

## **Presentation CAPS information day 19 September 2012 in Pisa**

### **Introduction**

My name is drs. Hein de Graaf, social psychologist. Until my retirement this year I was working for the Dutch Association of Municipalities to assist them in fighting feelings of loneliness, exclusion, apathy of their citizens. Especially those citizens who are more challenged in that area than others. Together with friends and organisations in that field I have started the VayaV Cooperative UA recently. Same goals but with innovative means: a combination of physical and virtual meetings aiming at fun and gain and knowledge for the target group.

The subject of my presentation here at the CAPS conference in Pisa, is the possibilities and challenges of a 3D virtual environment based on open source (called the VayaV Metaverse) combining open online social media, distributed knowledge creation and data from real environments in order to create new forms of social innovation, in this case strengthening personal social networks of (elderly) people who are slip sliding into exclusion and loneliness.

Through this presentation I hope to meet possible partners for the CAPS call, that is expected to be published in July 2013, to be able to develop VayaV Metaverse within one of the existing or upcoming proposals. VayaV Metaverse already is in the pilot phase through the CIP funded project DISCOVER, started April 2012 aiming at improving the digital skills of (informal) carers for the elderly. We will employ specially initiated local VayaV communities in The Netherlands as pilot groups. The pilots are 4 municipalities in The Netherlands (Kerkrade, Rotterdam, Almelo and Alphen aan den Rijn), Thessaloniki, a Spanish and Irish region and the project coordinator: Birmingham Council.

### **VayaV**

VayaV is a digital social network environment like Facebook, but with a feature Facebook cannot deliver: the possibility to meet in groups and interact in groups. VayaV will be a immersive 3D 'world' designed and build according to the specifications our target groups will provide (**VayaV Metaverse**). VayaV will also have its own interface to this Metaverse (**VayaV Viewer**).

**VayaV Community Service** is the third part of our product. We will start and maintain local VayaV communities, together with municipalities and their partners. They will meet in a mix of physical and virtual meetings. Mainly for pleasure and fun, but also for improving the quality of your life, learning, training, increased knowledge about your possibilities and challenges. Specific topics derived from the CAPS programme will be provided. The communities will be a mix of our target group with (local) service and product providers, computer hobbyists and experts in certain relevant fields.

VayaV is all about meeting friends, making new friends, friends who also are providers of services and advice, friends who are experts on issues relevant to you. Sometimes the ties are weak, sometimes strong; they change with time and circumstances. But we really need them, especially when you get older and lose friends and the ability to make new ones. They are called social networks but what they are is nothing new: friends, family, acquaintances that you can depend on and they can depend on you.

Since 2003 the world has seen the astonishing quick rise of virtual social networks. Millions of users joined them, but only a small percentage of those are senior citizens. Roughly speaking the analyses tell us that the relatively successful areas where the senior citizens are active are the ones that are closest to their 'lifestyle', their everyday experiences: email (reminding us of writing

letters), search engines (looking up facts) and the subject of VayaV: the virtual 3D environment (closest to meeting and making friends in the real world).

Email and search engines are already flooding the market. The 3D environment to meet people almost as in the physical world has been ignored until now. The only examples are Second Life and business applications. Second Life is built by 'residents', the users, themselves for themselves. My five year research in Second Life showed that this is not the fitting 3D environment our Target group wants. We need a newly developed VayaV Metaverse based on what the intended users want, after seeing the possibilities demonstrated through my 'simulations' of environment and virtual communities in Second Life in my regions: 'Nederland' and 'Noordzee'. See for example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNxlfvKHsSg> and

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nExXbU10ag0>

### **Communities**

Why use virtual meetings next to physical to start and maintain sustainable communities?

Physical meetings are the best to get to know each other well enough to decide who you want to see more often and share fun and pleasure with. With virtual meetings you can however meet much more people and also more easily maintain contacts with your (new found) friends. The rule of thumb is: you have to meet 150 people to discover that you want to see 50 of them once more concerning a shared problem, 20 to (also) share fun and pleasure, to gain 1 or 2 friends in the end. The VayaV communities are based on those 20 with subgroups of real friends. The combination of now and again physical meetings at fixed times and places with virtual meetings anytime that is convenient to your and the ones you want to meet, are the best approach to reach our goals (fight exclusion and feelings of loneliness) and those of CAPS.

### **CAPS involvement**

VayaV can contribute to the following CAPS requirements:

1. Meet pressing social needs that are not met now: inclusion, participation, co-production of products needed when physically, psychologically or socially challenged.
2. Multidisciplinary approach: in the Dutch VayaV Cooperative we have user groups representatives, local policy makers, professional and voluntary service providers, ICT experts, social psychologist, sociologist and marketing/ business partners working together. We will invite partners from other EC countries, especially from universities, municipalities and SME's.
3. Big Data about what really goes on in the world relevant to our goals are best collected through communities of people with strong ties: i.e. the VayaV communities. The same goes for extended or collective awareness. Those communities have strong ties because they share fun and pleasure in the first place. Gain and knowledge, awareness and collecting big data are possible to achieve only when the communities are up and running. By combining physical and virtual meetings in a 3D environment VayaV is offering the possibilities of meeting a lot of people to choose from and maintaining the strong ties with the few who you consider to be your best friends.

### **Contact**

I invite all parties interested in our VayaV approach to contact me: [heindegraaf@vayav.eu](mailto:heindegraaf@vayav.eu) You can also find me on LinkedIn: Hein de Graaf.