The Balthazar Approach: Engaging Senior Adults as Skilled Members of Intergenerational Project Teams

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Abstract. İn this paper the Balthazar approach is introduced, which is a project-based series of workshops for intergenerational teams focusing on peer-to-peer sharing and learning of skills while tackling specific societal challenges. The Balthazar approach is presented as both an attempt to tackle post-retirement demotivation and isolation of senior adults and as an evolution of the participatory design tradition which consists of involving final users in particular phases of a project through co-creation sessions to collect feedback on concepts and prototypes. The Balthazar approach aims to go beyond that and to build a framework to include skilled senior adults as actual members of a team throughout all the duration of a project.

Keywords: Intergenerational, senior adults, makers, co-creation, participatory design, social connectedness.

1   Introduction

The Balthazar project aims to make older adults and younger people meet and work together around projects that matter society and that need knowledge and skills from both parties to be approached and implemented. As **older adults**, we focus on already retired persons and soon- to- retire ones which would like to engage into societal challenges and to be part of an intergenerational team, offering their skills and learning unknown ones from their team members as the project unfolds. As **younger people**, we engage with design researchers, design/architecture students and "makers" whose interest and practice focuses on social innovation.

By facilitating **intergenerational encounters and project- based collaborations** among heterogeneously skilled people, the Balthazar initiative aims to foster the creation and prototyping of solutions to societal challenges that are meaningful and inclusive to each age group [1]. At the same time, the Balthazar initiative aims to keep older adults active, motivated, and generative [2] concerning their role in society beyond the employment age, as well as to make the younger generation more connected, respectful and inclusive of older citizens.

Seven Balthazar workshops are planned starting from october 2016 until 2018. The main location will be Copenhagen area. Each workshop is project-based, meaning that

on each event participants will be presented with a concrete challenge to work on, which tackles a specific topic of social interest, such as active ageing, and teams will work towards the achievement of specific outcomes. Each workshop elicits a **bidirectional intergenerational exchange** and specific skills (the so-called *Balthazar skills*) are acquired by older adults participants while completing each workshop's tasks, such as doing contextual research, insights gathering, concept generation, prototyping and co-creation. Those skills are fundaments to the *Balthazar approach*, enabling the senior adults to take an active role in the teams and contribute to each phase that a project might consist of (from research to prototyping). The collection of the skills grants older adults the membership to the Balthazar Advisory Board for senior good life (BAB).

2   The BAB - Balthazar Advisory Board for senior good life

The BAB is an organism whose members are Balthazar-trained older adults willing to collaborate on ageing related projects. The BAB members can offer their collaboration in projects following two approaches:

1. Traditional co-creation approach. BAB members react and act upon external teams' ideas/prototypes in particular phases of the project, when users feedback is mostly needed. External teams already working on an ageing related project can approach the BAB and invite its members to take part in co-creation sessions. The benefit for the project is to quickly engage with a community of senior adults who are already motivated to offer their informed feedback and have previous experience as co-creation respondents [3].
2. Balthazar approach. BAB members create ideas and prototypes to a specific challenge as active members of an ageing-related-project team. Constituting teams can approach the BAB to present a challenge and invite an older adult from the advisory board to join as an actual member of the team from the beginning to the very end of the project. The expected benefit for the project (being this the core research question of our Balthazar research project) is to be led and developed also by a trained final user, who brings his pre-retirement skills to the team as well as he has acquired and practised project-related new ones throughout the Balthazar workshops.

3   The first workshop: acquiring the skill of contextual research

The first workshop took place on October 4th, 2016 in the Valby Kulturhus, Copenhagen, and focused on showing senior adults why designers do fieldwork and on training them in doing contextual research. Seniors teamed up in groups of two and interviewed each other (Fig.1) following a conversation plot on daily experiences of ageing provided to them by the younger ones, such as designers and design researchers. Research tools were also created to be used during the interviews, which consisted of maps of the home and of the neighbourhood on which participants could pinpoint

pleasant and unpleasant experiences of their daily life through hearts and broken hearts stickers (Fig.1).

Fig. 1. On the left, a group of two senior adults interviewing each other. On the right, a map of the home filled with hearts/broken hearts stickers to represent pleasant and unpleasant experiences of daily life.

The aim of the first workshop interviews session was to practice the techniques of conducting a fieldwork and to acquire the skill of doing contextual research. At the end of the workshop, the participants were asked to perform another fieldwork as homework in the time between the first workshop and the second one. They were given the freedom to interview any person they liked on a topic of their choice. The aim of their homework was to uncover needs and opportunities for a future design project that they would have to present on the second workshop in front of the crowd of seniors and younger persons in order to attract possible team members to work with them on those specific challenges. A specific tool kit for contextual research consisting of a fieldwork notebook and extra maps of homes and neighbourhoods were handled to the seniors as support material for their research in the wild.

4   Future development

Starting from october 2016, the seven Balthazar workshops unfolds, giving senior adults who participate the possibility of learning project- based skills, such as doing contextual research, insights gathering, concept generation, prototyping and co-creation.

We envision that by August 2018 the first group of senior adults will be granted the access to the BAB as Balthazar "graduates".
The function of the BAB is going to be tested internally with the CIID Interaction Design Program- IDP students, who could take advantage of the participation of the BAB members in their school projects on active and healthy ageing during the year 2018.

An assessment of the Balthazar project will be conducted with the CIID students and the BAB members who engaged with them to prove the benefits of the Balthazar approach on the projects outcomes in general and, more in details, its benefits to young

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and older people in terms of intergenerational exchange [1] and social connectedness [4].

5 Acknowledgements

6 References

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