

The Characteristics of Environment Encouraging Elder-Teenager Cooperation in Rural Community

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Abstract

Nowadays, Local wisdom plays an important role in community development. One month of participant observation at Na-Ngoi – Phonplaloh, the rural communities, 650 km. from Bangkok, Thailand, it showed that elders were full of passions to contribute craft wisdom to teenagers. Nevertheless, teenagers were not eager to learn. Crafting everyday-products in semi-outdoor space around houses is contrast with chilling out with friends and smart phone at café in town. The experience mapping of dairy life of elders and teenagers presented that teenagers much consider virtual activities. They were full of passions to connect the world. This is extremely different from elders who preferred being in comfort zone. However, the mapping also showed evidences of potential for cross-generations cooperation. First, craft is still needed although we are surrounded by technologies. Second is online activities addict of teenagers. These reasons supported the idea of startup project, to value craft for tomorrow. In this case, the environment encouraging teenager-elder cooperation must be carefully identified. The study suggested four key successes to develop environment, 1) Flexible Space, 2) Visible Craft, 3) Leisure Activities, and 4) Connect. With empathy of personal context, space should not limited by location. Elders might need to stay in their place for crafting while teenagers travel around and connect to elders, craft products and the world. Craft would be visible in some places where everyone can easily explore them. Everyday leisure could be flexible according to their life-style. These make the space more dynamic and highly adaptable for changes.

Keywords: Community Development, Cross-Generation Cooperation, Local wisdom, Knowledge Transfer

Introduction

Thailand is now aging society. Government is currently encourage the study of this issue both social aspect and economics aspect. In National Elderly plan issue no. two emphasizes on social participation and self-actualization with surrounded people and participate in public activities. This conforms to The Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012 - 2016) which concern about preserving local wisdom which is the valuable social capital to encourage stability of national economics and society. School of Architecture and Design has involved in community development project at Na-Ngoi – Phonplaloh for four years. Na-Ngoi – Phonplaloh could be considered as a rural communities in Sakonnakorn province where Six-hundred and fifty kilometers from Bangkok, Thailand is. The people in community basically do farming. In the past, Na-Ngoi – Phonplaloh was recognized as the famous community producing high quality of bloom. However, producing bloom is not the main activity in term of economics anymore.

From the 4-year experience in the community, it has been found that elders are the key persons to keep local wisdom knowledge. By the way, there is just a few knowledge transferred to young people and teenagers. According to the global trend that focuses on the unique experience including product or service which are applied from local wisdom. So the idea to develop environment for knowledge transferring between elder- teenagers possibly be a community's brand-new program. Thai government has encouraged communities to express themselves to international. They encourage people to go back to their home town and develop the local business from what they actually are and what they actually have. That is why local wisdom plays important role for today.

Na-Ngoi – Phonplaloh is like other communities in developing countries where has been attracted by globalization. Teenager in the community would like to spend their time in the urban city. They love to meet their friends in the restaurant and coffee shops in the downtown. When they have leisure time in the community, they always spend time on social media. Face to face interaction has been significantly decreased.

From the primary observation, there is not much interaction between three generations, elders, adult, and teenagers because each generations have their own interests and activities. This is why there is a few knowledge transferred between generations. As the values of local wisdoms today, it would be much benefit if they can collaborate by using elders' local wisdom to generate future opportunities. Since adult has been taking care of family financial status, elders and teenagers would be fit to start take benefit from applying local wisdom.

On the other hand, local wisdom is very important in term of social and culture development. Local wisdom needs to be developed to properly fit to today culture. Na-Ngoi – Phonplaloh might be in this situation. Local wisdom, for example, crafts, has not been much developed and they are interesting for others including the teenagers in the community. Transferring valuable knowledge of elders is one of development opportunity that consistent with The Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012 - 2016). It refers to human development for the sustainability of life-long learning strategy. There are many kind of community's local wisdoms such as agriculture, Thai traditional medicine, craft and culture, and food. The methodology of local wisdom transferring that widely used is 'demonstration method' by self-practicing, from real experience (Seni Wong Na Ayutthaya, Teerayuth, 2013). However teenagers actually know that local wisdom could be applied to benefit to their life. They do not know how to get those kind of wisdom and make it as business.

Considering why elders would like to spend time on the basement of their houses, why adult would love to sit and chit-chat in local coffee shop or restaurant, and why teenagers love to kill time in the coffee shop, these space are their comfort zones. Each spaces would have their own characters to invite each generations to involve. It would be possible to design or create the space or place that people can join and interact. However, adult has got less potential to join due to the responsibility family finance. Elders and teenagers are considered to be good matching. It would be much benefit to teenagers to utilize local wisdom transferred from elders. The environment encouraging elders and teenagers to collaborate would be approached. This study aims to 1) understand people lifestyle and existing collaboration between elders and teenager, 2) the existing characteristic of space encouraging elders to collaborate with teenager, and 3) the relationship of human factors effecting knowledge transfer.

Panichkul, N., (2012), the case study in Finland, Helsinki Design Lab is start with the simple questions such as how to create a recreational space for elder people and kids in snow town. This is very simple question but it is very touchable question. Therefore, the study was conducted to understand lifestyles of elders and teenagers and also the reason of their existing collaboration. This study focused on the criteria of social and cultural context of community. Participatory observation was selected to be key success of data collection. It was to ensure that the solution purposed in this study would be high potential to be developed in the community, the hypothesis was developed and tested in the real context.

Barker and Schoggen (1973) mentioned ecological psychologist also give priority to specify the behavioral boundary of participating place, object, and time. According to the study focused on social interactions of “elders and teenagers” and “environment and object”, Interview and participatory observations were selected for data collection tools. However, the solution developed during analysis was built and test in the real context in the community.

Getting to know: At the first phase of participatory observation, researcher spent two weeks in the community to understand the reality of existing collaboration of elders and teenagers. The purposes of this collection are 1) current situation analysis, 2) general interaction between generation, 3) on-site study of favorite places of elders and teenagers. Researcher was assigned to collect the place that normally elders and teenagers love to be. The behaviors in those places and frequency of use were recorded. Elders and teenagers were interview the reason to be those places, such as atmosphere, activities, conversations, people, and special purposes. The general characteristics of places and special characters creating special purposes were recorded as well.

Getting deeper: The second phase of data collection was scheduled two months after the first phase. Two researchers were assigned to interview and observe elders and teenagers doing their favorite activities in the community. Eight elders and six teenagers were in-depth interviewed at their places for deeper understand 1) motivation to be the places, and 2) human-environment interactions. During interview, elders and teenagers were requested to explain their activities, objects and environment related to activities. Researchers also focused on their perception of their activities and the places.

Getting real: The suggestion from analysis was applied to be solution such as prototypes, and processes. The solution was explained to selected elders and teenagers in the community. Those elders and teenagers were invited to try the solution at the prepared environment and

situation. All activities and interactions were systematically recorded. In-depth interview played an important role to understand their perception to the solution. Elders and teenagers were encouraged to feedback their opinions and give recommendations to develop the solution.

Conclusion

At the first phase of data collection, researchers spent two weeks in the community. Site survey and stakeholders walkthrough are used as to interact with people, especially elders and teenagers. A group of teenagers mentioned that there is a new small coffee shop located in a kilometer from the community. They are very excited. It is good sign because this coffee shop is a small branch of coffee shop in big city. In fact, this coffee shop is very small and coffee is not the main product of this branch. However, this situation confirmed that teenagers do not only want to go outside the community. Leksomboon, K. (2012) also gives value to question of the community development project such as “how to make students know temple and school in community”. If community has enough proper space for them, they can also spend time in the community. At the same time, elders still preferred to have coffee at the local coffee shop in the community and go back to do leisure on the basement of their houses.

Convenience store could be considered as the most popular place in the community. It is not only popular for teenagers but also adult. However, there is not many elders at this convenience store. This is twenty four hours store. The interesting point is teenagers and some adult spend their time in front of the store. One of teenagers reflect that being here is easily to be recognized by the people pass by. They many meet and chit-chat with their friends here.

Oppositely, elders in this community do not like to go outside community. They would love to do something in the community, especially on the basement of house. Basement could be consider as semi-public space for rural communities in Thailand. In this community, many leisure, everyday crafting, chit-chatting, resting, and working were done on the basement. Elders group and do the same activities in one place. For example, this house A’s basement is for weaving. Elders who weave can enjoy weaving together. In some activities, they can share their tools and equipment. For the group that do crafts as business, doing together, they can share cost of material.

In-depth interview showed that elders in this community normally do crafting during a day. What they craft are everyday product such as textile products, weaving products, wood products. Sometime they make the new one and sometime they fix the used one. They reflected that crafts as they are doing are not value enough to sell to others. They also mentioned that teenagers has not been interested in crafts much because it is too difficult for this generation. However, most of them try to teach their family members but the members are not interested to continue. While some teenager pointed that she many time try to start learning crafting. However, after two days, she was very bored. Her opinion is that elders can easily to sit and do crafting with their friends because they are doing together. She thought that it would be easier if her friends can sit and learn crafting together with her.

Both elders and teenagers mentioned that people in the community do not pay attention to this local wisdom much because everyday products is not much value. Comparing to textile, the craft that always could be sold, everyday product is much cheaper than textile products. Therefore, some teenagers think that instead of weaving basket used at home, for a day,

buying a 50 bath plastic basket is much easier. Teenagers did not recognize other reasons such as value of local wisdom, or aesthetic of it. These groups of teenagers are more potential to consider functional benefit than emotional benefit.

In teenagers' opinion, most of them do not think that they can sit with elders for whole day. They do not love to work in the community. They have not seen any benefit to sit in one place although it is a nice place. At the same time, elders do not want to teach teenagers as teachers teaching in the class. The ultimate goal of elders is that what they do is benefit to teenagers in some way. It is acceptable for them if teenagers do not craft but they can sell craft products. The benefit of crafting for elders is to use but the benefit for teenagers is to sell. Group of teenagers mentioned the potential to do online shop for their community's crafts. They observed that their parents always take the crafts to sell in craft fair in Bangkok and big cities in Thailand. They think that if online shop is open for twenty four hours. They have found a lot of online shop on social media. One of them help their friend to promote her product on her social media. It would be nice to know how to get clients in to her list and how to do online marketing. Since most of local wisdom in the community is crafts, which are not interesting for teenagers. However, it is very interesting when considering the values of crafts of elders and teenagers. They value differently. Elders focus on "to do" but teenagers focus on "to sell". In term of business they are good matching. The idea of start-up project was raised during data analysis.

The start-up idea was explained to one of teacher in local school who is almost sixty years old. She agreed with the start-up concept. She also mentioned that students, nowadays, have been invited from others to promote their product on social media. In her opinion, it is very dangerous because students have not studied product they are promoting. Some product is not really good and many products do not reach the standard of Ministry of Industry. However, she has seen this interest in her students.

The trial project called "craft for tomorrow" was presented to local school. The purpose of this process is to use the case study as a tool to let people in the community to identify kind of space they want. William H. Whyte, Cited by Project for Public Space propose that it is very hard to design the right space, it seems that almost current public spaces were design for aesthetic approach but not for functional approach. Since this project students need to collaborate with elders, they have to carefully plan for elders also. Students were given the basic knowledge of start-up project and big picture of online business. Students were encouraged to set the team and contact to elders by themselves. It is very interesting that students have not occupy any specific space or area. They identified that the proper environment to crafts for elders is their homes or their friends' homes. They presented the idea that if it possible they need to know all of what crafts elders have done. Finally they requested data signal for their communication. In this case, the environment encouraging teenager-elder cooperation must be carefully identified. The study suggested four key successes to develop environment, 1) Flexible Space, 2) Visible Craft, 3) Leisure Activities, and 4) Connect. With empathy of personal context, space should not limited by location. These make the space more dynamic and highly adaptable for changes.

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