7 Co-design the ingenuity of ageing

A cultural model of ageing through design thinking

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Through the lens of design and ingenuity, evidence was gathered on many important topics around ageing – from coping strategies by creative citizens to end-of-life, dementia and productive ageing – with the goal of investigating which new services, tools and solutions will best serve our future super ageing society. This chapter is a reflection by a design researcher referring to Participatory Action Research (PAR) Methodology.

The program co-designed design actions based on the ingenuity of ageing within a diverse community. It does not conform to the medical model based on ageing as a disease to be cured by experts. Neither does it conform entirely to the social model of ageing, even though social connectivity with others is recognized as very important. By focusing on design as a creative practice/discipline and, more importantly, design as a citizen's right, the Social Innovation Design Lab (SI.DLab) encouraged every aspect of daily life to become a holistic celebration of autonomy. The SI.DLab exemplifies the cultural model of ageing through three tactics (articulation, culture and tool-making), in which boundaries are moved and new perspectives for change are opened up.

The SI.DLab is a cross-generation program which put together over 1000 students to work together with more than 400 senior citizens on topics of end-of-life, dementia and productive ageing, for ageing innovative ideas for our future super aged society. This chapter focuses on how to encourage more efficient PAR projects with older adults as partners with real design research projects funded by government on capacity building between the years 2017 and 2019 in the city of Hong Kong, China.

Introduction

While a group of design researchers set up a series of cross-generational and co-creation projects addressing ageing innovation for our future, some fundamental questions arose: Who participates in design processes? Who are the co-creators? These *who* questions informed our first Social Innovation Design (SI.D) Lab, funded by the Hong Kong government as a capability building program to train creative citizens through design thinking.

Manzini (2015) described emerging forms of collaboration between design professionals and others, where new solutions are suggested and new meanings created. A new paradigm and practices emerge based on a more engaged, innovative and sustainable way of being in the world. He also raised the question of what are the role(s) of the designer when everyone designs? This question is aligned to the discussion around the role(s) of designers and the differing relationships between “designers” and “users”. This whole narrative challenges the designer's role as the sole creator, artist and celebrity (Szebeko and Tan, 2010; Thackara, 2006; Valtonen, 2005).

Design research: designers vs users

Let's look at this relationship in more detail. Describing designers as having a democratic role is akin to the definition of design first set out by the Scandinavian design research collective, A.Telier, in a book entitled *Design Things* (Binder et al., 2011). This offers an innovative view of design research and practice, envisioning ways to combine creative design with a participatory approach, encompassing aesthetic and democratic practices and values.

Similarly, Slavin (2016) put together another classification to explore the relationship between “designers” and the “others”. The first type is “design for users’ participation” which is called User-Centred Design (UCD): “the centre from the designer’s imagination of the system to the designer’s imagination of the user of the system”. Even though it challenges the heroic sensibility of the modern designer, it still perpetuates the clear roles between “designer” and “user”.

Instead of “users” or those designing for use, the second type is promoting the concept of “designing for participation” which Slavin (2016) continued to refer to British architect, Cedric Price’s Fun Palace, as an environment continually interacting and responding to people. It is a

more provocative proposal that the essential role of its designer was to create a context for participation ... designing for participation, but that design is a fundamentally participatory act, engaging systems that extend further than the constraints of individual (or even human) activity and imagination.

(Slavin, 2016)

It is also important to involve users/citizens as partners in the process. This is why we referred to Design Thinking as the latest description of User/Human-Centred/Universal/Inclusive Design, as a practice, which has been promoted by business schools and adopted by different sectors in the past two decades. There are seven typical stages of Design Thinking:

1. empathize
2. define
3. ideate
4. prototype
5. test
6. evaluate
7. implement.

The latest model has progressed further still: design as participation is about how designers immerse themselves to become participants of the objects/systems/campaigns they create. This echoes an anti-disciplinary discourse (Ito, 2017) that indicates a new role for designers, i.e., “Designers as Participants”. This is the approach we referred to when curating the SI.DLab. Here, we trained 1000+ young university students to immerse themselves in old age and then co-design with 400+ senior citizens on ageing innovation for our future selves in our city.

Participatory Action Research (PAR): investigator-driven vs user/citizen driven research

Since Design Research is still a very young discipline, we still refer to other more established disciplines such as Social Sciences Methodologies. According to Blair and Minkler (2009),

Although gerontologists have increasingly incorporated in their practice participatory approaches that emphasize individual and community empowerment (Bernard, 2000; Levine and Greenlick, 1991; Ray, 2007; Ross et al., 2005), the involvement of older adults as partners in the research process itself is still relatively rare.

After studying ten Participatory Action Research (PAR) projects, they confirmed six established principles for PAR practice.¹ However, for this chapter, we would like to focus on five new remarks – although two still focus on why researchers do not conduct PAR but continue the more traditional investigator-driven gerontology methodology, i.e., (1) concerns about research rigor and the need for broadening the bandwidth of validity, and (2) personal investment (labor intensive) and delayed outcomes. In this chapter, we are concentrating on the three other remarks and have transformed them into three “tactics” for conducting more efficient PAR projects with older adults for our future super ageing society. Using our three design tactics from the SI.DLab on critical ageing topics, including end of life, dementia and productive ageing, we intend to discuss how PAR can offer an important complement to research methodologies despite operational challenges.

Tactic 1: articulating the ingenuity of ageing

Blair and Minkler’s (2009) first remark to the practice of PAR is “Honouring the Life Experience of Elders”. This aligned with the concept of “Ingenuity of Ageing” (Lee, 2012) and our first tactic is about how to articulate this ingenuity by linking different generations and professions to co-create a better future, and then come up with innovative and holistic ways to tackle ageing-related issues, which are “wicked problems” (Martin, 2007). As Laslett (1996, p. xi) stated, these are not social problems to be solved but instead “a unique experience for each individual”.

We researched and defined three crucial social topics in ageing innovation and carefully curated them into briefs for our Social Innovation Design Projects (SI.DPs): (1) Fine Dying – co-creating designs to prototype new services that enable the elderly in need to worry less about their end of life issues and age gracefully, (2) Dementia Going – co-creating designs to prototype new perspectives enabling dementia patients to access communal areas and be more active within their community, (3) Productive Ageing – co-creating designs to prototype a new value system, empowering elderly groups to creatively contribute to society. Over the two-year funded period, we worked with four target groups (1000 tertiary students alongside 400 elderly people, six social issue experts and three design mentors). Together, we co-created over 800 Social Innovation ideas toward ageing innovation for the future of Hong Kong.

These cross-generational ideas were articulated into design insights for implementation. Our intention is not just introducing design thinking but making the design discipline a practical social tool to orchestrate social innovation. Instead of working toward a market-focus economy, we are advocating that design can also deliver processes for radical social

change when developing services, systems and environments to support more sustainable lifestyles. More importantly, these processes bring different people together.

Case 1: Fine Dying – designing your own ritual movement

For our three SI.DPs, we looked at different life topics and tapped into the life experiences of elders in Hong Kong, using this information to innovate within social services. The most controversial one is the Fine Dying Project where we engaged over 100 elders enabling them to express their concerns on everything from the dying process to burial services.

Unlike medical or social service experts, who are working hard to insure a Good Death, we, a collective of researchers using design methodology and thinking to investigate new social practices, are advocating a different term we have coined: Fine Dying. The *Cambridge English Dictionary* defines Fine Dining as “a style of eating that usually takes place in expensive restaurants, where especially good food is served to people, often in a formal way”, and usually with special care. In line with this, we refer to Fine Dying as the extent of care we can offer to all of the experiences that surround dying. It is about ongoing processes where Hong Kong citizens can co-investigate unexpected new possibilities for their own dying matters in our city. Recently, new ideas about death and dying are arising, such as green burial, body composting and new spaces for mourning and grieving. However, as a taboo subject, many new ideas cannot be implemented because of fixed social values.

On the other hand, there are still some traditions offering us the opportunity to embrace the dead: one of them is the Chinese practice of burning joss paper. Our belief is that the deceased have similar needs in the spirit world to those of the natural world. This is why a great variety of joss paper objects are produced for people to purchase and burn at funerals. These objects are used on ancestors’ birthdays and during important holidays for deceased relatives so they may exist comfortably in the afterlife. The result of our Fine Dying study (Enable Foundation, 2017) was the concept of transition, moving from creating objects to rituals. Our aim is to transform the burial spaces and systems through changing the fundamentals. The first proposed solution was named, the Envelope, a one-off, ash scatterer for garden burial ceremonies. It was inspired by the life experiences of over 100 elders in Hong Kong and the procedure they expect from their dying process and burial rituals. These experiences were recorded and articulated into a series of aspirations toward their imagined Fine Dying experience in the city. From there we decided to select those focusing on garden burial, which is one of the green burial methods promoted by the Hong Kong government.

Tactic 2: designing a cultural model of ageing

The second remark for PAR practice is “Building Biodirectional Trust” which means enhancing trust by offering elders ownership of research. Instead of framing elders as passive subjects for research, the study pointed out that academic researchers should “become(s) facilitators and the linker of dialogue among the group of interest, aiming eventually for a collective identification, description, and analysis of specific problems, priorities, strengths and assets, and needs” (Averill, 2005).

In our case, we argue that ageing is a culture that should inspire younger people (Lee, 2012, 2017) and we intend to respond in creative ways to this statement: “Ageing in itself is not (just) a policy problem to be solved” (Bazalgette et al., 2011). As a team of design researchers, we believe that whilst public policymakers and social service sector experts are developing ways to solve ageing issues from medical and social perspectives, there

should be room for creative disciplines such as design research to bring new contributions on ageing research and innovation. For us, the major role of design research is to take the concept of aged culture and use this everyday ingenuity to inspire design and innovation. Our goal is to have the public understand ageing as a culture and not as a burden.

To experiment and embrace with the “Cultural Model of Ageing”, we have to acknowledge both the traditional models – medical and social dimensions of ageing – and, in addition, attach more importance to capturing how older people tackle their own ageing issues. With better health and higher education and less physically demanding jobs available today, more mature people become active elders who can stay longer in the labor force. Government policy encourages companies to employ more mature workers. Additionally, active elders are keen to contribute more to the community and develop their own interests. They are demanding a new, inclusive service model.

Case 2: Dementia Going – embracing the dementia culture

The common ground of this model is to work with exciting social phenomena and develop new citizen-driven services models. Young and old citizens worked together to co-investigate possibilities for our cities. Since 2015, we were asked by a regional center for dementia to research, design and prototype a set of “empathy tools” to enable people to better understand the illness of dementia. From its launch in April 2016, the toolkit was rolled out for training across Hong Kong communities. The Design Thinking-Making project opened up a new way of viewing the culture of care. Design research as a new discipline could contribute to a new approach to aged culture as well as linking different generations and professions to co-create a better future and come up with innovative and holistic ways to tackle ageing-related matters.

This particular project shows the inherent potential in the concept of “culture of dementia”, which aims to change people’s perception of the condition. It tries to foreground how joy and love can have a place in the life of a person with dementia and how meaningful, humoristic and positive interactions can be omnipresent in daily life. By heralding this positive perspective, the research aims to inspire designers to develop more appropriate designs to address this mystery while other experts work on a cure. For example, could designers create a story-telling tool for carers to capture the patients’ happy moments? Can a tool help us to enter the “magical world” of dementia, to see things differently and create a different world after the experience?

These experiences inspired us to conduct the Dementia Going Study as part of the SIDLab, where active senior citizens became mentors for young people on dementia. They advised on it as a medical situation and gave their caring experiences for those suffering from dementia. Young citizens also went into care homes to engage patients with dementia through collage making and went on to develop an engagement tool: “Dementia Stories: Happy Colouring”.

Carers of family members with dementia also co-designed a number of urban games with students to enhance public understanding of the different dementia symptoms. All these research actions were collated into the installation and intervention, “Dementia Home”. This experience was a home full of demented objects, which are tools, to aid visitors in their understanding of the dementia experience, demystifying this complex disease. Design and design research could also take the concept of aged culture or “culture of dementia” and use the ingenuity of everyday life that we believe could be captured and use this to inspire design and innovation.

Tactic 3: tool making with the young and old

The final and most important remark is the one about “Training Older Adults for their Roles in PAR” which is essential for the future development of more participatory methods for our common issues: ageing.

“Social innovation focuses attention on the ideas and solutions that create social value, as well as the processes through which they are generated, not just on individuals and organisations.” This is a definition of Social Innovation from the Stanford Graduate School of Business (www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/centers-initiatives/csi/defining-social-innovation), and we used this as our anchor when designing the SI.DLab program. This is why we curated carefully the process: each SI.DP is a three-stage training module with the aim of strengthening the distinct capacity of our target. To do this we openly recruited tertiary students from different universities or higher education institutions in Hong Kong. Our goal was to train them to become enablers of social innovation through design. Each participating student was guided through a specially designed co-creation process. This began by enabling them to immerse themselves into their older selves and invite others to talk about ageing. Then their task was to design for their future selves based on their immersive experience.

Over 1000 students – who we treated as young citizens – went through this immersion process. The most common projections they communicated about their older selves were related to physical restrictions such as poor eyesight and loss of hearing. Dexterity was also a concern for their older self due to back pain or arthritis experiences in family members. Based on all these assumptions, many of them proposed medical or healthcare devices for their future selves. In order to prepare them to co-create with older generations, we also pushed them to define their current interests and hobbies, which could be developed into a version, which fits their needs. Many of the ideas for their future selves were unrealistic but full of imagination and aspiration. These ideas inspired interesting conversations with older people.

Between young and old citizens – Super-ageing Society means there is a greater need for public and statutory authorities to work with older people in planning future services in order to insure communities are fit for all ages, or in other words, “lifetime neighborhoods”. We developed this concept through the practice of “inviting elderly people to become living experts in their society”. Therefore, it is beyond empathy, which can be defined as “putting yourself into others’ people shoes”. Advocating for design research and social innovation, our approach is to immerse ourselves in the living reality of others, i.e., not just design *with* the others or design *as* the others. Putting ourselves into the process and eventually we become the beneficiaries of these projects.

Case 3: Productive Ageing – #AgeReady drills for all

The best example to explain this immersive concept should be our Productive Ageing study. What does “getting old” mean? How should we define senior citizens’ productivity and contribution? We held a roundtable discussion with members from local social welfare organizations, academia and governmental departments, and realized that to tackle the issues of population ageing, the public must first learn what it means to embrace their old age and prepare for getting old. We hope more people from all ages can be inspired – learning what it means to get old, learn and prepare for our old age.

The outcomes evolved into a new concept, the OLD School, where people can learn how to age well together. We believe that every senior citizen with his or her valuable life experiences embodies learning material, which they can share with younger people. Through the co-creation

workshops of “Productive Ageing”, old and young participants explored the various meanings and attributes of getting old; from this, different learning tools were developed.

For the one-month prototyping within community, we developed four sets of learning tools for ageing well, entitled the DRILLS: #AgeReady tools and they were adopted into a community art space in a grassroots neighborhood to test how we can prepare for our future super-ageing society. For the next step, we will be working on Productive Ageing in Schools – “training for ageing” of the OLD School: training tools will be installed in primary/secondary schools and educational organizations creating dialog around ageing and forming new forms of life education.

Conclusion: design against ageism

Robert Butler coined the term “ageism” in 1969 ... he defined it as a combination of prejudicial attitudes toward older people, old age, and ageing itself; discriminatory practices against elders; and institutional practices and policies that perpetuate stereotypes about them.

(Applewhite, 2016)

How can design as a discipline contribute a bold response with new approaches to the scale of demographic change, to perspectives of ageing and more importantly bring everyone together to see ageing as “our” issues? This chapter is a reflection by a design researcher referencing PAR Methodology: value co-creation through conducting a creative citizen program with the aim of building their capacities in order to embrace their own “ingenuity of ageing” as well as being inspired and join the co-creation.

Gradually a picture emerged of a group of ingenious people working and stimulating each other to tackle persistent myths about older people, a culturally based fear of ageing. It became clear that their unique situation of collective living has become an incubator for social innovation, with co-design and participatory design processes enabling greater individual choice and control.

Through the lens of ageing and ingenuity, evidence was gathered on many important topics around ageing – from cognitive impairments to coping strategies for chronic diseases – with the goal of investigating which new services, tools and solutions will best serve a future ageing society.

Let’s co-design as the others do

[T]he notion of annotated portfolios entails selecting a collection of designs, representing them in an appropriate medium, and combining the design re-presentations with brief textual annotation. Gaver and Bowers characterize their proposal as a methodology for communicating design research, and more specifically, a methodology that is very familiar to designers as well as artists.

(Gaver and Bowers, 2012)

This is what we trained our students/young citizens to do: putting together their investigation of specific topics (burial services, dementia engagement and an ageing model) and immersive experiences becoming their “annotated portfolios”. They were guided through the process of following the Co-creation Manual that we designed for them. The materials proved to be useful resources when starting the ideating process with the older citizens.

Prototyping as civic education

Löwgren (2013) responded to Gaver and Bowers' notion of annotated portfolios as a way to communicate design research and he also elaborated the concept into "[t]he essence of research is to produce knowledge, and the essence of design is to produce artefact". Our counter explanation is that "the essence of design research is to produce knowledge through co-creating artefacts with multiple actors". The way we conduct our design research projects is to visualize and materialize social issues through design. As a capability training program, we design "tools" that train citizens to be "enablers" forming exchanges between the experienced and the inexperienced, between everyday tacit knowledge (of the elderly) and design knowledge (of the younger generation). This step of intervention is also sharing our research findings and it engages more people to join further investigation.

"It is just the beginning. In the future, we hope people can openly discuss their own solutions, not being held back by limitations", said Chi-Wing Lee, Director of Milk Design Hong Kong and design mentor of the Fine Dying Study (interview with author). This is the conclusion after his team delivered a series of designs for a garden burial ceremony. Unlike the average commercial design process, we believe the outcome of co-creation should be about an opening up of citizens' choices. Here, designers are one of the key collaborators.

Manzini and Margolin (2017) outlined four key areas that highlight the important convergence between democracy and design:

- 1 Design of Democracy – improving democratic processes and the institutions on which democracy is built.
- 2 Design for Democracy – enabling more people to participate in the democratic process, especially through the use of technology.
- 3 Design in Democracy – building access, openness and transparency into institutions in ways that assure equality and justice.
- 4 Design as Democracy – the practice of participatory design so that diverse actors can shape our present and future worlds in a fair and inclusive way.

Referring to this classification, we are proposing the extension of type 4 (Design as Democracy) into action, i.e., designing democracy where design researchers become initiators of the 5i process. Designers would curate the process but not lead it. Together, we co-created and co-presented spectrums of possibilities and we advocate citizens to design their own lives in a democratic society through democratizing design as a knowledge production methodology.

This democratization through design research enables more citizen participation and also creates a dialog platform, helping to design an open society collectively.

Note

- 1 Six Key Principles of PAR in Practice (Blair and Minkler, 2009):
 - i PAR is Participatory and Facilitates Collaborative, Equitable Partnership in All Phases of the Research.
 - ii PAR is Empowering.
 - iii PAR is a CoLearning Process.
 - iv PAR Contributes to Capacity Building and Systems Change.
 - v PAR Balances Research and Action.
 - vi PAR Involves a Long-term Process and a Commitment to Sustainability.

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