.
- To assess how well the game is communicated without my guidance.
- To improve participation rates by removing the pressure of an external observer.

Some village supporters may not have had already existing strong bonds with their co-players, which might have affected outcomes like emotional depth or motivation to socialize. I aimed to explore whether this influenced results.

### Data collection

To learn from the playtests, I scheduled evaluation sessions with my contacts and prepared a series of questions to discuss (see Fig. 95, and see Appendix L for the full list of questions). If answers raised more questions, I asked further. To ensure my contacts remembered their own experiences and gained insight into how their fellow players perceived the game, I had them discuss several topics

with each other after playing (see Fig. 94). The village supporters emailed me a report of these discussions before our evaluation session. With the trusted contacts, I was able to schedule the evaluation session shortly after their playtests. I did this to ensure that their memories of the experiences were as fresh as possible.

### Limitations

- I did not directly observe the playtests, and as a result, I may have missed observable insights into how they use the game and what they did during the playtests.
- The game is ideally introduced organically; in these tests, participants were actively sought, which may have impacted authenticity.

### Conclusion

The following paragraph shares the key evaluation outcomes.

## After-play discussion topics

- First impressions and overall feelings (fun, boring, emotional, etc.).
- Player interpretations of the game's goal. (To understand perceived intentions.)
- Opinions on the game's title: "Wat maakt jou blij? Deel en ontdek."
- Feelings of inspiration and whether it prompted any new intentions or actions.
- Questions they found especially interesting and why.
- Opinions on the visuals (e.g., whether exaggerated images were engaging or off-putting).

Fig. 94: The topics I provided for after-play discussions between the players.

## Evaluation session topics

|                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| First impression | I had asked them to write a report directly after playing the game, so they could capture their and their fellow players' first impression.                                                                        |
| Finding players  | Questions about how my contacts found their fellow players, including how they felt about asking them.                                                                                                             |
| Playing rules    | To understand if the the title of the game and the playing rules were clear and easy, including how to play the game, the reflective questions and discarding a card per round.                                    |
| Game in general  | Questions on the card game itself. Was it easy / uneasy to handle the cards, were the reflective questions asked, how was it to answer a questions themselves.                                                     |
| Part 1 and 2     | To understand if both parts were played, what the two parts meant to them and when the second part was introduced and how. And if and how they used the images and icons.                                          |
| After the game   | Questions about their emotions, e.g. feeling inspired or uninspired. Are they going to take any actions after playing the game? Would they like to play it again? To indicate if the game felt meaningful to them. |

Fig. 95: The topics discussed during the evaluation sessions.

I asked neutral or balanced questions and provided balanced examples to avoid bias.

|                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <h2>Player experience</h2>                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement &amp; atmosphere</li> <li>• Interaction quality</li> </ul>                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cosy, non-competitive game feel encouraged natural back-and-forth dialogue.</li> <li>• Most participants were enthusiastic; one remained neutral.</li> <li>• Effective among trusted pairs or groups, granting “permission” for deeper questions.</li> <li>• Village supporters could tailor depth of their own answers yet found it engaging.</li> </ul>            |
| <h2>Game design &amp; usability</h2>                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ease of use</li> <li>• Structure &amp; mechanics</li> <li>• Scalability &amp; adaptability</li> <li>• Material quality &amp; aesthetics</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear, physical cards and simple rules allowed skipping unwanted questions and moving on at will.</li> <li>• Discard rule initially confusing but valued for flexibility.</li> <li>• Images provided visual rest; icons marked phases, though double icons caused minor misunderstanding.</li> <li>• Final design praised for aesthetics and ease of use.</li> </ul> |
| <h2>Game impact</h2>                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional connection</li> <li>• Social connection</li> </ul>                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Emotional:</b> Strong connection, players surprised by shared stories and expressions of warmth (e.g., a rare hug).</li> <li>• <b>Social:</b> Many planned new actions (reading, calling friends, music) with peer encouragement.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                      |
| <h2>Facilitation &amp; communication</h2>                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To trusted contacts</li> <li>• To homebound older adults</li> </ul>                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial hesitation common but overcome by positive outcomes.</li> <li>• <b>To trusted contacts:</b> Emphasize helping others; introduce gradually via willing participants and word-of-mouth.</li> <li>• <b>To homebound older adults:</b> Present in a familiar setting, after some social time; frame as aiding the contact for effective engagement.</li> </ul>   |

Fig. 96: Highlights of the key evaluation outcomes, based of five playtests.

## 02 Key evaluation outcomes

The key outcomes from the five playtests are explained in this paragraph and summarized in Fig. 96. Detailed summaries of the playtests conducted by the three village supporters are provided in Ch. 7, Par. 3, and those conducted by the two trusted contacts can be found in Ch. 7, Par. 4.

### Player experience

All participants, with one exception (older player of playtest 3 who was neutral, as suits his overall demeanor), expressed strong enthusiasm about their game experience.

The card set felt like a game to the participants, not goal-driven, but a cosy and pleasant activity. This atmosphere was created by several elements:

- Players appreciated the back-and-forth of asking and answering questions.
- The physical design of the cards, which included clear rules, allowed players to skip uncomfortable questions or move on to a new card when ready.
- The format granted permission to ask questions that would otherwise remain unspoken.

Together, these features made the game feel enjoyable to play and encouraged

spontaneous, natural and meaningful conversations. The game is particularly effective among people who already knew each other and shared trust, as this enabled them to open up more deeply.

*The village supporters experience*  
Village supporters noted they often held back from deep personal sharing due to their professional roles but still engaged effectively. Two now carry the game with them, recognizing its value as a Positive Health tool for casually exploring residents' strengths and joys.

### Game design and usability

Most participants followed the rules, making small adjustments to suit their preferences. Initially, discarding a card each round caused confusion, but players soon appreciated the flexibility. While the card images received little focus, they offered visual breaks that helped players pause or reflect, enhancing comfort. Icons clearly signaled game phases, though double icons caused some confusion, with players assuming questions were also doubled. Trusted contacts, who received the final design, praised the look and usability of the cards.

Part 1 was consistently described as enjoyable, interesting, and surprising.

Part 2 also sparked deep conversation and reflection and helped players identify small, interest-aligned steps. Though some found the thoughtful responses tiring, especially some older players, trust within the group made silences feel natural, and many shared meaningful stories. Only one session ended early due to fatigue; most players remained enthusiastic.

### *Transition to part 2*

Participants approached part 2 in different ways:

- Some simply continued after finishing part 1.
- Others were intrigued by the theme of “What makes you happy?”.
- In a few cases, players invested so much time and effort in part 1 that they only discovered the existence of part 2 when they were already wrapping up the game. As a result, they chose to play part 2 only briefly.
- Sometimes energy levels were too low to continue fully into Part 2, resulting in shorter or skipped sessions.

Overall, the game proved to be flexible in use. Players followed the rules but didn’t hesitate to adapt elements. They decided themselves when to stop and how many cards to play. The game can

be replayed, as the questions allow for new answers each time. Since not all cards are used in every session, leftover cards provide variation for future plays, as well. In group settings, repeated questions can be answered by different people.

### *Additional use cases*

Nearly all participants mentioned additional contexts where they would want to use the game, with colleagues, volunteer groups, other family members, because of the deeper understanding and bonds it fosters. It was also noted as a tool for care professionals, since it invites reflection on life in a relaxed, positive way.

### **Game impact**

The playtests allowed an evaluation of the game’s short-term emotional and social impact.

- Emotional: Most participants experienced significant emotional connection. They were surprised by the personal stories they were able to share, supported by the game granting them the “permission” to do so. “My brother-in-law gave me a hug when I left, he never does that.” shared one of the trusted contacts.
- Social: Several participants, including older players, reported

intentions to take new actions, some of which were socially themed, as a result of the game. These included reading a book, considering to learn a musical instrument, calling an old friend, or sharing memories with family. In many cases, fellow players supported these intentions by recommending a book, sharing information on where to borrow musical instruments, or encouraging follow-up. This shows the game not only fostered thought but helped spark supportive interactions that could lead to new social engagement.

### Facilitation & communication

Some players were initially unsure whether the game would lead to comfortable or meaningful conversations, but all of them reported being pleasantly surprised by the engagement and depth. One co-player from playtest 1 questioned whether homebound older adults would be willing to play, despite my anticipation of a positive experience. This highlights a key insight: people often hesitate before trying the game, but become enthusiastic once they do. Effective communication is essential in motivating both trusted contacts and homebound older adults to engage with the game.

### *Communication strategies*

- To trusted contacts: Motivation often increased when they saw their participation as helping someone else, for instance, when a village supporter asked them to play for another's benefit. One supporter suggested a gradual rollout, beginning with willing participants and relying on word-of-mouth to spread the game.
- To homebound older adults: A familiar, calm setting, such as their home, was key. Trusted contacts typically introduced the game during a relaxed visit, like over coffee. Framing the game as a curiosity or favor from the trusted contact proved effective; helping someone else was often a compelling reason to play.

## Highlights of playtest 1

To inform Fig. 96 on p. 176



Village supporter  
(VS) 1

+



Woman (75+)

Part 1 + Part 2: ~ 1 1/2 h



### Game Design & Usability

- **Game was easy to play**; rules were generally well understood.
- Cards were simple to handle; reflective questions sometimes needed reminders.
- Photos were noticed but did not actively influence gameplay.
- Some overlap in questions, but reflective prompts led to varied answers.
- Works well in both pair and group settings.

### Player Experience

- Players enjoyed the interaction and appreciated learning more about each other.
- The older woman was **surprised** by her own life satisfaction.
- **Familiarity** between players improved the quality of conversation.
- VS was cautious and thoughtful in answering due to her professional background.

### Game Impact (Short-Term)

#### Emotional Bonding

- VS felt a strong emotional connection during the game. She now carries the game with her and plans to use it regularly.

#### Social Motivation

- No new social actions were triggered, likely because players were already socially engaged.

### Facilitation & Communication

- VS plans a gradual rollout of the game in her community, starting with more open participants.
- The title of the game generated **curiosity** and motivated participation by the older woman.

Fig. 97: Highlights of the playtest of village supporter 1.

## 03 Summaries of the playtests done by the village supporters

The key highlights of the playtests of village supporter 1, 2, and 3 can be found in figures Fig. 97, Fig. 98 on p. 183, and Fig. 99 on p. 186, respectively.

### I. The playtest of village supporter 1

#### Overall experience of the game

The co-player who village supporter 1 chose to playtest with, was someone actively involved in the community. The partner was enthusiastic to discover if she would like to play this game as a trusted contact with homebound older adults she knows. So the intention was not for her to find new activities, but rather to consider if she could act as a trusted contact. However, the questions from part 2 made her reflect on her life: She was pleasantly surprised to realize how well she has everything in order, which brought her joy. When asked if the older woman would play the game with homebound acquaintances, she was hesitant: "I think they might find the game 'silly' or they just aren't interested."

Village Supporter 1 enjoyed learning more about her co-player. She appreciated that the game provided an opportunity to discuss different topics than usual.

She expects that the game works well both in pairs and groups. **She observed that it is most effective when participants already have some level of familiarity with one another.** This aligns with the intention of the game.

Village Supporter 1 plans to use the game more often: "I'll **carry it in my bag,**" and experiment with introducing it during group activities. She envisions approaching people and offering the game both one-on-one and in community settings, such as neighborhood centers. However, she wants to ensure she introduces it to the right individuals at the right moment. Since older villagers often take a passive approach, she aims to encourage engagement. **She suggests starting with receptive individuals, allowing familiarity with the game to grow before introducing it to more reserved participants.**

#### Initial experience and understanding of the game

The village supporter allowed her partner to read the rules independently. After some clarifications, the game was easy to follow.

The older woman liked the photos, but some left her unsure of what to do with them. For her, the focus was on the

questions, not the photos. She needed to be reminded of the reflective questions. Village supporter 1 is quite skilled at asking questions, making the prompts less necessary. She expects them to be an asset if the player can't come up with these deepening questions themselves.

### Both players found the interplay between question and answer enjoyable.

Village supporter 1 is quite open, so she answered the questions candidly. However, she is mindful of her position and chose her answers carefully.

Her partner appreciated the title and was **curious about what would bring her joy**. The cards were manageable despite an eye condition. They followed the rules but occasionally needed reminders.

### Detailed experience of the game

They played for about 1.5 hours, covering both sections. The village supporter initiated the transition to the second section, noticing that it required more contemplation. The distinction between the two sections was evident: the first focused on past experiences, while the second encouraged reflection on potential changes. Her partner, generally content with life, did not see a need for major changes.

Some similar questions led to repetitive

answers unless underquestions were used to steer the conversation in new directions.

## II. The playtest of village supporter 2

### Overall experience of the game

Village supporter 2 found the game experience inspiring. **"I now realize that sometimes you just have to try it, despite your initial concerns about whether the other person will like to play it."** She was surprised by how positively her playing partner reflected on life and how it benefited her. This aligns with the concept of positive health, focusing on what is going well to improve well-being.

Her partner wanted to continue playing beyond the one-hour session, enthusiastically sharing stories even as the game neared its conclusion. Given the person's typically negative outlook, village supporter 2 found it encouraging that so many positive aspects emerged during the conversation. The older woman expressed interest in playing again: "I actually need to play it again, because now I'm into it. I need to think about the questions. Then I'll know more answers!"

Although village supporter 2 was

## Highlights of playtest 2



Village supporter  
(VS) 2

+



Woman (70+)

Part 1 + Part 2: ~ 1 h



To inform Fig. 96 on p. 176

### Game Design & Usability

- VS finds that the rules are clear enough for others to use independently.
- **Minor rule deviations** (e.g., forgetting to discard cards) did not disrupt flow.
- Older player found questions **effortful** but still engaging.
- Cards were easy to handle; photos supported associations.
- Sub-questions were sometimes challenging but promoted interesting deep discussion.
- Double icons caused occasional confusion.
- Game seen as adaptable for volunteer or social groups.

### Player Experience

- Co-player was **highly engaged** and continued sharing beyond the game and expressed desire to play again.
- VS remained mindful of professional boundaries in her responses.
- **Familiarity** between players improved the quality of conversation.

### Game Impact (Short-Term)

#### Emotional Bonding

- The game encouraged open, personal storytelling that **deepened connection**.

#### Social Motivation

- Co-player decided to **reconnect with an old friend**, likely influenced by positive emotions during the game.

### Facilitation & Communication

- The game title invited exploration.
- VS introduced the game after coffee, creating a relaxed entry point.
- Initial skepticism of the VS turned into enthusiasm to share the game with others, reinforcing the game's value.

Fig. 98: Highlights of the playtest of village supporter 2.

concerned about the professional relationship she had with her villagers and wondered if she could answer all the questions at the depth she wanted to share, she found that she could quite well direct her answers to maintain her own privacy (e.g. answering some questions more superficially when necessary).

**The village supporter intends to use the game more often**, including with her working group. She was inspired by her partner's response and she also believes the game rules are clear enough for others to use independently. Moreover, she feels the game could be used in other contexts, such as with volunteer groups, **to strengthen bonds**.

### **Initial experience and understanding of the game**

The village supporter took time before introducing the game, wanting to first establish trust with her playing partner. She was already over for coffee and after fifteen minutes during the get-together she introduced the game. She viewed the game as a tool to offer a fresh perspective on life.

**Her partner was highly engaged, sometimes forgetting whose turn it was.** The rule about setting cards aside was not always followed strictly, but it did

not hinder the experience.

The village supporter sometimes noticed an age gap. "You don't have to dig so deep, do you?" the older woman said. It could be the case that the older woman felt uncomfortable with this, but at the same time, she was very enthusiastic about sharing her stories, which lessened this suspicion.

Although the questions sometimes touched on past negative experiences, she found that the game title 'What makes you happy?' encouraged them to try the game out. She noted that some questions naturally led to discussions about different stages in life, such as falling in love, starting a career, and marriage, which offered a pleasant variation.

The cards were easy to read, and the photos facilitated association. Underquestions were sometimes challenging but prompted meaningful discussions. The double icons caused some confusion, requiring occasional clarification.

### **Detailed experience of the game**

They transitioned to the second section naturally, finding that it prompted deeper reflection. One reflective question, "How can you do that today?"

prompted her partner to plan on calling an old friend. This was directly triggered by the statements in part 2. However, the positive emotions generated from part 1 may have given the older woman the confidence to finally plan that call (Ch. 2, Par. 2). It was something she had been avoiding, illustrating the power of bringing certain topics to light and being able to discuss them with someone she trusts.

### III. The playtest of village supporter 3

#### Overall experience of the game

After playing, village supporter 3 felt good and found playing the game positively surprising, but noted that the man was not particularly motivated to take immediate (social) action. However, she expressed a desire to continue playing the game with him. Since she only played for about 20 minutes, many questions remained. She believed the man would open up more over time, and the game reinforced her expectation that he needed additional stimulation.

She noted that the game encouraged a different style of conversation. “You get to know each other in a new way and discuss topics you wouldn’t normally address,” she stated. While she already had strong questioning skills, she

observed that the other player needed some time to adjust. The older man had to think longer about his responses due to memory difficulties. Still, he could answer most of the questions, some more superficial and some more in-depth.

She now keeps the game in her bag. “If I need it, I use it.” She also sees potential for using it with colleagues or passing it on to others. She believes the rules are clear enough for independent use.

#### Initial experience and understanding of the game

The village supporter emphasized the importance of an existing relationship before playing. “You need to have a certain relationship with someone before I play it, because the game is quite personal,” she said. “For example, I’ve met this man several times now.” When introducing the game to her playing partner, she mentioned that it was for a student project. The partner was willing to help the village supporter by playing the game. In this case, the older adult wanted to help someone else rather than play the game for his own sake. This is an important insight for communicating the game.

The village supporter had put the game down and then explained the rules.

## Highlights of playtest 3

To inform Fig. 96 on p. 176



Village supporter  
(VS) 3

+



Man (80+)

Part 1: ~ 20 minutes

Part 2: ~ 1 question



### Game Design & Usability

- Older player found questions **effortful**
- Most rules were understandable, though the discard rule needed clarification. Once understood, the discard option was found useful.
- Double icons were confusing; photos added engagement during listening.
- Works well in pairs and groups, offering different conversational dynamics.
- VS sees value in using the game professionally or sharing it with others.

### Player Experience

- The game led to **new types of dialogue**.
- **Familiarity** between participants helped create a relaxed atmosphere.
- VS remained mindful of professional boundaries in her responses.

### Game Impact (Short-Term)

#### Emotional Bonding

- VS carries the game and plans to reuse it to support reflective, uplifting conversations.

#### Social Motivation

- No new social actions were triggered. VS plans to replay with the same older adult to explore more potential.

### Facilitation & Communication

- The older adult was motivated to play the game, because he was **willing to help** the VS (rather than playing the game for his own sake.)

Fig. 99: Highlights of the playtest of village supporter 3.

Initially, the rule about setting a card aside was unclear, but it became evident that this feature was useful. The title was found straightforward.

The village supporter enjoyed playing but was mindful about what she wanted to share, often sticking to publicly known information to protect her professional role. The cards were easy to read and handle, despite this older adult's vision problems. The underquestions added depth, which was helpful for her reserved playing partner.

### Detailed experience of the game

She noted that the second part of the game encouraged deeper conversations. Her partner, however, had limited energy that day and could only answer one question from this section. *She found that the game required players to search their memories, which could be tiring.*

The icons in the second section were slightly less appealing, and the double icons sometimes caused confusion. However, the photos added engagement.

### Additional testing by village supporter 3

The village supporter also played the game with two younger women (<30)

and a group of middle-aged friends (50–60). This was her own initiative.

The game was well received in both groups. The middle-aged group expressed a strong desire to play again. They followed the rules, which suited them well.

One suggested an alternative title, “Who are you?”, as the game involves more than just discussing happiness; it also explores personal experiences and identity. However, the current title is more suitable because of the lighter tone, which encourages people to try it out.

Village supporter 3 specifically mentioned that *in the friend group, they more often looked at the photos because there were many people and a lot of listening, which led to more attention being paid to the photos.*

Playing in a group added speed and dynamics, with more interaction and engagement.

## Highlights of playtest 4

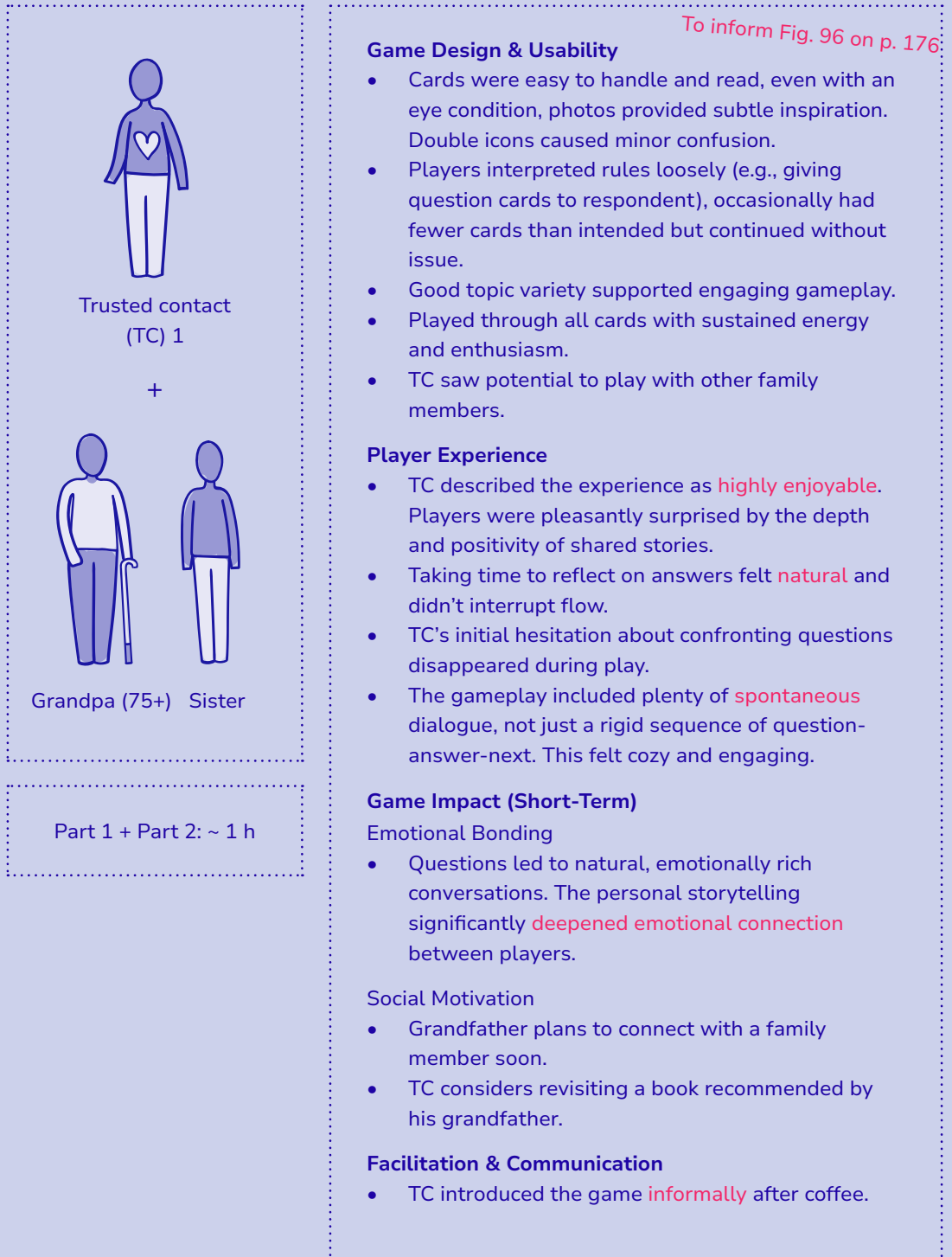


Fig. 100: Highlights of the playtest of trusted contact 1.

## 04 Summaries of the playtests done by the trusted contacts

The key highlights of playtests of trusted contact 1 and 2 can be found in Fig. 100, and Fig. 101 on p. 192, respectively.

### I. Playtest by trusted contact 1

#### Overall experience of the game

The players felt inspired. Some answers even led to mutual compliments or interests, which was especially pleasant.

The trusted contact was very positive about the experience. **He felt the game was well-designed: simple in concept but very effective.** The questions were good, and while he initially worried they might be too difficult, he quickly realized during play that this was not the case. Taking time to think about answers felt completely natural, and it didn't disturb the flow of the game. His grandfather was very positive and found the experience deeply personal. **"Things you are proud of or good at don't usually come up in everyday conversations, but they did here."**

Overall, it was a very successful and meaningful experience. After the game, the grandfather continued sharing more stories, which the trusted contact found very meaningful too.

The interaction clearly worked both

ways. The trusted contact could see himself playing it again with others, like his parents or aunt. He also expressed gratitude for being allowed to playtest the game, describing it as a valuable and memorable moment for him, his sister, and their grandfather.

#### Potential future actions

The contact noted that one of the game questions led to a story, prompted by a reflective question: "How can this bring you a smile today?" After some follow-up discussion, they discovered that the grandfather had old photos he wanted to share with the family members involved in the story. He was going to look for them in the coming week.

The contact himself was also inspired. He remembered that he used to enjoy reading, a hobby he surprisingly had in common with his grandfather, who even recommended a book. The game had facilitated a conversation that would otherwise never have occurred, noting shared interests.

#### Initial experience and understanding of the game

The game was played at the grandfather's home. After they did coffee, the contact introduced the game by saying, "Hey grandpa, someone gave me this game to play with my

grandfather. Would you like to try it with us?” His grandfather was open to the idea. Normally, they don’t play games together, so my contact was unsure of his grandfather’s response. He approached the invitation in a neutral tone to give his grandfather the freedom to decline, if needed.

Before playing, the trusted contact worried the questions might be too hard or confronting, or that it might be awkward if someone didn’t have an answer. But these concerns proved unfounded. **The questions naturally sparked beautiful conversations without feeling forced or overly direct.**

They played through both parts of the game in about an hour. The contact briefly read the key rules aloud to keep things simple. The instructions were clear. Occasionally, they had fewer cards in hand than intended, but it didn’t negatively impact the experience. Initially, they laid cards down on the table, but later found it more enjoyable to hand the card directly to the person they wanted to ask.

### *Game visuals and mechanics*

While they didn’t consciously focus on the photos, the contact believed they still had an effect, especially when players had to think about

their responses. The images subtly contributed inspiration.

They followed the question structure: first asking the top question, then giving the card to the other player, and finally answering the follow-up question. They played with three people, taking turns choosing whom to ask. Sometimes, others also joined in to share related stories.

Handling the cards was not an issue, even for the grandfather who has poor eyesight. He even commented on how pleasant the cards were to use.

Regarding the discard mechanism, sometimes players let go of interesting questions simply due to the rules, but overall it was helpful to have this option. Unused questions can be played in future sessions and asked questions can be directed to different people in larger groups, they found.

There was some minor confusion about the double icons in part 2, especially since part 1 used distinct images consistently.

### **Detailed experience of the game (Parts 1 and 2)**

They completed part 1 and decided to continue with part 2. “Well, after 1 comes 2, so we kind of had to,” the

contact joked. They played through all the cards, since they found they had energy and time to continue. Although many questions prompted stories about the past, the grandfather's answers varied across life stages, from youth to work life to recent years. "The game brought out many wonderful stories from the past that we had never heard before," he shared enthusiastically. Topics included hobbies, family members, and mischievous childhood memories. Some stories even inspired thoughts of actions they could still take today.

When asked about the difference between part 1 and 2, the contact noted that part 1 was broader, while part 2 focused more on connecting past experiences to present or future possibilities. They also finished part 2, which went more quickly. He noted that with multiple players, the game cards are quickly played.

They often elaborated on topics they found interesting. The gameplay included plenty of spontaneous dialogue, not just a rigid sequence of question-answer-next.

My contact enjoyed answering questions himself too, as it turned the experience into a conversation rather than an

interview, which made it cozy and engaging.

## II. Playtest by trusted contact 2

### Overall experience of the game

The game impression was very positive. The game sparked an open and meaningful conversation, which all players appreciated. One particularly touching moment: before leaving, the contact's brother-in-law gave him a hug, something he normally never does. It clearly made an impact.

The atmosphere was relaxed and the gameplay enjoyable. As the contact put it: "It brings about a completely different kind of conversation." Each person asked about five to six questions. Throughout the session, the contact could tell that his fellow players were enjoying themselves as well. They felt inspired and experienced many positive emotions. My contact noticed this both verbally and non-verbally. "If I ask them to continue playing the next time I see them, I'm sure they'll say yes".

The contact emphasized that knowing his fellow players allowed him to gently steer the conversation when needed, helping everyone feel comfortable. This highlights the importance of playing the

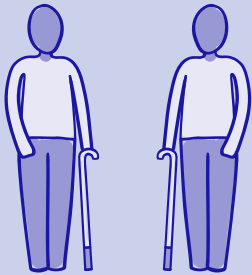
## Highlights of playtest 5

To inform Fig. 96 on p. 176



Trusted contact  
(TC) 2

+



Brother-in-law (70+)    Sister (70+)

Part 1: ~ 50 minutes  
Part 2: ~ 15 question

### Game Design & Usability

- Physical cards contributed to playful, dynamic interactions. E.g. drawing new cards allowed for smooth topic transitions.
- Cards were well-designed and easy to use.
- Players initially misunderstood the discard rule but appreciated its usefulness upon clarification.
- Part 2 was played as a gentle wrap-up.
- TC sees potential use in professional health settings to support positive reflection.

### Player Experience

- Players felt uplifted and **inspired** by the experience. The conversations were **meaningful**.
- No new facts were learned, but shared memories were revisited and valued.
- TC guided conversation gently based on his **familiarity** with participants.
- TC expressed interest in playing again and sees value in using it with homebound contacts.

### Game Impact (Short-Term)

#### Emotional Bonding

- An **unexpected hug** from a participant signaled emotional depth.
- Game encouraged mutual curiosity, even among the sister and brother-in-law who typically don't engage deeply.

#### Social Motivation

- The sister might consider learning to play an instrument, after a related conversation.

### Facilitation & Communication

- TC introduced the game **informally** after coffee.
- TC appreciated the freedom to present the game without pressure or goals, but simply as to enjoy time together.

Fig. 101: Highlights of the playtest of trusted contact 2.

game with trusted contacts.

He also sees potential for the game in healthcare settings, where it could be used to encourage people to reflect on their lives in a positive way.

### Initial experience and understanding of the game

The contact had already been visiting his sister and brother-in-law for coffee when he said, “I brought something along. I looked through it and it seems fun to play together. It’s a way to have a different kind of conversation.” They were both open to the idea. He later mentioned it was part of a student project, but **he genuinely wanted to play and didn’t view it as a test**. It felt natural to try it together, and he would’ve been surprised if they had said no.

He noted that if the game had been introduced with a more formal goal like “learning to communicate better,” it would have felt too heavy. Instead, it was simply about having a good time and reminiscing, no pressure. To my contact, the use of physical cards helped reinforce that it was a game, not an examination. While it could be played one-on-one, he found that playing as a group of three added more energy.

He observed that people aren’t always

great at coming up with good questions, and this game provided them with thoughtful prompts. If someone wanted to change the topic, they could simply draw a new card. This gave the game a dynamic, accessible quality.

My contact appreciated the game’s title and thought it was fitting.

### Game rules

The contact read the rules aloud. The gameplay was clear and easy to follow. The group was flexible with the rules, if a question felt repetitive or unsuitable, they simply discarded it. The contact said he’d even be open to discarding a question after asking it, if it proved too difficult, though that this not occur.

During their turns, players could choose whom to ask a question. Initially, the couple directed all their questions to the contact. **After a while, they began asking each other questions, something they normally rarely do**. New ideas, interpretations, and follow-up questions emerged naturally.

They played for over an hour. They asked both the main and follow-up questions at the same time, as the follow-up helped provide direction, they found. At the beginning, they discarded one card, and from then on, they held two cards: one to ask, one as a backup.

They continued drawing back up to two cards after each turn. In this case, they didn't use the discard rule consistently, but in future games, the contact would prefer having the option of discarding a card per round, especially with other groups where the fit might be less intuitive. He didn't realize that this was already the intention according to the game rules.

### *Game visuals*

When asked about the card design, the contact said he initially wanted to shuffle the deck, but the cards were too large. He would prefer a pocket-sized version for easier transport. However, he did appreciate the design of the cards. They were easy to handle.

He found the photos visually appealing. He appreciated their presence even though he didn't actively engage with them. The icons helped him distinguish part 2 from part 1.

### **Detailed experiences of the game (Parts 1 and 2)**

While they didn't necessarily learn new facts about each other, they revisited many shared memories, which they found valuable. A few moments stood out, like the contact's sister complimenting her husband, or discovering that she would like to

learn an instrument. When asked by one of the reflective questions, "What are you waiting for?" she admitted she didn't know. The contact then told her about a place where she could borrow instruments. Although he encouraged her in the moment, he doesn't intend to keep following up. It's unclear if she followed through, but the idea was clearly planted.

The stories prompted by the game spanned different time periods, from the distant past to more recent events, though mostly older memories.

Players asked questions while holding the card, and when done, placed the card down. They answered both parts of the questions enthusiastically.

The contact noted a clear distinction between the two parts of the game: part 1 focused on memories, while part 2 looked toward the future.

They played part 2 slightly differently. Instead of drawing cards, the contact selected a few questions for discussion as they wrapped up the session. The others didn't hold cards during this time. He saw that part 2 was titled 'What makes you happy?' and he wanted to ask a few more of these questions, because he felt curious. They spent about 15 minutes doing so, it was more to wrap

up the game.

When asked if any questions were too difficult, the contact replied that even the challenging ones eventually led to shareable stories. They did not mind them or the silences that came from needing to think.

He would definitely play the game again, particularly with family. He feels confident it would lead to a fun and meaningful evening.

### Other potential game partner

My contact also mentioned a cousin he wasn't able to include in the test, but would like to. They currently struggle to connect in conversation. He believes the game could help give their relationship a positive boost and draw his cousin out of his shell. Though this specific test didn't occur, it illustrates the contact's belief in the game's potential, especially for engaging those who tend to retreat into their own world.

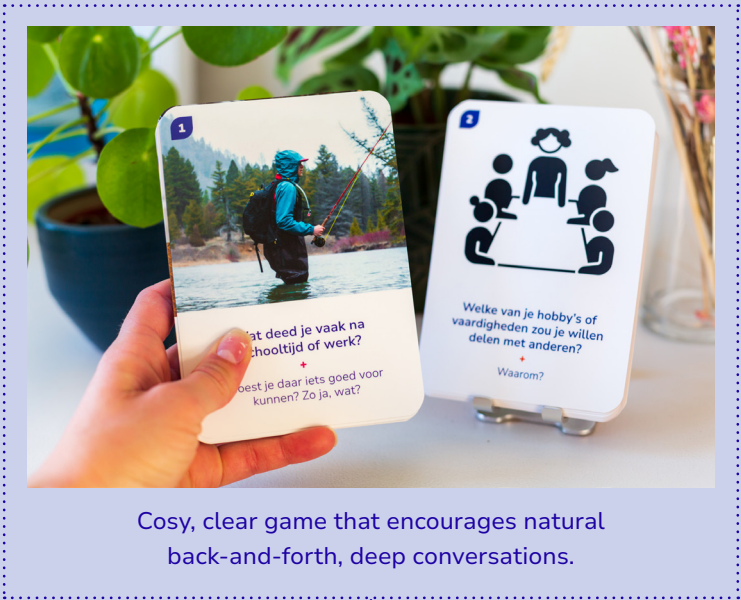
### III. Additional playtests by the designer

In addition to the official evaluation tests, I personally played the game with a friend (both in our 20s) and with a family group of four (two in their 20s–30s and two in their 50s–60s). I also observed my father (50s–60s) playing

with my grandmother (75+). These sessions gave me insight both as a player in pairs and in group settings and as an observer:

- The game gives players permission to ask personal questions and often leads to rich conversations.
- Some answers carried emotional weight, but this didn't lead to discomfort, as the players trusted each other.
- When players did feel a bit uncomfortable, the photos offered a gentle place to rest their gaze, reducing social pressure.
- The rules were often interpreted flexibly to make the gameplay smoother. For example, some players made discarding cards optional or only discarded one before continuing with the remaining cards.
- These informal playtests reinforced how adaptable and accessible the game can be across different settings and relationships.

The game “What make you happy?”



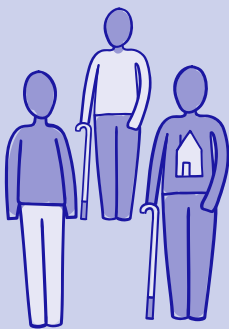
Cosy, clear game that encourages natural back-and-forth, deep conversations.

The game as:

Emotional connector

Health tool  
(Personal reflection)

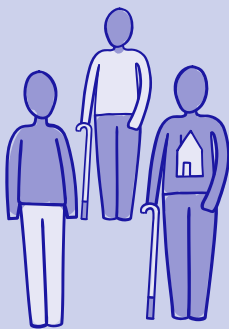
Social encourager



Players experience enthusiasm, inspiration, and a strong sense of connection.



The game supports healthcare professionals in helping co-players reflect positively on their lives.



About half the time, they consider small actions to take, some of them social, encouraged by their co-players.

Fig. 102: The three key areas of impact of the game.

## 05 Chapter conclusion

The evaluation with village supporters, potential trusted contacts, and older adults showed that the game was generally experienced as positive, exciting, and inspiring. It was easy to play, partly because participants felt comfortable adapting the rules to their own preferences and already had a sense of trust among each other. This familiarity made deeper sharing and even silences feel natural, comfortable, and valuable.

The game aims to help homebound older adults feel more socially and emotionally connected. While most participants were not truly homebound, several displayed traits or circumstances associated with being somewhat homebound, such as being closed off to deep conversations, shy and reserved, or less socially active. The game supports its goal by encouraging self-reflection, which fosters positive emotions and can motivate (social) actions. These are often supported or inspired by co-players.

It was also noted that the game requires a certain level of energy, especially for older players. In most cases, this did not stop them from playing, but one participant did choose to end the session early due to low energy on that particular day.

Minor elements of the game, such as the mandatory discarding of cards and the use of double icons in part 2, caused some confusion. However, overall, players adapted the rules to suit their own needs and still found the game enjoyable and comfortable to play.

### Game impact

Fig. 102 shows the three key areas of impact of the game.

The evaluation showed that players experienced an increased sense of **emotional connection** during gameplay. This suggests that future players, especially homebound older adults, may also feel more emotionally connected while playing. This has two key implications:

- Homebound older adults may feel more seen, heard, and understood, potentially deepening their relationships over time.
- They may become more open to encouragement from trusted contacts to engage in new social activities (Ch. 3, Par. 7).

Most participants also **reflected on their lives** in meaningful ways. Some were surprised by how content they felt, while others expressed pride in overcoming life challenges. Drawing from the

Positive Health framework (Ch. 2, Par. 2), such moments of reflection appear to increase their intrinsic motivation to engage in activities that suit them, should they seek this. It also brings potential for village supporters and other health professionals to use the game as a **tool**.

Several players, including older adults, considered or even took **small (social) actions** as a result of the game. These actions included visiting family, calling an old friend, or reminiscing about memories with others. While valuable, such actions may not always lead to lasting new connections and could remain occasional. Since most participants in this evaluation were relatively socially active, their social responses might differ from those of homebound older adults. Further testing is needed to gain more insight into this distinction.

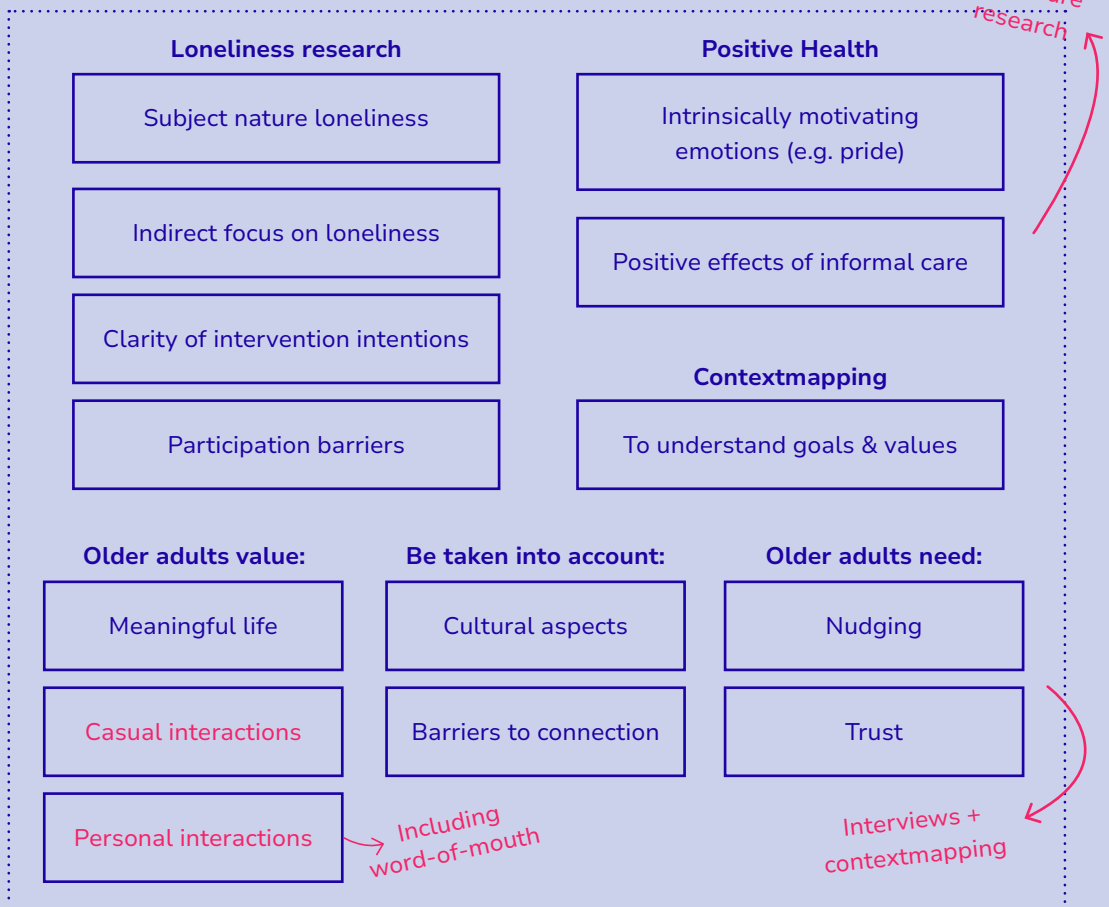


# **Chapter 8**

# **Conclusion**

It revisits the original objective and assesses whether it has been met. Reflections are offered on the product, the process, and personal development. The chapter then provides recommendations for improving the game and suggestions for further testing, ending with the next steps for the outcomes of this thesis.

## Key insights that I chose to take into account



## Led to the final design



Fig. 103: The key insights led to the final design.

# 01 Conclusion and reflection

## I. Conclusion

This thesis project, *'Let's Bond! Fostering social connection for older adults in Twente'*, set out with the goal of enhancing well-being of older adults by increasing their experience of connectedness. To guide this process, the following research question was posed:

Main research question: What kind of intervention can be designed to enhance the social connectedness of older adults in Twente, focusing on strengths rather than deficits?

Initially, the project addressed older adults in general, but after uncovering the crucial role of **village supporters** as key actors, the focus shifted to supporting **homebound older adults**, those who experience a lack of connection but rarely act on it or seek help. I defined them as individuals who tend to experience emotional or social loneliness but are unlikely to act on it or accept help.

Loneliness was found to be multifaceted and deeply subjective, commonly distinguished as:

- Emotional loneliness: the lack of deep, meaningful relationships.
- Social loneliness: the lack of

frequent or sufficient social contact.

While I initially chose to prioritize social loneliness as a focus aligning with the needs of the key actor, further insights revealed the strong potential of emotional connection as a gateway to broader social participation. Emotional bonds with **trusted contacts** (e.g. family members, neighbors, or friends) emerged as a critical motivator for the homebound older adults, often guiding them to small yet meaningful steps toward increased social interaction.

Due to ethical and time constraints, direct research with homebound older adults was not feasible. Instead, insights were gathered using a multi-method approach, including literature review, interviews, and contextmapping techniques. The Positive Health framework played a central role, emphasizing autonomy, strengths, and meaning rather than illness or deficits. This informed the design strategy: an indirect, non-stigmatizing approach that fosters intrinsic motivation through reflection on positive memories, current abilities, and personal values.

Findings revealed that older adults in Twente highly value casual (non-obligatory and informal) and personal (equal-level and genuine) interactions.

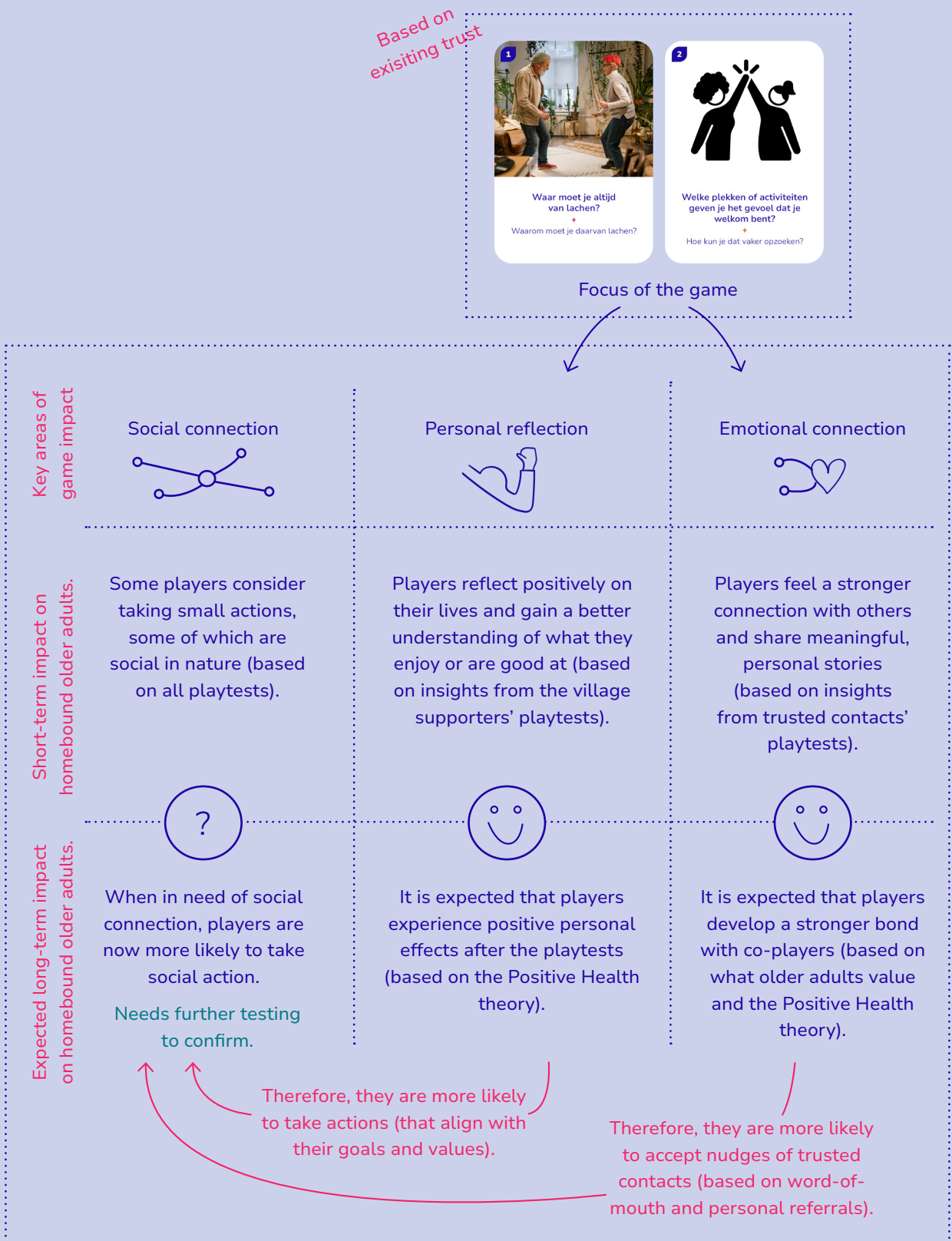


Fig. 104: The expected game impact.

And the role of trusted contacts to promote behavioral change in the homebound older adults were identified through word-of-mouth encouragement and personal referrals (far more effective than formal invitations). The key insights from this thesis are presented in Fig. 103 on p. 202, upper section.

These findings led to the development of “**Wat maakt je blij?**” (“What makes you happy?”), a conversation-based card game designed for homebound older adults and their trusted contacts (see Fig. 103 on p. 202, lower section). The game consists of two phases:

1. Reflecting on personal memories, strengths, and interests.
2. Exploring how these reflections might lead to small or larger actions aligned with the player’s values.

Some of these actions may lead to new social engagement, though this is framed as a possibility rather than an obligation, to preserve the player’s sense of agency and avoid any sense of judgment or pressure.

The design encourages emotional connection and self-reflection within a context of equality and trust. It is meant to feel empowering, not prescriptive.

**Short-term evaluation** of the game showed repeated positive outcomes:

- Participants reported feeling emotionally connected and energized, through meaningful conversations.
- The game created opportunities for (small) self-driven actions (e.g., calling a friend or revisiting a hobby), motivated by their co-players.
- Professionals and village supporters appreciated the game’s ability to spark positive personal reflection in an informal way.

However, the game did not consistently lead to consideration of new social activities. Long-term effects remain unknown and should be assessed in future testing. See Fig. 104 for the expected game impact.

Its impact will also depend on how the game is **communicated**. To avoid framing the homebound individual as someone “in need,” facilitators must use respectful, empowering language.

In conclusion, this project demonstrates how **designing for well-being**, rather than against loneliness, creates more empowering outcomes. By encouraging intrinsic motivation and emotional connection, “Wat maakt je blij?” offers a gentle and human-centered path to greater social connection. It highlights design’s potential not to “fix” people, but

to enable exploration, joy, and human connection on their own terms.

### Limitations

- Due to access restrictions, the game was tested mainly with socially active older adults and trusted contacts experienced in question-asking. This may have influenced results.
- In addition to insights I gained from extra playtests that I conducted or observed myself, most of the knowledge from the evaluation was obtained through spoken word and explicit feedback. As a result, important details may have been missed.
- The dynamic between equal players is crucial to the game's experience. When professionals (e.g., village supporters) use the game, care must be taken to avoid a power imbalance. These professionals must understand the game is meant to be mutual, not one-sided.

## II. Reflections

### Reflection on the product

- The game is intended for use between individuals with an equal and trusting relationship. While village supporters can play this role

to some extent, they must tread carefully to preserve the sense of mutuality. The act of questioning and answering is central to the experience.

- The game supports both one-on-one and small group formats (up to 4–5 players).

### Reflection on the Process

I only identified the key actors, the village supporters, after the initial stages, leading to a highly condensed second half of the project. Nonetheless, rapid iteration, close collaboration, and flexible sprint planning enabled a rich and meaningful design process. Though ideal testing with the actual target group wasn't possible, I believe current results still offer valuable insights into the game's potential impact.

### Personal Reflection

At the start, I felt constrained by how I thought the project "should" be done. Letting go of this opened up space for me to find my own approach. I embraced quick cycles of research and design, planned frequent meetings with village supporters, and developed a process that matched my strengths. I'm also proud of the communication I maintained with my supervisors and stakeholders, even while working remotely from Delft.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

I feel the project is truly mine, and I'm happy with how it evolved. ->

## 02 Recommendations and next steps

### I. Game improvements

- Add packaging: Develop a dedicated game box to present and store the game. This reinforces its identity as a standalone game and improves user perception.
- Refine game rules: Game rules remained underdeveloped, and players experienced mild confusion about certain game elements, such as discarding cards. Clarify and expand the rules to ensure consistency while maintaining room for personal interpretation or provide additional playing options.
- Minor adjustments: The double icons on part 2 caused confusion and should be revised.
- communication strategies.
- Ethical considerations: The game works well between trusted contacts but may evoke emotional vulnerability if played with strangers. Assess emotional risks and provide guidelines for safe, respectful facilitation.
- Explore phase 2 engagement: Phase 2 of the game has been skipped or played briefly in some playtest cases. Examine through further testing if this is due to cognitive load or lack of clarity. Consider redesigning the second phase or introducing nudges to make its purpose and value clearer.
- Assess long-term impact: Currently, the game prompts small, personal actions. Study whether repeated play or a redesigned second phase could lead to larger social steps for those in need or ready to take them.
- Adaptability beyond Twente: The game was designed specifically for Twente, but it may be suitable for a broader audience. Explore how it could be scaled or adapted for national use, considering cultural and contextual differences.

### II. Further testing

- Test with target group: Playtests were primarily conducted with socially active older adults, not necessarily homebound individuals. Further testing with the actual target group is needed to validate impact.
- Understand game communication: Participants often only played after prompting, despite positive experiences. Investigate how to encourage play more effectively, focusing on informal, strength-based

### III. Next Steps

- Leverage village supporters:

Empower village supporters to introduce and use the game with community members. Their role is crucial in spreading the game through informal networks.

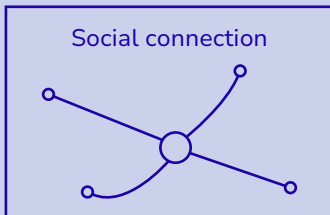
- Promote organic growth: Rely on word-of-mouth and casual introduction to reach homebound individuals in a non-stigmatizing, empowering manner.

These recommendations aim to refine the game experience, enhance its reach, and ensure its ethical and emotional safety for all participants.

# Glossary

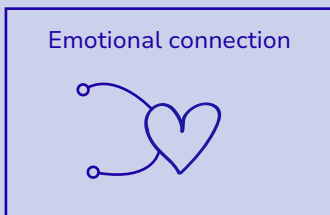
## Social connection

The subjective experience of having a broad enough social network.



## Emotional connection

The subjective experience of having deep, meaningful connections with others.



## Activities

A broad spectrum from organized events like senior fitness groups or one-time workshops (e.g., birdhouse crafting), to informal activities such as mowing a neighbor's lawn.

### Homebound older adults

I define them as older adults who stick to their familiar circles and routines but often feel socially isolated.



### The designer

Me, Emmelie Huisman.



### Trusted contact

I define them as individuals who already have an existing relationship with the homebound older adult.



### Village supporters

Their role is to enhance the quality of life in their villages by informally supporting both residents and the local community. Often if I refer to village supporters, I refer to the three village supporters who act as the key actors for this project.



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*The thesis report was written by Emmelie Huisman, with editorial support from OpenAI's ChatGPT.*

The game “*What Makes You Happy?*” highlighted the potential not to ‘fix’ people, but to empower exploration, joy, and human connection on their own terms.

