

Participation and Equity of Older People in the Long-Term Care Sector: Societal and Systemic Perspectives

Participation in Long-Term Care: An Ethnographic Study on Residential Care (EPICENTRE), Home-Based Care and Assisted Living (PARTICIPATIO) in Switzerland

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Introduction:

Global population aging is increasing the demand for long-term care (LTC), spanning care homes, assisted living, and home-based care. In Switzerland’s federal and fragmented LTC system, older adults face tensions between the need for support and the desire to maintain autonomy and participation. With EPICENTRE-PARTICIPATIO we ❶ examine how and by whom participation is understood, negotiated, and practiced across LTC settings in Switzerland. ❷ We identify and analyze inequities that are unjust or unfair and ❸ we develop ideas and approaches to promote equitable participation of older people living with LTC.

Methods: ❶ ❷

- Ethnographic, multi-sited study within the Swiss LTC landscape
- Participant observation, informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, document analysis
- Participation with a transdisciplinary advisory group

Results:

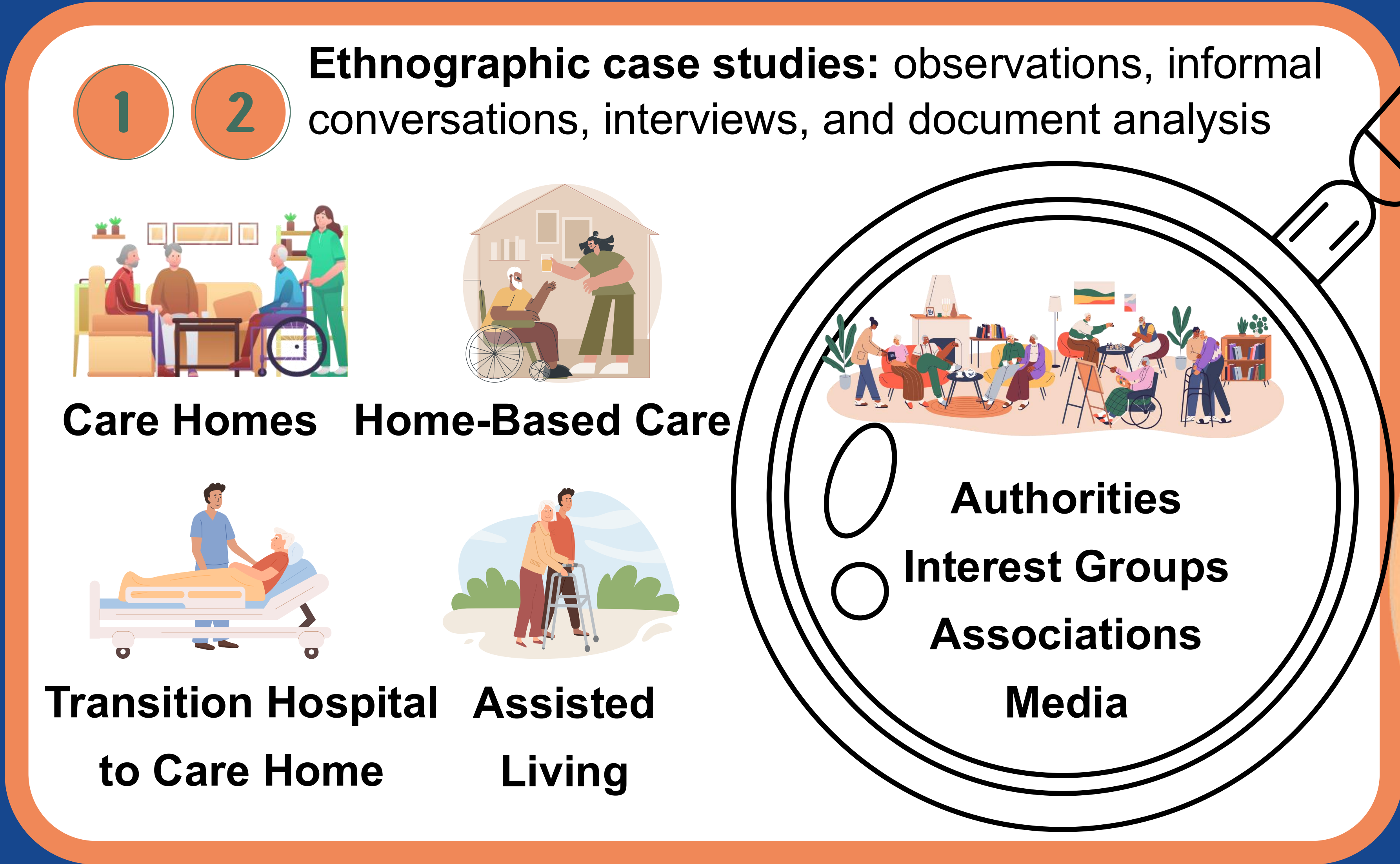
- Participation is understood and practiced heterogeneously across LTC settings and actors in Switzerland
- Structural and social inequalities limit opportunities for participation
- Institutional and regulatory logics overshadow residents’ everyday participation
- Socio-political fragmentation leads to uneven access

Financial Disclosure:

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Key Findings:

- Uneven participation across settings**
Opportunities for participation vary widely between home-based care, assisted living, and care homes
- Structural Inequities**
Participation is shaped by socio-economic position, cognitive and physical impairments, gender, and migration background – leading to unequal possibilities for participation
- Fragmented system, fragmented participation**
The decentralized and sector-divided Swiss LTC landscape creates gaps between health, social, and housing services, which hinders residents’ participation
- Participation as everyday practice**
Participation occurs in everyday routines and relationships, acting beyond formal decision-making
- Equity as a Perspective**
Viewing participation through an equity perspective sheds lights on systemic exclusions and highlights the need for inclusive policymaking and collaboration that expand the diverse LTC settings, regions, and contexts



Discussion:

Participation in LTC is a multilayered process that unfolds across individual, organizational, and systemic levels. It extends beyond personal engagement, as it is shaped by institutional routines, organizational cultures, and broader policy and funding frameworks. The absence of a nationally shared conceptual and regulatory foundation weakens participation across all these layers – limiting residents’ everyday participation at the micro level, constraining professional and institutional practices at the meso level, and reinforcing regional and social inequalities through fragmented governance at the macro level. Strengthening participation therefore requires both empowering individuals, but also aligning structures of care, policy, and recognition across the entire LTC landscape.

Layers of Participation:

With which influence?

- Meaningful participation?** Why participation?
- Taking part vs. having a part (Simovska & Jensen, 2009)

Context?

- What is the **social, economic, political or cultural context** shaping participation of older people?

Who?

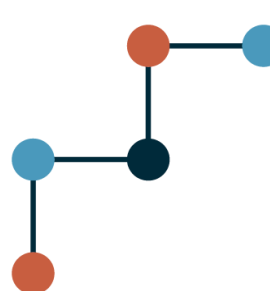
- Diversity?
- Equitable inclusion of marginalized groups?
- Self-exclusion?

3 Implementation Science Approach:

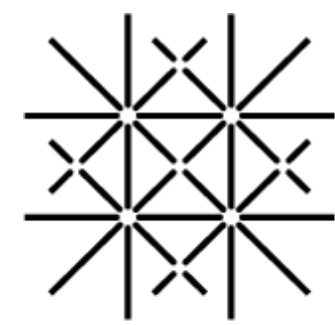
Transdisciplinary advisory group including representatives of older people with LTC, their relatives, staff from the LTC sector, as well as members from interest groups, authorities, practice and scientific partners



To strengthen equitable participation in the long-term care system through the joint development and implementation of ideas and approaches



Swiss National Science Foundation



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