Community Planning in the Enlightenment of Inter-generational Solidarity

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Abstract. With the rapidly ageing in China, the present social pension services and the community settings could hardly meet with the needs of the elderly who wish to age in place. As an effective approach to alleviate this current situation, inter-generational solidarity emphasizes the supportive relationships between multi-generational neighbors and the cohesive bonding within community. In this study, theoretical research was first conducted, discussing the necessity and feasibility of inter-generational solidarity in community. Then field surveys were carried out and questionnaires were distributed, investigating the present situation and respondents’ attitudes to inter-generational solidarity. Finally, suggestions were proposed in three aspects: community spatial planning, management and activity arrangement. According to the results, preferences of respondents for inter-generational solidarity were confirmed, and votes of each item of demanding and providing behaviors vary greatly. There was a great difference between generations and their preferences for mutual supportive behaviors. As is seen from findings, community inter-generational solidarity is relatively feasible in China. The appropriate encouragement and facilitation of inter-generational solidarity would provide a potential alternative to community planning in the future.

1. Background

Ageing population and active ageing. China is now faced with serious ageing issues. By 2020, the proportion of older people (\(\geq 60\)) will increase to 17.8\% [1]. The demographic structure is undergoing great changes, significantly affecting the economic development [2]. Paired with ageing dilemma, social service system is still incomplete, with deficiency of effective supply of old-aged services, low quality and efficiency, and inadequate social participation [1].

The “active ageing” concept of United Nations (UN) extends the focus of ageing from “health” to broader ranges, involving participation, contribution, social insurance and rights, etc. [3]. This proposal recognizes “the rights of people to equality of opportunity and treatment in all aspects of life as they grow older” [4]. It emphasizes the older population’s positive effects, and indicates that retired people still possess potential capacity for social and economic development. The elderly should not be deemed as burden, but ones equipped with responsibility and obligations in social life.

Community Inter-generational solidarity. Inter-generational solidarity refers to an intentional connection between individuals or masses of different ages [5]. It addresses the interaction and linkages within family and other social groups, and involves both behaviors and emotions. This type of mutual supporting is two-way, which indicates that one could provide support to others, whilst getting help from others. In this way, the impetus for active collaboration among generations is provided and a virtuous cycle for inter-generational solidarity is developed.

With the global population ageing, the positive impact of inter-generational solidarity upon active ageing has been reaffirmed. In 1993, the European Union (EU) put forward a proclamation, underlining the significance of inter-generational interests [6]. In 1995, the World Health
Organization (WHO) raised the Ageing and Health Program, highlighting the value of inter-generational links. In 2005, the European Commission published its “green paper”, addressing the connection between generations [7]. Since 2009, the EU sets up an anniversary, aiming to make the society more age-friendly under the enlightenment of inter-generational solidarity [8].

2. Significance of community inter-generational solidarity

The international attention of “inter-generational solidarity” has recognized that this approach, which is filled with social care, would bring about a wide range of living changes to citizens.

Supplement of social pension. The ageing process is quite slow and continuous in developed countries, however, it is being compressed with backward socio-economic growth in less developed ones [4]. In this situation, service system of social pension is lagging behind. As a non-policy initiative which originates from residents themselves, inter-generational solidarity is key to prevent the imbalance between supply and demand of social service prior to the coming ageing peak in China. In the meanwhile, being a positive complement to China’s social insurance system, it reflects the main point of active ageing. Mutual assistance within community could provide help and support with greater flexibility, personalization and promptness, which is conducive to build a more caring and supportive neighborhood environment.

Economic benefits. As population ages, the old-age dependency ratio increases yearly. China would step into a period of demographic debt instead of dividend. Shrinking labor force would result in the ballooning costs of labor as well as the community operation [9]. Inter-generational solidarity would help deal with these problems. The living care and spiritual comfort within neighbors could be a considerable extent to make up for the economic deficiencies [10]. In this way, the efficient and healthy operation of the community could be guaranteed.

Social integration. Active ageing has been taken as the overall goal of ageing work in China. Social embeddedness and development of modern society manifest that the elderly are still in need of continuous socialization. Ageing at home could well meet with this demand [10]. Community inter-generational solidarity has positive effects on it. Emphasizing a supportive relationship of reciprocity within community, it encourages the aged to participate in social life and redefines the value of the elderly [11]. The degree of older people’s re-socialization would be improved through the supporting behaviors between neighbors and regular community activities [12]. Thus the elderly’s re-integration into the society could be achieved.

Community cohesion. In an ageing society, an individual is facing the phenomenon of family’s miniaturization, nuclearization and empty nest. The changes in family structure is accompanied by great changes in social kinship and degree of inter-generational communication. To some extent, the relative disintegration of family ties impels people to seek for social life and community relationships [13]. Meanwhile, in urban contexts, to promote community inter-generational solidarity would provide a platform for learning and communication between neighbors and the harmony within neighborhoods would be gained.

Chinese filial culture. Family ethics which is influenced Confucian culture is deeply rooted in Chinese people [9]. According to traditional customs, old people in family are always relying on family support in their later life. Accordingly, inter-generational solidarity extends the range of piety to a common community. This mode makes the most of living customs and would be good for ageing in place.
3. Methodology

**Identifying inter-generational solidarity.** In this study, inter-generational solidarity refers to the support and assistance outside family; that is to say, the inter-generational solidarity is between non-family or non-genetic members in the community. So the inter-generational solidarity among community neighbors, which is based more on mutual understanding, is studied.

**Patterns and behaviors of inter-generational solidarity.** Inter-generational solidarity involves the mutual participation of residents. Thus we divided the related behaviors of inter-generational solidarity into two types - providing and demanding behaviors.

The national work and relevant policy on ageing in China [14, 15], as well as the research articles on urban community living environments for the aged were studied [16-19], investigating the types of community pension services that the elderly need. Integrating the results’ of international pension development [10], the community pension services were mainly grouped into four categories. Then according to *active living*, which was proposed for one’s healthy lifestyle, the potential active behaviors an individual within neighborhoods were put forward [20]. With the overall consideration of active behaviors and community pension services, we made attempts to explore the potential patterns of community inter-generational solidarity and related behaviors. Meanwhile, the specific care needs of elderly and children were taken into account. Hence the patterns were grouped into eight categories with detailed behaviors (Fig. 1 & Fig. 2).

![Figure 1. Patterns of inter-generational solidarity.](image1.png)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patterns</th>
<th>Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living services</td>
<td>Catering &amp; meal delivery; to help handle the payment of living expenses; to help laundry;...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>To provide assistance within the community travel traffic sharing;...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work &amp; study</td>
<td>Personal interest counseling; personal education and training; to help surf the internet;...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; rehabilitation</td>
<td>To popularize health care information; to accompany fitness/outdoor activities;...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural &amp; entertainment activities</td>
<td>Organizing and participating in community cultural activities; community sports activities;...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering activities</td>
<td>Resources and information sharing among residents; providing legal aid; mediating family disputes; exchange of second hand products;...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care-giving for the aged</td>
<td>Day care for the elderly; to accompany and chat with the elderly;...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>To taking care of children; children's education (after-school tutoring);...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 2. Detailed behaviors of inter-generational solidarity.](image2.png)

**Research process.** Empirical research was conducted in Harbin, inquiring about the inhabitants’ attitudes towards community inter-generational solidarity. The objective was to identify the specific patterns of residents’ inter-generational solidarity as well as the discrepant preferences among age
groups. Harbin is the capital of Heilongjiang Province. It is now facing with serious ageing problems and the study of Harbin has reference values for other cities in China.

4. Results

General information. Field surveys were conducted in 4 communities in Harbin. A total of 508 questionnaires were distributed, of which 417 were valid. The valid response rate was 82.1%.

Attitudes towards inter-generational solidarity. Residents have the interest and willingness of community inter-generational solidarity. The votes of each item varies greatly, while the demanding and providing of each one less different (Fig. 3 & Fig. 4).

Preferences for different categories. It is indicated that inhabitants have more willingness to accept inter-generational solidarity in the aspect of pension, travel and public communication. Those activities which mainly take place in public space get higher votes. Thus the encouragement of supporting activities in public space should be paid more attention.

Different preferences between generations. Fig. 5 and Fig. 6 show the results of average preferences of each generation (children, middle aged and the elderly). It could be found that the middle aged have the relatively higher willingness of inter-generational solidarity, followed by children and the elderly.

![Figure 3. Overall demanding-providing preferences of each item.](image)

![Figure 4. Proportion of demanding and providing preferences of each item.](image)
5. Suggestions

According to the questionnaire results, residents have comparatively strong willingness of inter-generational solidarity within neighborhoods. However, as is seen from field surveys, few supportive activities were carried out in communities. So the opportunities, which would promote inter-generational solidarity, should be provided.

Spatial planning. Activities of inter-generational solidarity would change the relationships between neighbors and have effect on the requirements of community space. Community space, in turn, would facilitate the supportive activities and play a positive part in inter-generational solidarity (Fig. 7). Thus community public space, which accommodates daily activities within neighborhoods, should be optimized to encourage interactions between generations. According to the results, inhabitants have more preferences for supportive activities in public space. Therefore, the community space could accommodate those activities and livable physical environments ought to be considered. Then neighbors could be promoted to participate in communication and collaboration. In the long run, this would facilitate inter-generational solidarity. Besides, chances of encounters between neighbors should be increased by means of planning. Rational planning of pedestrian routes and other settings should be considered so that more opportunities of encounters would be obtained.
Community management. In the aspect of community management, residents should be offered opportunities to take part in community maintenance. As is seen from the questionnaire results, residents have preferences for participating in community management. Thus it would be applicable to foster inhabitants’ participation in these activities. Meanwhile, “cohousing” where residents are the decision-makers of a shared community is worth learning [21]. In brief, positive involvement of community management would enhance the inter-generational linkage within neighborhoods.

Community activity. Trust and understanding among residents are the prerequisites of community inter-generational solidarity. More opportunities should be provided so that residents could be involved and have access to friendship, and organizing community activities is a decent option. In this way, people of different ages could get in touch and have mutual learning. Besides, the familiarity within neighborhoods could help make inter-generational solidarity more effective.

6. Conclusions

Community inter-generational solidarity reflects the mutual support between multigenerational people within a shared residential community. The findings of this study show that people possess the willingness of participation in inter-generational solidarity and its feasibility is then confirmed. With the acceleration of population ageing, inter-generational solidarity would provide an alternative approach to the sustainable community. Supports and assistances within neighborhoods would help create and maintain a supportive living environment where well-beings and spiritual comfort are obtained for generations. In the meanwhile, the sharing strategies of inter-generational solidarity assist with the reduction of family living costs and bring about economic benefits. This would help nip the ageing problems in the bud prior to the ageing peak around 2030.

Acknowledgements

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