

Piloting of speculative design workshop at Sunway University on Feb 22, 2018

Fifteen older adults from Klang Valley, between 60 and 85, attended the pilot workshop that saw the deployment of speculative design as a qualitative research methodology for drawing out issues that are of greatest concern to senior citizens in urban areas. The purpose of this pilot workshop is to test out the efficacy of speculative design for the purpose at hand while also experimenting with the best way for introducing and developing the process of speculative design with stakeholders. Care was taken to ensure that all proper ethical considerations have been met.

One of the greatest challenges involved getting near equal participation from all the workshop participants, by keeping the more vocal and active ones from dominating the conversation while also keeping an eye out for potential triggers. In the process of going through three sets of activities during the course of the day, the objective of identifying how social isolation features in the life of older adults morphed into a broader outstanding issue of which social isolation is still an unequivocal part: the need for a sustainable healthcare system that integrates well with all other public and private infrastructures already available and not yet implemented, as well as conditions of existing social relations.

The day begun with a welcoming remark from Dr Clarissa Lee, who used that time to get the participants to introduce themselves and identify the most memorable event of their life in the past year. This is followed by an identification of life priorities and what they could change about their priorities if they were to have control over their lives (barring the miraculous). The purpose of this first set of activities is not merely to warm up the participants, but to get them reflecting on their own experiences and how these experiences could be connected to their immediates present and potential futures. The researchers saw that family and social relations, as well as continuous active contribution to society, helped the participants maintain a long view on their present situation in relation to one's life cycle. This would be important to informing their views on policies pertaining to older adults, and how the policies should best be constructed.

After a short break, the participants moved into one of the main activities of the workshop, which is to take on the role of policy makers and politicians that have control over how policies are enacted in Malaysia. The participants took on their assigned roles with gusto – some moved through the process efficiently and with economy, while others felt so strongly about the political processes of their role that they spent a big portion of the time debating on the issues orally before narrowing down the issues to the most important that they would present to their peers. Yet, there were others who felt overwhelmed by the task, and needed a little more assistance from the researchers. This activity carried through to lunch, a time used by the researchers to understand the background of the participants better through more informal interactions.

Presentations from the second activity set followed lunch, where the participants not only elaborated on points they outlined on large sheets of paper, but also took points of information and questions from the floor, in the manner expected of policy makers and politicians. The activity also gave rise to lively discussion that the researchers have to curb in the interest of time. But the myriad of issues raised could be

categorized into a few primary issues that would be further explored in the final portion of the workshop.

As a preamble to the third and final activity set of the day, the participants were shown clips from two very different media representation of ageing and senior citizen – one from an ongoing American TV series while another was from a 1952 Japanese film from a famed director. The researchers consider this an important interlude to the flow of the activities due to the lack of positive portrayal and recognition of older adults in television and cinematic representation, and also to personalise some of the larger social justice issues discussed in the preceding role-play activity. The two clips tackled both uncomfortable and usually avoided issues in relation to senior citizens, such as that of death, sexuality, mental health, and post-marriage blues.

The final activity attempted to bring a nascent form of co-designing into the workshop, although it was unfortunate that there was insufficient time to do this in great depth. However, with the assistance of the other facilitators present, Dr Clarissa used curated pictures as a starting point for familiarizing the participants with a co-designing process that begins from brainstorming to finding connections between seemingly unrelated objects to putting together a coherent presentation of issues and possible policy recommendations. This was acknowledged as the hardest part of the workshop, and that it took place towards the end, when the participants were no longer as fresh, was noted by the researchers for future redesigning of the workshop.

Dr Yong Min Hooi, Assoc Prof Lau Sian Lun, and the student helpers worked to document the affair through a combination of video recordings, photography, and note-taking. Assoc. Prof Hwang Jung Shan worked to ensure that logistics did not interrupt the smooth running of the workshop. All the researchers and student helpers would also assist with the participants during the course of the day, including in facilitating the group activities. Dr David Tan, the project's collaborator from UNU-IIGH was present as observer of the workshop's process but he assisted in the facilitation of some of the more difficult group activities. The researchers also learned to reconsider their prior assumptions and to tweak how such a workshop should be conducted in the future, with the feedback provided by the participants. A diversity of useful output was generated which assisted the researchers in improving on the original hypotheses made, and to help in refining the research questions.