

Body Sense: Community Building and Residents Physical Participation

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Abstract: Community building is inseparable from the participation of the local residents. Participation pre-supposes the existence of the body, however, the existing research on residents' willingness to participate in the community building, mostly focused on the residents' mind, and ignored the residents' body, showing a kind situation of "being without physically present". This paper attempts to analyze the subjectivity of the body in the practice of community building. The article demonstrated, that resident participation is not only a single active process of consciousness, but it is also a process of embodied experience. The body is the medium through which the individual is related to the external community intentions. The body senses will perceive, and received environmental information such as sensory stimulation, situational atmosphere, and presented as the real need of the subject. The body is an important aspect, however, rarely discusses, therefore, the body sense should not be ignored during community builders.

Keywords: Embodiment; Body sense; Resident participation; Community building

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1. Introduction

The concept of community building is originated from the town building movement in Japan, which was further implemented in Taiwan in the year 1994 [1]. Community building is a route to recreate a place by mobilizing the community as much as possible, and using the local resources such as people, culture, land, economic production and scenery. In the recent years, community building has been widely used in the community practice in the mainland China, thereby, China has ushered in the era of community building.

In a certain sense, the community building is also known as "create people". The community builders trigger the residents to response to the ordinary community life, attract the residents to participate in the community affairs and activities, guide the residents to discover their interest in the community, and lastly, empower the residents by stimulating their enthusiasm, and gradually promote the changes of residents' awareness and behavior. This process very difficult, and required a lot longer time to achieve the goals of community building, where at present, the residents are generally indifferent to the community affairs, and their willingness or participation rate in the community activities is relatively low [2]. Additionally, the participation rate of the residents is still not at a satisfactory level, even with the availability of a platform for cultural and recreational activities for the residents, therefore, the reasons which are limiting the participation of the residents in the community affairs or activity need to be further discusses.

Based on the multiple research analyses that was performed to determine the factors which contributes to the lack of motivation of residents' participation, can generally be classified into two aspects, which are macro and micro. The analyses on the macro-related aspect involve the investigation of factors such as the

management system of urban communities in China, and the involvement of multiple modes of community governance. Ma Xiheng^[3] mentioned that, the allocation of public power in the community, and differences in the way of interaction between the multiple subjects, will have an impact on the participation rate of the residents. Additionally, if more equitable distribution of the governance benefits can be achieved among multiple subjects, thereby, can stimulate the enthusiasm and the participation of the residents in the community activities. Meanwhile, the micro-related aspect involves the considerations, initiative, and the willingness of the residents' own self, where most likely limited by economic factors. For example, Chen Wanling^[4] believes that, the ability of the residents to distribute profits among the community members is the driving force for the residents' participation, further, the ability to distribute profits is positively related to the residents' willingness to participate. Hu Rong^[5] in his research, found that the participation of the villagers in the village elections was an important route for the villagers to express their interests, however the villagers will actively participate in the election, if the participation cost is lower. In addition, the social assumption of the residents, becomes the next deciding factors, which encouraging the participation of the residents. Researchers found that the social assumption of the residents is focusing more on the residents' sense of community, a sense of community belonging, and the residents' participation notion and ability. For example, some scholars mentioned that the gap between residents' participation expectations, and the actual reality will affect the residents' participation^[6]. Some scholars believe that, the stratification of the participants themselves, and the differentiation of residential areas, will further lead to the difference in the community participation and involvement^[7].

Although the above studies can explain the factors, which can contribute to the low participation of the residents in the community affairs or activity, however there are certain limitation in these studies. For example, whether these studies focused on the impact of the institutional environment and its changes on individual residents, or directly examined the initiative of the residents themselves, and whether they focused on the evaluation of participation effectiveness or focus on the participation awareness, whether the human nature was based on the hypothesis of economic man or social man, concluding that most of the researches were examining the "mind" of the people, ignoring the aspect of the "body", and showing a kind of misconception such as "being without physically present." Therefore, when discussing about how to create people in the community building, one should consider the education and the empowerment of the residents for granted a "heart-shaping" movement, without ignoring the subjective existence of the residents' body. Additionally, the senses, are the first threshold of the external things to enter or to stimulate the human brain^[8]. The residents' willingness to participation in the community affairs or activities is composed of a series of comprehensive senses, where the body sense will affect the process, and it is the intentionality of human beings. Additionally, the residents' participation in nature is not a disembodied process, but an embodied experience process, therefore, study on how to restore the body's subjectivity in residents' participation, explore the senses of body in residents' participation, and examine the impact of this local perception of the body on residents' willingness to participate, is an effective way in enhancing the level of community development and governance.

2. Understanding of body sense as a perspective

For a long time, the body has been filled with greed and depravity, while the humble position was dominated by the mind, thereby, completely separating the body and the mind^[9]. Due to the two turns in the "body-mind" issues, research on body sense was initiated. The first turn was "the body turn", that was originated in the 1980s, thereby, the academic circle began to reflect on the duality of "mind and body", and "the body" aspect was included in the research field of humanities and social sciences^[10]. Next, the second turn was emerged in the 1990s, which called by the Canadian anthropologist David Hoes as "the sensorial turn", since then, sensory experience is considered as a physiological study, as well as a historical and social scope

of research ^[11]. As a result, the living sensory body has been discovered, and the body sense has become an important source of creative meaning, subsequently, has become a new focus in the humanities and social sciences. For example, Li Fei mentioned that, a specific set of cultural genes was engraved in the body of a specific group of people through the practice of incarnation, and then the people are further shaped and differentiated as “the other” and “us” ^[12]. Additionally, Ye Hongyan and Zhang Fenghua described that moral judgment is embodied in the mind, and after manipulating of the body senses, such as body temperature, and action variables such as open and close eyes, the body sense started to affect people’s moral judgment ^[13].

The term of “body sense” was first proposed by comparative medical historian, Kuriyama, who found the existence of “tense sense” in all the aspects of the western society, and the “tense sense,” is the most important body sense aspect, which understand the western social culture ^[8]. In a lame term “body sense”, is the experience and the feeling of the body. Meanwhile, a Taiwan scholar Yu Shunde defined it as “body is the subject of experience to perceive the perception items (categories) of the internal and external world, and its cultural boundaries (such as how to mean corruption) and feeling connotations (such as how to mean grandeur), may due to the difference in the cultural backgrounds, leading to a huge difference ^[8].” Body sense was developed by the body following its interactions with the cultural environment, which it has been occupied for a long time. As Chris Shiling ^[14] mentioned, the “body sense” is refers not only to sensory experience, but also to the perceptual pattern behind it, quoted from a text of “the cultural composition of perception profoundly defines our experience of our own body, and our understanding of this understanding of the world.” Further, Zhang Xun’s and Yu Shunde’s described the body sense and the cultural construction as “The Body Experience of ‘Xu’ in Daily Life,” and “Body and Object: A Study of Object and Body Sense” respectively.

Body sense is closely related to our daily life. The words, such as cute, delicious, lively, comfortable, indifferent, and others are commonly used by the people to express their physical feelings in the daily life, however, for a prolong time people are often ignorant of body sense. This is related to the traditional concept, that human cognition has always been regarded as a disembodied cognition, which is referred to as an independent existence, that can be separated from the body. At present, in the field of cognitive science, the view on the role of the body in the cognitive process has become the demarcation standard of the first and the second-generation cognitive science ^[15]. As a key concept of the second generation of cognitive science, the embodied cognition refers to the role of the body in cognition, and the dependence of mind on bodily functions. Merleau-Ponty, a French phenomenologist, described that there is certain factors in the environment that can stimulate the people’s perceptual organs, leading to cognitive and psychological changes ^[16]. Additionally, people’s thoughts, value judgments, actions or intentions are inseparable from the body’s perception of joy, anger, sadness, and joy ^[8], therefore, the perception is largely depending on the body that is formed based on the living body.

In this way, describing the participation of the residents from the perspective of body sense has become a new perspective, where it looks at the entire participation process in a new way, treating the residents as a flesh and blood people with various sensory abilities, and further elevate the residents’ body from the periphery of activity participation based on the center status. Especially, from the body sense perspective, known as the phenomenal body, which emphasizes that the body is not a material shell, but an object body which can only be passively sensed, meanwhile perceptible sensed in the body which can be a perceptible subject.

Next, based on the recognition of the phenomenal body, it emphasizes that residents’ participation is an embodied process or experience. This highlights the presence of the resident subject, which means the participation is an ongoing action process by focusing on the physical sensory field, which is felt through the whole body. In Merleau-Ponty’s words, “all experiences are sensations.” This also highlights the

intentionality of the body, where the body sense will try to help the subject in making a beneficial behavior, therefore, it will perceive those possible environmental information and characteristics that are beneficial to the behaviors. In summary, the intentionality of the body expresses the correlation between “I” and the world [17].

Further, the residents’ cognition of participation will be affected by situational factors. There is not only the influence of physical environmental factors, such as the spatial layout, temperature, color, sound, and others of the participating place, however, there are also influences of interpersonal environmental factors, such as interpersonal distance, and the grasp of communication attitude, which may also be affected by the participants. The influence of the individual’s own circumstances, such as the physical condition, emotional and mental state of the participating, the urgency of time, and others, therefore, a same environment will produce different perceptions, thereby same person may have different perceptions at different times.

Finally, the process of resident participation is a generative process. Residents do not only put their bodies in the participation, they also put into their own wisdom and opinions, and behave as a producers. In a certain sense, the effect of residents’ participation comes from the joint production and creation of organizers and participants. In this process, the body is not only the subject and the experiences, but also a kind of power or energy.

3. Conclusion

It can be assumed that any action that is taken by people, including the participation of residents in a community, inevitably presupposes the existence of a body. Bryan Turner emphasized the role of the biological body, “I must have my body in order to touch, smell, and hear [18],” where people (residents) enter the world (a community) through physical activity. However, the body is not an object between “me” and the world. The world (such as a community) enters the perception of “me” by opening up to the body, forms “my” perception of people, things and certain behaviors, such as the evaluation of the value of resident participation. The evaluation was initially carried out at the interface of the active body, but in the advanced stage of cognitive development, especially in the stage of symbolic semantics, which the offline cognition could realize, and the recognizer no longer has to be in a real-time environment when interacting with actual objects, cognition becomes a process of dealing with mental representations [19].” Community building from the perspective of body sense is the process of “I have witnessed the existence of others in the perception of ‘body’, and others have also witnessed the process of my existence in the perception of ‘body’. It is in this inter-body-subjectivity nature, that human beings can become a ‘community’ that communicates, and observes each other [20].”

Therefore, when community builders work in a community, the first thing that they need to consider is on the sense of body of the residents, on how to create a warm, friendly, and a respectful and professional atmosphere. From the physical layout of the activity site to the mannerisms of the staff’s own speech and behavior, these factors will enter the residents’ body through their ears, eyes, nose and other sensory organs, further resulting in a series of internal perceptions, and then the external organs such as the limbs of the body, will make a corresponding, subconscious response due to the transmission of bioelectrical pulses caused by the sensory receptors, showing either sitting there and waiting in confusion, embarrassment, uneasiness, or acting on his own free will and even go away, or they like the activity, feel satisfied and want to participate again. This is the unconscious body sense of residents that support their conscious mental activities.

However, while the body separates “I” from the world, intentionality it make the body separate from the world. In this way, the world has a “for me” meaning, and I also have a “for the world” meaning [17], is the basis for the realization of community building. We change the context of the community, subsequently

the change of the situation leads to the change of the residents' behavior. In this interlinked process, the community has gained endogenous momentum for development. In this sense, body sense is the foundation of community building and even community governance, and the development of a community depends on the reproduction of residents' body sense. We need to understand community building in terms of "living body", because only by understanding how a resident perceives and act in the world, one can build a better world to inhabit.

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