

Chapter 4

An Intergenerational Solidarity Approach to Community Public Space in China

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ABSTRACT

Community intergenerational solidarity is an effective intervention to facilitate cohesiveness and to explore mutual supports between generations within neighborhoods. However, few attempts have been made in China from the perspective of physical environment. This study aims to explore the associations between community intergenerational solidarity and the built environment, and then figure out the approaches for the facilitation of community intergenerational solidarity. Firstly, a conceptual framework of community intergenerational solidarity was proposed. Then field surveys were carried out and questionnaires were distributed in four residential communities in Harbin, China, investigating the respondents' preferences for intergenerational solidarity. The results demonstrate that inhabitants have the expectation of intergenerational solidarity and they would prefer to those activities that take place in public space. Based on that, design approaches of community public space, including overall planning, service facilities and open space, as well as other suggestions, were proposed.

INTRODUCTION

Intergenerational solidarity refers to a purposeful and robust connection between individuals or masses for different age groups, while it also emphasizes on the behavioral and emotional commitment within interaction (Cruz-Saco, 2010). A number of determinants have been taken account to study the variation

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of multigenerational contact, including widely and seriously ageing, demographic variations on a national scale, segmentation of traditional families, as well as covering range of governmental responsibilities (Bengtson, Lowenstein, Putney, & Gans, 2003). Additionally, re-understanding of intergenerational solidarity's positive impacts on an international scale has urged to conduct the relevant studies in recent decades. It helps identify that intergenerational solidarity approach, which is filled with social care, will provide a wide range of life changes for citizens, particularly the older ones.

The achievements of the current researches are mainly related to gerontology, psychology, physical therapy, etc. (e.g., Krout, et al., 2010; Saville & Becker, 2011). However, in terms of living environments, few studies were undertaken to investigate intergenerational solidarity. In addition, in the specific socio-cultural context of China, a small number of researches could be applied and taken practically. Thus, due to the mentioned deficiency, this study intends to explore the relationships between community intergenerational solidarity and the built environments and after that, it proposes design approaches, facilitating intergenerational solidarity within sociocultural context of China. For this purpose, firstly, the conceptual framework of community intergenerational solidarity was proposed based on theoretical aspects of its global development. Then, the field surveys were conducted, and questionnaires were distributed among four residential communities in Harbin city, investigating the current position and respondents' attitudes to intergenerational solidarity. The obtained results demonstrate that the respondents have expectations from intergenerational solidarity, and the inhabitants would like to associate with the location of intergenerational solidarity relevant activities, and those activities which took place in public space were confirmed with more evidences. This helps identify the potential effect and significance of community public space with respect to intergenerational activities and interaction. Consequently, according to these findings, the design approaches for public places, involving overall planning, community service facilities and open space are represented, fostering intergenerational solidarity within neighborhoods. Eventually, a number of recommendations are provided for the sake of sustainable development and social cohesion in the community.

BACKGROUND

Ageing Population and Misunderstanding of the Elderly

Population ageing is a global phenomenon that has impacts on every human life (United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2002). Generally, the elderly is defined as 65 years old or over in several countries, involving America and Japan. While in China, the elderly refers to those people who are 60 years old or over according to *Rights Protection Law of the People's Republic of Elderly People*. Hence, in this study, we take into account people who are 60 years old or over as the elderly. China has represented an ageing society since 1999. The ageing process is characterized by accelerated growth of population over 80 and "empty nest" families, low birth rates, etc. It is estimated that by 2020, the proportion of the China's elderly population will increase to 17.8%, and the old-age dependency ratio will be doubled to 28% (State Council of China, 2017). Compared with the developed countries whose ageing is quite slow and gradual, this process in the developing countries is greatly being compressed with relatively backward socio-economic growth (World Health Organization [WHO], 2002). According to the research performed by Gao, Wu, Xu and Yan (2015), China's demographic structure is undergoing a transformation, and this significantly affects the economy development which

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