Co-designing Senior Interaction: Inspiration stories for Participatory Design with Health and Social Care Institutions Workshop, PDC 2010

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INTRODUCTION

We present stories, methods and challenges from the first part of our research project Senior:Interaction.

In the co-design project Senior:Interaction (S:I) a public care unit, university researchers, industrial partners, and senior citizens in a specific urban location are working together to design new horizontal service concepts that can strengthen social interaction among seniors in the urban environment. The project started late 2009 and will be finalized late 2012.

Research and development in the areas of "aging-in-place" has so far focused on helping senior citizens to overcome physical challenges associated with aging. Carpets, which can call emergency services if you fall, the smart pill box that beeps when you have to take your medication, and a bed, keeping track of whether you get up in the morning, are examples of this.

But desire and ability to remain in their own homes is not only a matter of a well-functioning physical environment. It is also about having an interesting life, an independent life, and a well-functioning social life; about quality of life and self-management.

The overall objective of this project is to formulate alternatives to this politically / economically driven agenda for senior citizens and develop new design concepts and interaction technologies for social interaction on top of the service models that create the basis for experience sharing and social interaction among seniors- and thus contributing to greater self-reliance and social wellbeing.

In Senior:Interaction we are exploring and developing welfare technology and service models that support experiences and social interaction. New patterns of social interaction in the context of elderly care can be supported by the new social "spaces" and "channels" that have developed in the area of social media. So far, these "spaces" and "channels" have primarily been used for communication between service providers and individual citizens, but this project focuses on how it can be used to create an open infrastructure for everyday experiences

and social interaction between senior citizens.

The project suggests a move from service models focusing on a relation between the individual citizen and the service provider towards concepts based on a broader content and social perspective. In other words, a model in which the service provider does not always provide a service that goes directly to the individual, but also helps to maintain a locally based network, by offering services to groups of seniors.
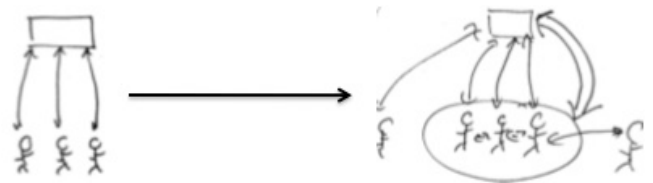

Figure 1: Towards a service model supporting social interaction

Social interaction among seniors is supposed to be enhanced through such new horizontal service models as they offer opportunities for peer-to-peer communication closely connected to on-going everyday activities. The project focuses particularly on three everyday areas: the meal, physical mobility & strength, and cultural experiences in everyday life. These everyday areas have the potential of binding people together in a neighborhood and thus contribute to the feeling of belonging and being confident in the local environment.

METHODS

The S:I project uses the design laboratory as a platform (framework) for organizing and guiding innovation. With design laboratory we refer to open collaborations between many stakeholders sharing a mutual interest in design research in a particular field. The open collaborations means that "what" is to be designed is not predefined in the outset but something, which is co-designed, experimented with and rehearsed as the process goes along. The authorship of the results is therefore also shared among the participants (Binder and Brandt, 2008). "Instead of separating research, ideation and concept development from design and implementation, the design laboratory sets up a learning organization that right from the start simultaneously explores both the "what" and "how" of innovation" (Binder, 2010, p. 21). The core of the process is series of co-design events where all stakeholders participate in activities that focus on mutual

experimentation and learning. "Even if they [the events] are limited in time, often lasting a half to a full day, they create engagement, and shared experiences, ant they are always organized to produce tangible outputs." (Brandt and Eriksen, 2010, p. 71)

The S:I project is organized around a series "design labs" each including three workshops. During these workshops different aspects of the project are explored, while innovative designs sketches develop into still more detailed design concepts addressing the overall aims of the project. The first phase, which was finalized September 2010 aimed to get a shared understanding of seniors' everyday life and to co-design a number of innovative concepts, which will be sketched on technological platforms during the second phase. The last phase includes using Living Labs (senior homes) as design and experiential platform.
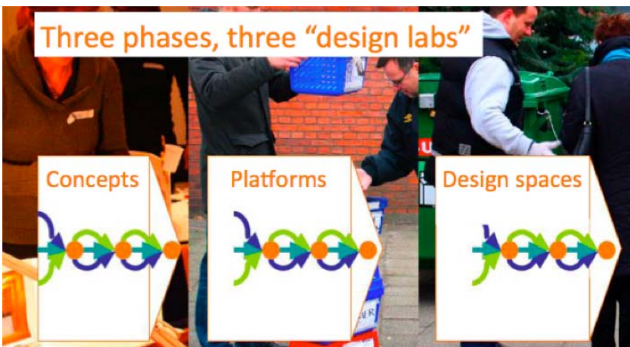

Figure 2: Our design process

In the concept phase we have been working with 15-20 seniors participating in the first three workshops. These seniors were selected through the public care unit (activity centers, clubs and elderly housing units).

WHO ARE THE SENIORS

A crucial challenge of co-designing with seniors in the S:I project has been recruiting seniors for the project, because it can be difficult to find a positive identification as senior participant.

In co-design processes designers and future users are carrying out central part of the design activities together.

As designers we have an initial idea of who these future users are and select users based on this initial idea of who the users are.

In a good co-design process user participants are able to identify themselves as part of the future users. When applying a co-design approach in the area of senior citizens this creates a number of issues related to identity, self-image and stigmatization when selecting users as co-designers.

When do we consider ourselves 'elderly', 'old', as 'senior citizens' or similar phrases used to categorize people in the late part of their life?

When approaching people in the specific urban environment who we envisioned to be the future users we realized that almost nobody among the group of people between 55 and 75 years old identified themselves as 'elderly' or 'senior citizens'. Rather they tend to refer to 'the others' or even to their own parents; like Tove, 73 years old talking about her mother, when we asked her to tell about everyday life as a senior.

This made us realize that we need to find new ways of not only selecting future users co-design projects with seniors, but also to reconsider the way we think of, address and refer to our future users.

Rather than using biological age, institutional categories or similar formal ways to group the users that we imagine as the future users, we suggest to talk about situated elderliness. Doing this turns our attention towards communities of practice as a means of understanding, which our future users are. We want to turn this into *communities of everyday practice*, as a way of understanding our participants. The issues of self-image, identification and stigmatization become crucial for the ability to run a successful co-design process in the area of co-design for social interaction among seniors.

INSPIRATION STORIES

The stories presented below are from the first workshop, which focused on how a good day looks like in a senior everyday life ("My Great Day"), and on imagining how a good, shared experience might look like ("It is good to Share Training Experiences"). Prior to the first workshop all senior citizens had an individual visit from members of the project group to get the discussion started and to
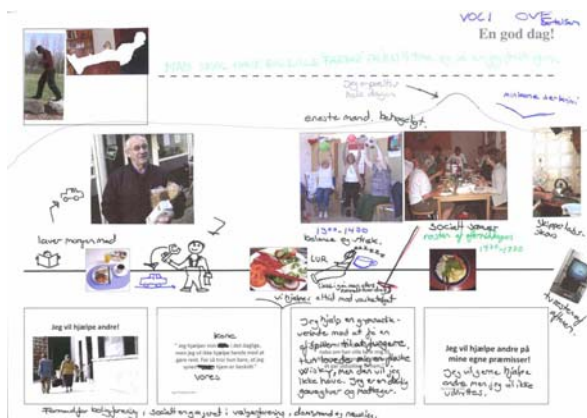

Figure 3: "My Great Day" poster and workshop situation

get confidence with the project and the overall methodological approach. The result of these visits was a personal 'workbook' with individual stories and life fragments for each participant. Based on these workbooks we formulated 11 themes relevant for seniors in their everyday life.

"My Great Day"

The first exercise was formulating how a good day looks like, based on the senior's own everyday life and expectations. Design materials provided for this were pictures illustrating typical activities and pictures illustrating the 11 themes, and a poster for gluing all illustrations and adding personal descriptions.

In the example poster shown in figure 3, one of the senior participants together with a project partner designed a poster describing how "My Great Day" looks like. The poster – made by Ove – illustrates core values in his life ("I want to help others", "I want to help according to my own premises, and not to be misused"), a central activity ("it is important to have a nap after lunch"), the overall mood of the day ("I am positive all day"), activities that structure the day (meals, nap, social activities, watch TV). The activity of expressing "My great Day" served as a way of letting all senior citizens tell about their everyday life in a semi-structured way directed by themselves.

By doing this scenario the first move towards creating concepts for social interaction addressing everyday areas is created.

TOWARDS THE CO-CREATION OF NEW SERVICE MODELS

Throughout the dialogue between seniors and project partners stories of everyday interaction are told and re-told in the light of an emerging understanding of what interaction technologies may facilitate. In the initial visits we are told about how a routine morning call from a community nurse to a group of seniors has evolved into a communication hub where the seniors through the nurse learn about what the others are planning for the day. At the workshops stories are told about neighbors looking after each other and sharing newspapers and magazines. And as the seniors work with the doll scenarios the stories gradually move from the well known to an imagined future.

The designlabs have only just begun and we are still to see how the municipality and the private service providers will pick up on the stories and start to explore horizontal service models.

Imagining how digital technologies can create new ways of everyday living and new ways of establishing everyday social relations is difficult for all of us. During the

Figure 4: Scenes from the scenario "It is Good to Share Training Experiences"

"It is Good to Share Training Experiences"

In the second part of the workshop the seniors were organized in groups of 3-4 seniors, industry partners, municipality partners and researchers and asked to create and record a doll-scenario based on the personal stories on how a good shared experience could look like. The design materials provided were a number of dolls, and materials for customizing these, a stage consisting of three sets, some pictures to glue to the three sets, and a video camera for each group.

In this scenario shown in figure 4 Robert, Anni and Mohammad are doing a bike ride together in a park. They are taking a lot of photos. After going to the park they go to the public swimming pool and take a long swim in the nice, warm water. After a lot of exercising they are tired and each of them go home to relax. At home they can watch their photos from their shared exercising day on their own TV's. Anni's children are visiting this night and listen to Anni's story about her day in the park with her friends Robert and Mohammad.

designlabs running throughout the project, senior participants can explore and rehearse their future life as seniors through scenarios, mockups, prototypical digital design concepts and living labs staged in their own environments.

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