RESEARCH ON DESIGN EMPOWERMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE ELDERLY IN COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

From the perspective of "active aging" to transform the pressure of aging on social development into a driving force for sustainable development, more and more scholars begin to study how to promote the continuous social participation of the elderly. However, most of the current studies on the elderly empowerment opportunities focus on the macro level, such as the significance and policy conditions, and lack of specific strategies and methods of research and application. This article shares insights on how design empowers the elderly, based on the research practice of designers. The purpose of the study is to promote the elderly to play their subjective initiative and become the solution of community problems through design, so as to promote the sustainable development of society.
Key Words: The elderly, Empowerment opportunities, Empathic design, Participatory design

1. INTRODUCTION

It is of great significance to give full play to the initiative of the elderly today. In order to cope with the aging society, the active aging advocates to return the right of social participation to the elderly, and the empowered elderly can change from the maker of social problems to the solver of them. In this context, "active" is defined as the continuous participation of the elderly in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and public affairs, rather than merely physical health or limited to labor participation.[1]

However, some studies have shown that community services for the elderly lack effective response to the real needs of the elderly population, and the elderly become passive "objects" to receive services. This makes the effectiveness and professionalism of community services, especially community pension services, more prominent, which is not conducive to the sustainable development of society. (HouBing, 2018)

In order to change this passive situation, this paper, from the perspective of design, considers how to promote the elderly to give play to their own subjective initiative, studies the possibility of design to empower the elderly and provides methods and paths, and explores how to promote the elderly to become problem solvers. By means of the research method of empathic design, community service participation of the elderly was observed. And through a participatory design case to explore whether design can empower the elderly, and analyze how design can empower the elderly.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

Due to the particularity of the elderly population, it is difficult to obtain accurate and effective feedback by conventional survey methods. By applying the research method of empathetic design, designers can intuitively understand the actual situation of elderly community service participation from the micro level. This can help designers intuitively recognize the thoughts and feelings of others -- their motivations, emotional, and mental models, values, priorities, preferences, and inner conflicts." (Fulton, 2003) [2]to understand what affects the elderly's motivation to participate in community service.

According to Ilpo Koskinen's suggestion on the selection of subjects in the Empathic Design Methodology, the primary group in this study is mainly the elderly who are active in the activity center of the elderly in the community. And the secondary group is the elderly who live in the community. In these two groups, the author pays more attention to the "special users", such as empty nest elderly and the elderly who move in from other places.

In the first stage of the study, the author uses the following research methods of empathic design to study the situation of elderly community service participation:

- Observation method: Designers write diaries to record the participation of the elderly in community services and draw the social situation of the elderly in the community.
- Empathic probing This part mainly uses visual recording tools and question cards. Senior citizens are invited to take pictures of their daily routines and show the scope of their main activities with the help of smartphones.
- Interview method: The designer carries out personal interviews with the elderly, so as to strengthen the further understanding of the collected data and verify the results of the probing and observation.

In the second stage of the study, the designer observes whether design can empower the elderly when they participate in design activities, and how design can play an enabling role through the design activities.

In this part of the participatory design project, three generative tools are used, including community impression map board, service intention board and community service vision board. These tools guide residents to express their opinions on the past, present and future experience of community service respectively. In the process of participatory design, the designer is mainly responsible for guiding and observing the self-expression of the elderly as participants.

3. RESEARCH RESULT

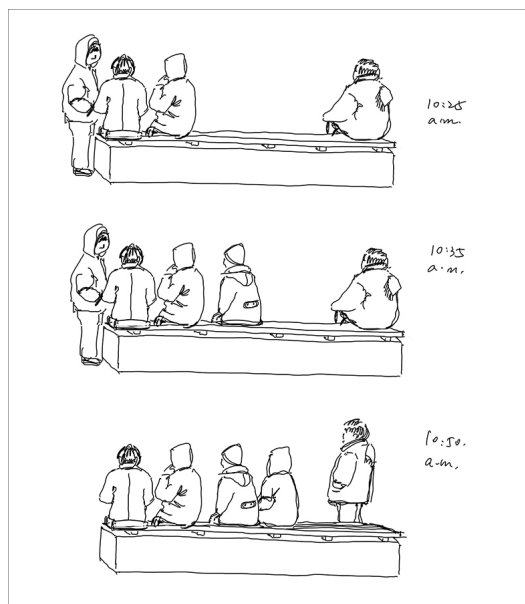### 3.1 The Status of the Elderly Participating in Community Service

Since June 2018, the author has used the above research tools to study the elderly in Wuxi and Shanghai communities, and the following three typical elderly community service participation type were finally summarized:

- Active participation type: The 73-year-old takes part in monthly volunteer activities and choir rehearsals. He firmly believes that "old people are old but not weak". Although most of the volunteer services involved were simple tasks such as distributing bottled water or disease prevention propaganda materials and performing performances, he was very satisfying and fulfilling with his volunteer activities. He said Problems in the community service can only be solved by the government, because "it is difficult for people to act as organizers".

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[1] Quotations from World Health Organization (2002). Active ageing: a policy framework. The Aging Male, 5(1), 37.
[2] Quoted in Thomas, J. , & Mcdonagh, D. . (2013). Empathic design: research strategies. Australasian Medical Journal, 6(1), 1.

- Lack of participation type: The 65-year-old followed her son halfway across China to settle in new home. She does most of the housework at home, so she only comes out at 3 or 4 p.m. She hasn't been involved in the community since she moved here. For one thing, she didn't want to be seen as "a Lazy people with no sense of family responsibility." For another thing, she admitted that she was unable to communicate because she cannot understand dialect. And she added: "but there is no need to understand." Figure 2 records her social dynamics in the square when she basks in the sun for an hour. When the crowd gathers, she showed an air of curiosity about the conversation of others.

[Figure 1] On the right side were new immigrants and on the left four were local elderly people.

- Common participation type: The 65-year-old retired worker, is an empty-nester. His daily schedule is usually: from the opening of the elderly activity center (usually 6 a.m.), he will stay in the mahjong room until the afternoon activity center closes (usually 3 p.m.). He describes the activity center, "The computer in the e-reading room is always down, and I can't surf the Internet. One or two people were sitting in the dark, smoky TV room.

It's much more lively in the mahjong room. By the way, it's good to have lunch here." As for the problems in the community, "it is useless to care about them. The most important thing is to take care of yourself." But he has no plans for his future.

Through the above three typical case descriptions, by comparing what they say, do and think, we can conclude that the positive factor affecting the elderly's participation in community service is that community service can meet the needs of self-realization, respect and social interaction of the elderly. Negative factors are:

- Lack both systematic and organizational support and solutions to complex problems in the community. The elderly had to wait passively for the government to act.
- Lack of identity hinders the establishment of social relationships and makes it difficult to integrate into the local elderly community. She gives up the right to participate in community service passively.
- The individual-centered ideology, which takes enjoyment as the premise to participate in community service, is not willing to assume more responsibilities and obligations.

In the later part of the discussion, the author will propose the design of enabling opportunities for the elderly according to these three factors.

3.2. Participatory Design Practice

Participatory design activity in the community[3] take the form of open workshops. Designers use design tools to gather comments from residents and stakeholders on community services (software) and utilities (hardware). In the design activities, the designer as the guide helps the elderly to participate in the design activities, and people can immediately communicate the solutions and get relevant feedback.

The workshop located in the garden of the community centre and attracts the participation of many elderly people, not only old residents, but also new immigrants. Residents will lead designers to every corner of the community, so that designers can feel the specific situation and inspire a lot of inspiration, which could not be achieved by the conference-style. [Figure 2] With the help of design tools, the elderly not only put forward opinions and requests for existing services, but also look forward to future community services.

From the perspective of the elderly themselves, the demand for services mainly focuses on self-realization and social interaction. Specific wishes include regular reading and tea parties, community professional training courses.

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[3] This participatory design activity is part of the micro-renewal design project of Hongxian community by Shanghai DAYU Community Building Development Centre. The author participated in this activity as a guide and observer. The essence of the project is community design.

In view of the fact, that the existing public space is mainly used by the male elderly, the female elderly emphasize that they need an independent space for social and leisure entertainment.

In addition to their own needs as the elderly group, they will pay attention to the needs of their grandchildren, other relatives, especially the disabled relatives. For example, the design of space and services (parent-child reading clubs, etc.), barrier-free gardens, Blind road and lane traffic problems, etc. Others think from the young people's point of view that the community's public space can be used in different periods of time and become a place for young people to read and work at night. Some pet owners want to borrow their pets to socialize and change the un-civilized behavior of other pet owners.

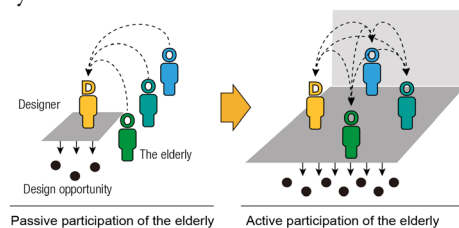[Figure 2] Collect the opinions and vision of the elderly on community service

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Providing Solutions to Problems

Participatory design practice has proved that the use of generative tools in the design can help the elderly to better self-expression. Compared with the design research activities carried out by the above designer as observer, the role of the elderly is passive, the transmission of information is one-way, and new values can only be generated through the re-processing of the designer. In the stage of participatory design, not only the designers and the elderly exchange information, but also the exchange of knowledge can occur among multiple stakeholders, which is more likely to produce creative solutions or design opportunities. [Figure 3] Therefore, the elderly may become active problem solvers.

From the perspective of design, this is mainly due to the following three points:

- The role of the elderly in the design tool has changed from passive to active;
- The elderly has mastered the method of finding problems and obtained the way to solve them by means of the design tool;
- Based on the real life environment, multi-role participation enriches the exchangeable information. And based on empathy with others, it is possible to obtain design opportunities that are in the common interest to create sustainable community services.

[Figure 3] The role of the elderly changed from passive to active in this study

4.2 Create Opportunities to Build Relationships

In his book Return to the Community: Volunteer Morality and Community Care, C. heginbotham put forward the goal ideal of community service.[4] One of the ways to realize the ideal is to rebuild the new citizen consciousness, that is, residents' voluntary participation in the community, and establish the relationship of mutual assistance and love in the community. "Relationships" are also described by Manzini as one of the important components in the framework of sustainable quality, and it is believed that creative solutions can be produced in "deep relationships".
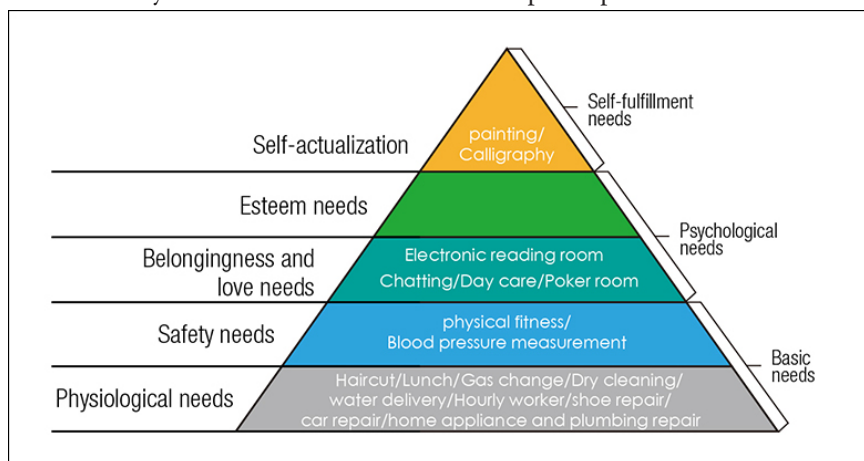
As far as community service is concerned, it lacks the shaping of new citizenship consciousness and the estab-lishment and guidance of in-depth relationship. To some extent, the interaction of Participatory design activity can also be regarded as an important community participation, which enables the elderly in the community to sympa-

[4.] Quoted in Dai Ming, & yuan shasha. (2010). Research review of urban community service at home and abroad. Urban issues (11), 25-33.

thize with the elderly from different backgrounds and provides opportunities for the creation of "relationship". It has changed some old people's indifferent attitude towards community service participation, especially those new immigrants. In the process of participation, they acquire a sense of satisfaction and identity, which to some extent improves their sense of community participation, which may become a positive force to promote the development of community services in the future.

4.3 More Active Community Service

As mentioned above, community service is in many people's minds is almost equivalent to providing entertainment and dining for the elderly. To some extent, this implies to the elderly that "you only need to wait for services", but it limits and weakens their ability to participate actively. Comparing with Maslow's demand theory (as shown in Figure 4), most of the services are focused on meeting physiological needs and low-level security needs, which limits the ability development of the elderly and their enthusiasm for social participation.

[Figure 4] Distribution of community services for the elderly based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

When Manzini talks about "active participation", he thinks that each subject's ability depends on the characteristics of his environment (his or her enabling ecosystem) and his or her personal resources. From this point of view, the designer's task should be to expand the elderly's personal resources including knowledge, organizational skills, entrepreneurial skills and design capabilities through design. In the design of the content and form of community service, designers can guide the higher-level needs, change the negative ideas of the elderly on their own values, eliminate the confrontation of identity and break the shackles of their roles, and help them acquire the corresponding knowledge and tools through various ways.

Through the design, the chat in the community square is not just chat, and the debate in the reading room is not just debate, exploring and enhancing the value of dialogue among the elderly, providing the possibility of defining and practicing different lifestyles for the elderly. Then we can expect that in the future, more and more community service objects - the elderly to the role of community service designers and providers, thus creating a more positive community service.

5.CONCULSION

From the perspective of design, this paper studies how design intervenes in the empowerment problem of the elderly. With the research method of empathy design, this paper studies the present situation of elderly people's participation in community service. It also analyses the positive and negative factors that affect elderly people's participation. Design can provide the elderly with solutions to problems, ways to build relationships, and more active community services to empower the elderly, so as to promote the participation of the elderly in community services.

In this paper, the elderly is regarded as "problem solver" to actively explore the problem of elderly empowerment. At the strategic and methodological level, it provides practical reference for the design of research and application of intervention in elderly empowerment.

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