

# **The Elderly, the Digital Divide and Citizenship:**

**a collection of best practices and  
senior experiences**





# E-book dedicated to the 2nd EUDIGIT webinar, hosted by the district of Altona, Hamburg on 17-18 June 2021



Altona Town Hall

The content for this e-book was prepared under the framework of EUDIGIT – European Digital Citizens project, funded by Europe for Citizens programme under grant agreement 614897-CITIZ-1-2019-2-FR-CITIZ-NT.

© EUDIGIT 2021

Compiled by Aseniya Dimitrova, TheMayor.EU based on contributions from all partners

Designed by Eduard Lilov, TheMayor.EU

Edited by Tzvetoza Vincent Iolov, TheMayor.EU

## Table of Contents

<i>EUDIGIT – European Digital Citizens.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Partners.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Ageing is the defining demographic trend of Europe.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>The Elderly, the Digital Divide and Citizenship.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>La Maison du Bel Age itinérante - The mobile caravan for the elderly in Marseille.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Digital Seniors - a helping hand with new technologies in Cluj.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>UniTE – University for the Third Age in Genoa.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Culturally sensitive digital coaches for the elderly of Rotterdam.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Staying active with board games on Zoom in Hamburg.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Library digitalisation in Varna.....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Making e-health accessible: The Comfort Houses of Rotterdam.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Daily-life experiences of seniors in a connected European Union.....</i>	<i>26</i>



# EUDIGIT

## European Digital Citizens

**T**he facts are alarming: 169 million Europeans do not have even basic computer skills. This presents itself as a real brake, not only in the professional sphere but also in the fight against social exclusion. This gap also creates differences in development among citizens, and between cities and villages, it endangers the principle of regional cohesion and may damage the feeling of belonging to the EU and having a broader European identity.

This fact has been noted by all EUDIGIT partner cities, which have expressed their concerns about the link between digital exclusion and European Union citizenship, especially among disadvantaged groups of people.

The digital divide, as a contemporary phenomenon, actually acts as an accelerator of social exclusion for those who are not connected enough, not skilled enough and not informed enough – in other words, those who missed boarding “the boat of progress”. Even when they are digitally connected, many citizens show poor interest in European matters. These are pertinent issues since communication stemming from the EU institutions and Member States flows mainly through online channels.

The stakes are therefore high since it involves a battle for the hearts and minds of all EU citizens. On the ground level, EUDIGIT explores how cities, as the government level closest and most accessible to people, can become actively involved in reducing the digital divide through the adoption of policies and an evolution of public services tailored “with and for all citizens” approach, coupled with better communication strategies.



### OBJECTIVES:

- Strengthening EU citizenship and citizens' awareness
- Contributing to reduce the digital gap in cities
- Co-building digital policies with citizens

### ACTIVITIES:

- 7 events
- 30 workshops with civic society
- Co-build policies with citizens and stakeholders in all partner cities

### OUTCOMES:

- 5 e-books
- A declaration for cooperation between partner cities
- Digital participation surveys
- Involvement of 520 people directly and 30 000 indirectly

### TIMEFRAME:

May 2020 to March 2023

### BUDGET:

126,000 EUR



# PARTNERS

- CITY OF MARSEILLE
- EVRO ADVANS ASSOCIATION /  
THEMAYOR.EU
- CLUJ METROPOLITAN AREA
- MUNICIPALITY OF GENOA
- MUNICIPALITY OF ROTTERDAM
- FREE AND HANSEATIC CITY OF HAMBURG
- MUNICIPALITY OF VARNA





# Ageing is the defining demographic trend of Europe



## DID YOU KNOW THAT:

- As Europeans, we are living longer than ever before and becoming an older population with every year that passes?
- Life expectancy at birth has grown by 10 years in the last 5 decades
- By 2070, 30% of the population will be aged 65+
- There are fewer births, and the working-age population is shrinking

## Challenges and opportunities related to ageing

- Formative years: life-long learning, healthy & active ageing
- Working age: labour markets, productivity, innovation and business opportunities
- Retirement: volunteering, intergenerational relations, adequate, fair and sustainable pension systems, old age poverty
- Growing needs: healthcare, long-term care, mobility, connectivity, well-being

## EU's response - a "Green Paper" on Ageing

- The European Commission published on 27 January 2021 a Green Paper on ageing
- The aim was to stimulate a debate on European level and
- To discuss options on anticipating and responding to the challenges and opportunities that ageing brings
- You can consult the document here: [Green Paper on Ageing - Fostering solidarity and responsibility between generations](#)
- And find out how the Commission plans to address the issues raised here: [The impact of demographic change in Europe](#)

*Source: European Commission, Green Paper on Ageing*

**AGEING DOES  
NOT MEAN  
"AGED" –  
IT IS A  
CONTINUOUS  
PROCESS THAT  
CONCERNS ALL  
AGES**



# THE ELDERLY, THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AND CITIZENSHIP



The second seminar of the EUDIGIT project took place online on 17-18 June 2021. Organised by the district of Altona, Hamburg, in collaboration with the Project Coordinator the City of Marseille and TheMayor.EU, the event gathered over 100 participants in front of the screens, together with a small group of senior citizens in Hamburg. For

two days, they debated on what works in **bridging the digital divide experienced by the elderly in Europe and how to promote digital citizenship.**

The first day gave EUDIGIT partner cities the chance to present the results from their local workshops – small virtual or physical meetings, preceding the webinar, in which local seniors shared their

needs, expectations to policymakers and the everyday digital challenges they face. As part of these workshops, cities identified the most successful projects and initiatives, implemented on their territories, which have helped bridge the digital divide experienced by senior citizens. You will be able to learn more about them on the next few pages.

Additionally, active ageing and the relations between seniors and the digital were showcased beyond city level – the experience of BAGSO - German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations was put on display, while the EU's Green Paper on Ageing was explored at more depth.

Finally, the first day concluded with an open conversation between senior citizens from partner cities.

They exchanged experiences and views on their current situation with regards to the digital world and formed new friendships.

The second day offered numerous suggestions on how the smart city concept can be put to the benefit of seniors: namely, through e-libraries, travelling digital houses, artificial intelligence assistants, virtual communities or lessons on Internet technologies.

RECORDINGS OF THE ENTIRE EVENT, AS WELL AS THE SLIDES FROM ALL PRESENTATIONS, ARE AVAILABLE AT [EUDIGIT.MARSEILLE.FR](http://EUDIGIT.MARSEILLE.FR)



# LA MAISON DU BEL ÂGE ITINÉRANTE

The mobile caravan for  
the elderly in Marseille

## Where?

BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE DEPARTMENT  
(MAIN CITIES ON THIS AREA: MARSEILLE,  
AIX-EN-PROVENCE, ARLES), FRANCE

## Who?

BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE DEPARTMENT

## When?

2021  
- ONGOING



The Département des Bouches-du-Rhône (a regional authority of NUTS 2 level) has long demonstrated its public support to seniors with a view to fighting against their social isolation, raising their awareness of digital tools and assisting them with online administrative procedures. In this regard, we present The Maisons du Bel Âge (which translates as House for the Elderly) - administrative offices aimed for people over 60, as well as their families or caregivers. They are designed to guide seniors in their queries and assist them in dealing with administrative procedures or requests for services, such as the Personalized Autonomy Allowance or remote assistance. The teams on site do their utmost to facilitate the daily lives of seniors and teach them to use

the Internet and social networks - very important skills in today's world. The most vulnerable residents can also find a health monitor service there.

Starting this year, the Department of Bouches-du-Rhône has introduced a new innovation with the creation of the itinerant Maisons du Bel Âge. These are specially adapted caravans that visit villages with the aim of meeting senior citizens' needs (including those with limited mobility) close to their homes.

In particular, the travel trailer offer up to 12 hours of laptop training sessions for beginners and individual support when using mobile phones, tablets or computers. The target is to increase the outreach from 3,000 to 5,000 seniors in the period 2021-2024.

Additionally, and after a successful experimental phase, a new service will be added in 2021 – the lending of up to 5000 tablets, with a 4G package included. These tablets will be adapted to seniors' needs (featuring simplified interface and large characters).

Furthermore, the Maisons du Bel Âge take care of the psychological well-being of the elderly by giving them the chance to play games. What's more, these citizens will be initiated into the world of virtual reality (thanks to travel, relaxation and cognitive stimulation modules).

The Maisons are also spaces that promote social ties, offering a range of leisure, sports and cultural activities, as well as weekly events, outings, workshops (memory, nutrition, health, digital) and targeted conferences on issues related to ageing.

Each week, the Maisons du Bel Âge travel throughout the department's territory. They offer much-needed services to residents, particularly in small towns and villages.

THIS SERVICE THUS TAKES  
THE DIGITAL WORLD  
CLOSER TO PEOPLE IN AN  
OLD-FASHIONED WAY,  
SOMETHING THAT IS  
MUCH APPRECIATED BY  
SENIORS.





# DIGITAL SENIORS

a helping hand with new technologies in Cluj

## Where?

CLUJ-NAPOCA, ROMANIA - DAY CENTRE FOR THE ELDERLY N. 1 AND N. 2

## Who?

SIMPLON ROMANIA, CLUJ-NAPOCA CITY HALL, LOCAL BUSINESSES

## When?

2019

- ONGOING



## Why?

For the seniors of Cluj-Napoca, Simplon Romania developed in 2019 a free digital education course, named Digital Seniors, with the support of the local administration and two other private companies. It was this project that stimulated the interest of the elderly to learn how to use computers and the Internet. The basic skills taught in this course – such as online utilities payments – proved to be of great benefit with the onset of the pandemic and the ensuing lockdown.

At the start of the pandemic, the Day Centre for Elderly No. 1 in Cluj-Napoca found itself in a position where it had to either adapt to online social media presence or cease its activity. Luckily, many of the seniors who attend the centre's courses were already familiar - at least at a basic level - with the virtual world, so a digital transition was possible.

It is in this context that Simplon Romania asked itself the question of how to offer seniors a place where they can maintain social interactions and have fun -

a place to learn, but to also feel at ease. The answer was found in the newly launched online general culture quizzes. Hosted by trainers from the same company, these sessions gave any senior the chance to compete against others once every two weeks.

In parallel, they developed a Facebook group where young volunteers could offer technical assistance to seniors. It is in this group that the competition's areas of interest are voted on before the online sessions. Other important details are also discussed, and senior users are encouraged to talk through the technical issues they face, and to ask questions about the use of modern technologies.

According to the organisers, the Digital Seniors program has stimulated the elderly users' curiosity in learning how to operate a computer and how to use the Internet. It has additionally demonstrated how this group of people can adapt to new technologies, and that the ability to learn does not go away with age.

**FURTHERMORE, THE EVENINGS SPENT TOGETHER OFFERED NEW, RELAXING, AND ENRICHING SOCIAL EXPERIENCES, AND THE MOST COMMITTED AND PERSEVERING PARTICIPANTS WERE REWARDED FOR THEIR SUCCESS IN THE CONTESTS.**





# UNITE

## University for the Third Age in Genoa

### Where? GENOA, ITALY

### Who? UNIVERSITY OF GENOA

### When? 1983 - ONGOING



### Why?

UniTE - University for the Third Age was founded back in 1983, upon the initiative of the University of Genoa. It was meant to offer cultural courses, which met the needs of people of the third age, who are no longer employed and are free from professional commitments. The idea was to offer these people not only new intellectual stimuli, but also opportunities to network and socialize.

The need to offer new and stimulating activities to this age group, as well as new meeting places, is still there and is becoming increasingly evident, particularly in Genoa and Liguria.

UniTE cultural courses respond to this demand since they are characterized by the professionalism and quality of the teachers - mostly university professors helping out without any compensation.

Another characteristic element of the UniTE courses as they are offered today is the variety of subjects, spanning different educational and scientific sectors, from literature to art history, from medicine to economics, from sociology to law, from physics to engineering and architecture.

Due to the positive experience of previous years and the exceptional success UniTE has seen, the University of Genoa recognizes these courses and has included them in its Statute. In this way, the Academic Senate of the University intends to ensure the continuity and stability of UniTE in order to stimulate its development, while guaranteeing the high-quality level of the courses. As a result, UniTE students are full members of the large community of Genoese university students.

By offering this useful service to an important part of society, the University of Genoa opens its doors to all residents of the city and of the Liguria region.

**FINALLY, DURING THE PANDEMIC, UNITE ORGANIZED DIGITAL COURSES TO TEACH ELDERLY PEOPLE HOW TO USE HEALTH APPS, HOW TO MANAGE ONLINE SHOPPING AND, OVERALL, HOW TO NAVIGATE THE DIGITAL INNOVATIONS OF DAILY LIFE.**





## BEST PRACTICE NUMBER 4

## CULTURALLY SENSITIVE

## digital coaches for the elderly of Rotterdam

## Where?

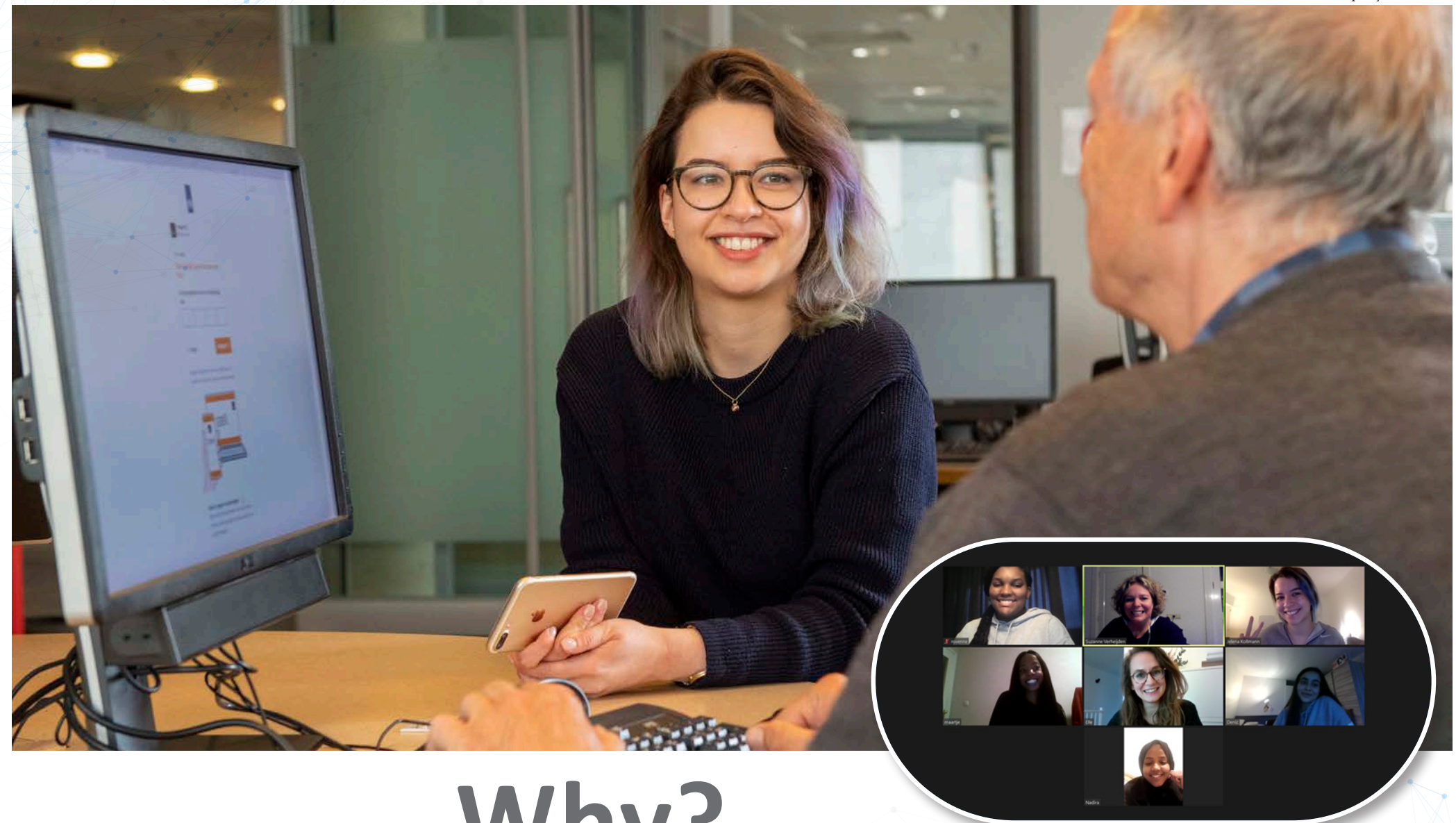
ROTTERDAM,  
THE NETHERLANDSUNION OF VOLUNTEERS ROTTERDAM (UVV),  
NEW ROTTERDAM NETWORK (NNR), NETWORK OF  
ORGANIZATIONS OF OLDER MIGRANTS (NOOM)

## When?

NOVEMBER 2020  
- ONGOING

Municipality of Rotterdam

## Who?



## Why?

Culturally sensitive Digicoaches (originally: Cultuursensitieve Digicoaches) are young volunteers who offer support to senior citizens with learning basic digital skills. The service is entirely free, offered individually, and meant for people above 55 years of age.

What brings additional value, compared to similar initiatives for the elderly offered by the Union of Volunteers, is that both the coach and the senior

student are from the same cultural background. This facilitates the understanding between them and as a result – enhances the learning process. Moreover, the young volunteers speak various languages, among which Serbian, Somali, Papiamentu (Portuguese-based creole language spoken in the Dutch Caribbean), Vietnamese, Turkish, Farsi, Dari, Kurdish, Spanish or Lingala (Congolese language) - with more languages to be added soon.

Senior citizens can request help over the phone or email or go to an online platform and find the information they need right away. As regards to the platform, it is a good example of an online environment adapted to the needs of the elderly: using large text size, clear signs and icons and well-structured pages.

**THIS MAKES IT IS EASY FOR ANYONE WITH BASIC TO NO DIGITAL SKILLS TO ORIENT HIMSELF AND REQUEST ASSISTANCE.**





# STAYING ACTIVE

with board games  
on Zoom in Hamburg



## Why?

## Where?

HAMBURG, GERMANY

## Who?

AWO AKTIV, HAMBURG

## When?

2020

– ONGOING



“AWO Aktiv” Hamburg is the youngest branch of the Workers’ Welfare Association (AWO) in Germany. The latter was founded by Marie Juchacz in 1919 to alleviate the difficulties of the workers after the World War I.

The regional AWO association of Hamburg has around 2,800 members who work in over 130 social institutions and projects. One of them is AWO Aktiv, which has been offering continuous education courses and excursion programmes for people 60+ since 2015.

Their offer is aimed at older people who want to learn or do something fun together, but also at younger people who want to do voluntary work for the benefit of society. Every four months they release a new program with

language courses and courses on health, theatre, art, literature and computers as well as lectures, social get-togethers and a variety of excursions, city tours and sightseeing. Said activities are being organised in every part of Hamburg.

With the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic, their offer has adapted to the needs of online teaching and socialisation from a distance. Some of the courses and meetings went partially or entirely online on Zoom, and new activities were added. Among them are online trainings on the use of digital equipment and software, physical and brain training exercises and board game meetings for overcoming social isolation.

Thus, once a week, senior citizens can join a digital game afternoon group on Zoom. Participation is free and gives the elderly the chance to play “Don’t get angry, Man”, quizzes, bingo and other games with their peers.

**THE POSSIBILITY TO PARTICIPATE IN LEISURE ACTIVITIES ONLINE DURING THE PANDEMIC IS CERTAIN TO BOOST THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF OLDER CITIZENS.**





# LIBRARY

## digitalisation in Varna



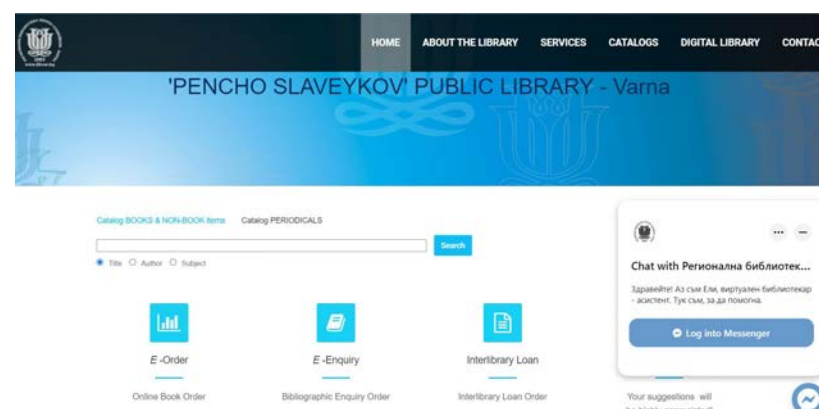
## Why?

## Where? VARNA, BULGARIA

## Who?

PENCHO SLAVEYKOV REGIONAL LIBRARY

## When? 2008 – ONGOING



The process of digitalisation of the Pencho Slaveykov Regional Library in Varna started in 2008. Back then, the institution took part in a project that provided access to the collections of libraries, museums and archives through the European Digital Library - EUROPEANA.

Having started with the idea of digitalising post cards from Varna, the project expanded to include volumes with other historical sources. These were subsequently categorized and assembled under different themes that illustrate the recent history of the coastal city. The result is "Varna Digital Library", which contains various documents, such as

postcards, 19th and 20th centuries photographs of personalities, events, and buildings - emblematic of the city and the region, as well as periodicals published after 1880, and owned by the library and cultural institutes. The digitized collection combines both documents and metadata with analytical descriptions of the objects. Ultimately, there is a plan to make the library and information resources fully open and accessible.

Additionally, and thanks to the efforts of many professionals from Varna and municipalities in the region, the Pencho Slaveykov library boasts a comparatively high degree of digitalisation of services.

For example, it has digital catalogues and collections, and an electronic registration system. Users can order books online or submit a bibliographic enquiry order.

**THE LIBRARY OFFERS SELF-SERVICE POINTS AND A CHATBOT ASSISTANT-LIBRARIAN, AS WELL AS PROFESSIONAL TRAININGS, CREATIVE WORKSHOPS, VIDEO LESSONS AND COMPUTER LITERACY COURSES FOR PEOPLE ABOVE THE AGE OF 60, AS PART OF A LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME.**





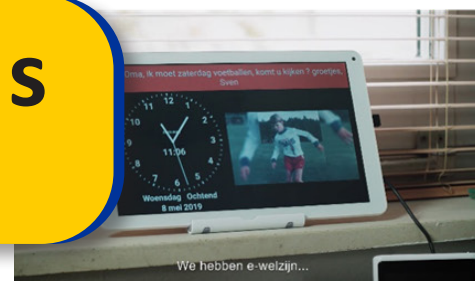
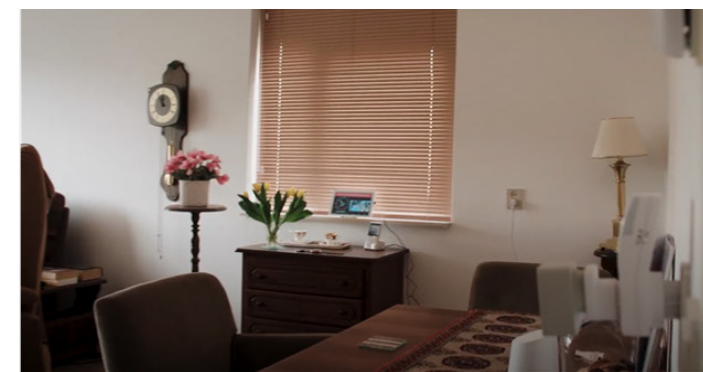
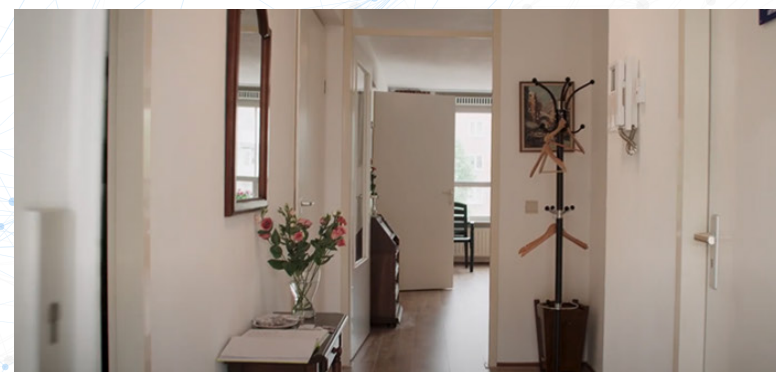
# MAKING E-HEALTH ACCESSIBLE:

## The Comfort Houses of Rotterdam

**Where?**  
ROTTERDAM AND OTHER CITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

**Who?**  
WELFARE ORGANISATION WMO RADAR, MUNICIPALITY OF ROTTERDAM, HOUSING CORPORATION WOONSTAD, VOLUNTEERS AND LOCAL PARTNERS

**When?**  
JANUARY 2019  
- ONGOING



## Why?

The Comfort Houses (originally Comfortwoning) are an initiative of Wmo Radar in collaboration with the Municipality of Rotterdam. It was launched in the Overschie neighbourhood together with Woonstad Housing Corporation at the beginning of 2019. A second Comfort home followed soon in Prins Alexander borough, to soon reach a total of 6 such in the city and another 3 in the south of The Netherlands.

The Comfort Houses are places that introduce visitors to technological solutions for the home. These solutions make it possible to live

independently at home longer and with a greater quality of living. With these objectives in mind, the question of e-health is paid special attention.

The products on display are divided into the following categories: e-welfare, e-hygiene, e-safety, e-convenience. The most popular products are a digital doorbell equipped with camera, remote-controlled curtains, toilet flush and dryer, an electric drying rack, a robocat/robodog, a talking alarm clock, Google home speaker, and a robot vacuum cleaner.

The key to the success of the project is that the visitor is put at ease with a warm welcome and a proper explanation on how each gadget works through a guided tour and a cup of coffee. This is usually done by volunteers, college students and interns, who set up the devices and demonstrate how to operate them. This happens in person, on social networks and through informational takeaway booklets. The visitor only needs to book an appointment in advance for himself or for a group of friends. An additional advantage of the Comfort House is that the visitors can borrow a product to test it at their own home.

In just a couple of months, the Comfort Houses have welcomed over 1000 visitors from different backgrounds - which is a great success.

**THEY HAVE ALSO RECEIVED VERY POSITIVE FEEDBACK FROM THE SENIOR CITIZENS LIVING IN ROTTERDAM, WHO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THESE VISITS HELPED THEM DISCOVER SOLUTIONS THAT CAN ALLOW THEM TO CONTINUE LIVING INDEPENDENTLY AT HOME FOR LONGER.**





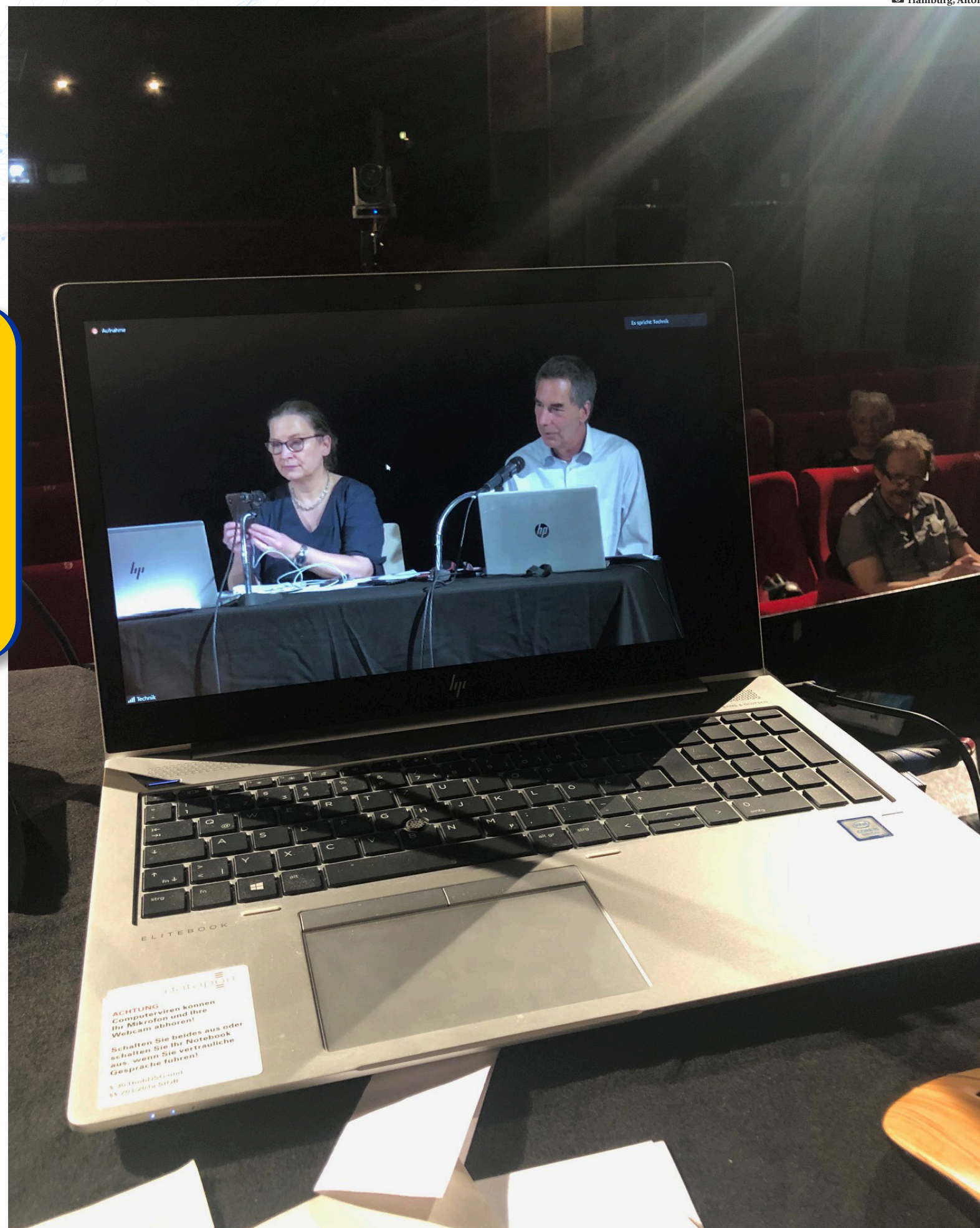
# DAILY-LIFE EXPERIENCES

## of seniors in a connected European Union

The two-day webinar was preceded by several meetings that each partner organised on its territory in order to gather the needs and opinions of senior citizens in the form of Senior citizen committees. Other than recommending the actions described above, they came up with some additional observations on what needed to be done to make the digital world more accessible for them.

**The Varna committee** identified the following challenges (and prospective solutions):

- Seniors are in a marginalized position because of their lower incomes;
- Insufficient technical equipment for all – there should be a program for providing tablets for adults (as is the case for students);
- Society has no understanding of the elderly and their needs – public campaigns should be organised to increase awareness of the needs of the elderly, and to learn how to best communicate with them;



- Learning and using the Internet helps to overcome feelings of loneliness, and depression. It can help maintain the connection with the outside world (not only during the pandemic), by keeping in touch with relatives and grandchildren. It improves seniors' integration in society.

In addition, **seniors from Marseille** outlined that they needed to get some preliminary training before purchasing computer equipment. Ideally, and especially during the pandemic, they would appreciate home visits from IT assistants, who could help them with some online operations. Moreover, for many, the computer equipment is too expensive and, as they do not use it often, they would prefer lending alternatives – a wish that was independently expressed by senior citizens in Hamburg, too.

Likewise, the main reactions from **the Genoese committee**, were that:

- After the pandemic, the demand for a mix of online and offline education will remain. Digitalization brought many advantages in education, including for elderly disabled people;



- Many elderly students said that following lessons online is easier as it captures one's attention better than before;
- Despite the lack of physical contact, (essential for this group of people), online meetings have shown success in terms of participation and in terms of teaching quality.

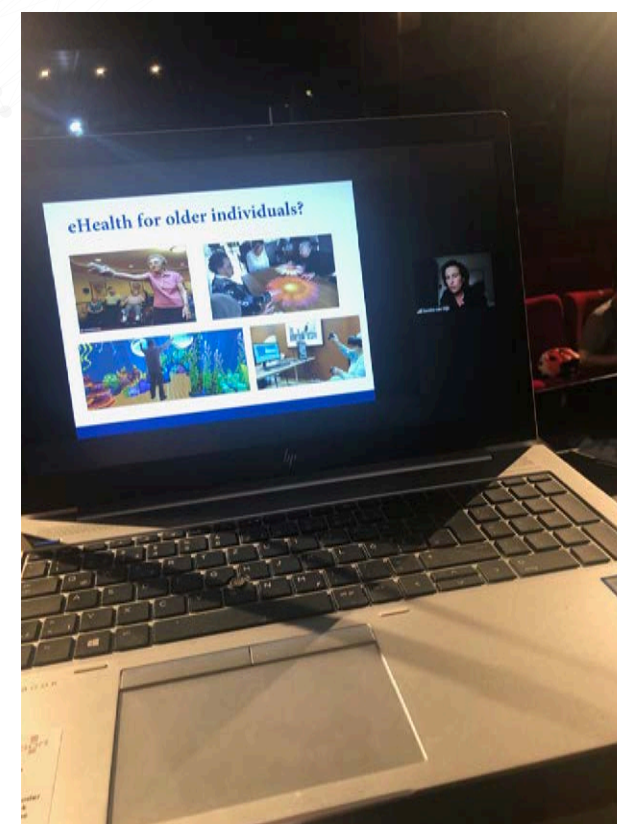
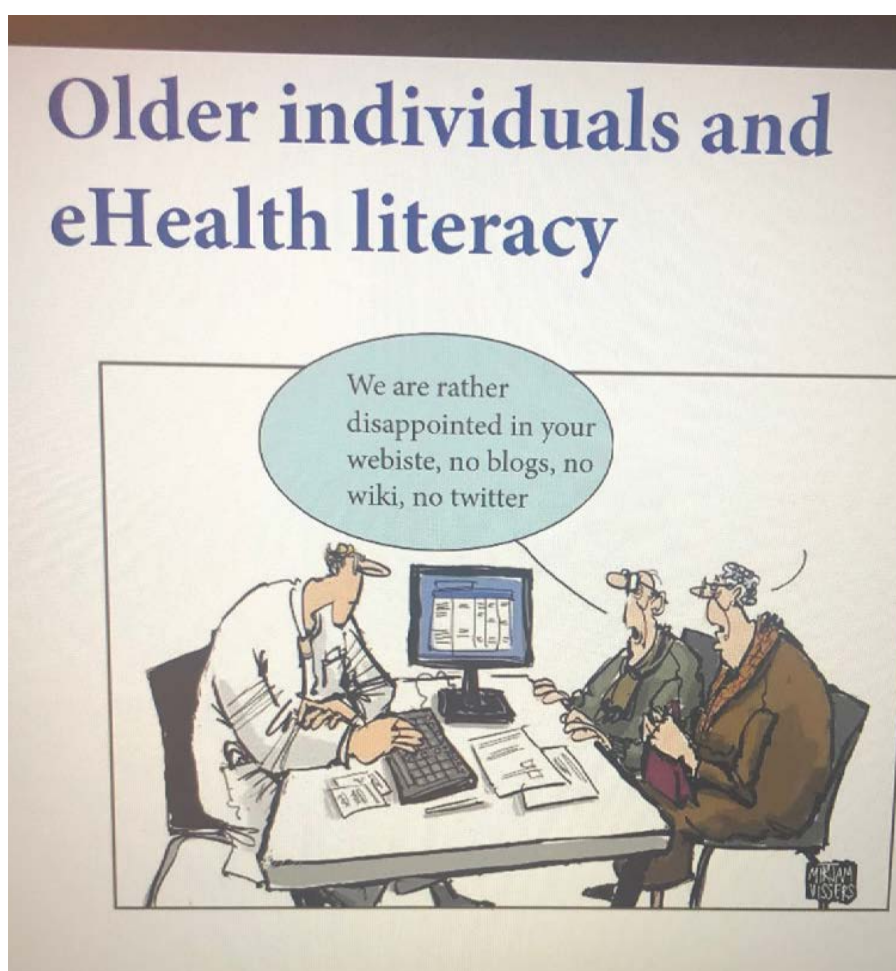
On their part, senior **citizens from Rotterdam** shared their appreciation for the opportunity to use online networks for the elderly. Although logging in with credentials can be a struggle sometimes, once they do, they get a lot out of the opportunity to learn from each other and connect online.

Similarly, **Hamburg's senior citizen committee** gathered around the idea that not only the availability of digital equipment and free WIFI is needed: there must be someone to train them and someone to contact in case of difficulties. Thus, a person of contact from the local administration would much facilitate

them in using apps for buying bus tickets, making appointments or renewing IDs and passports. To them, cyber security also represents an issue, and they would need to get trained on that.

The senior **committee in Cluj-Napoca** also proposed a visitor to the local day centres for the elderly. They used to socialize and network regularly before the pandemic, but

COVID-19 forced them to swiftly adapt to the new circumstances and carry on in a virtual format. Luckily, the transition went smoothly, because many of the elders were already digitally literate, thanks to previous projects, as was described earlier in this book. Moreover, in order to overcome technical issues, they communicated continuously through a WhatsApp group.



## HOW TO INVOLVE seniors in online events?

Finally, our EUDIGIT project was not spared the common difficulties related to organising an event during a global pandemic and we had to quickly decide how to involve senior citizens in the webinar dedicated to them.

Due to the inability to fly participants to Altona, the various partners resorted to different means in broadcasting their particular experiences. Varna pre-recorded a

conversation with a small group of seniors, discussing their encounters with the digital world and shared it with the rest of the participants during the event. Seniors from other cities, joined the live sessions, where they had the chance to comment and give feedback on the presented videos.

Hamburg, as the host city, adopted a different approach. They made available an entire cinema hall, where senior

citizens were invited to meet physically, while observing a safe distance. They watched the event on the large screen and were given a microphone by a technical assistant, whenever they wanted to intervene. The experience felt welcoming and familiar to them, as it closely resembled going to the movies, with the difference being that this time they got to play the main part and shaped the story as it was unfolding.



*The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein .*



Gemeente  
Rotterdam



Hamburg | Bezirksamt  
Altona

