




From Participants to Planners: The Psychological and Social Benefits of Community Elderly Involvement in Intergenerational Program Planning

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Abstract. Intergenerational programs (IGPs) can foster interaction and collaboration between different age groups. However, most IGPs are led by younger people with limited involvement from older adults in activity design and planning. This study aims to clarify the benefits and challenges of involving older adults in IGP design and planning. We organized an IGP involving seven older and six younger participants in a community in Shanghai, and older participants actively contributed to planning, organizing, and execution throughout the IGP. We distributed questionnaires before and after the IGP to quantify its benefits for mental health and conducted in-depth interviews to identify specific benefits and challenges for both age groups. The results supported those older adults who felt less loneliness and perceived higher self-efficacy, self-value, and well-being by participating in IGP design and planning. Younger people reported lower ambivalent ageism. Both age groups perceived stronger senses of meaning in life. In addition, we identified challenges and provided recommendations for involving older adults in IGP planning.

Keywords: Intergenerational Programs · Community · Elderly · Intergenerational Relationships

1 Introduction

Intergenerational programs (IGPs) are initiatives that promote interaction and collaboration between different age groups, especially the young and the elderly. Their goals are to bridge the generational gap, enhance social connections, and improve participants' well-being [1–4]. IGPs are recognized as beneficial for both older and younger people [5]. For the elderly, IGPs help alleviate loneliness, enhance life satisfaction, and further boost their sense of self-worth and the meaning of life by supporting the younger generation and sharing experiences [6, 7]. Meanwhile, through contact with the elderly, young people not only reduce their stereotypes and age discrimination towards the elderly group but also gain a better understanding of the life experiences and wisdom of older adults [3]. Such intergenerational interaction not only promotes psychological well-being at the individual level but also lays the foundation for fostering mutual respect and inclusiveness between generations at the social level [8].

Currently, most IGPs are led by young people, with limited involvement from older adults in activity design and planning. As a result, these IGPs do not fully satisfy the elderly. Research in other fields, such as participatory design, suggests that involving older adults in the design process can make the products better meet their needs [9–11]. Inspired by this approach, this study actively engaged older adults in the design and planning of community intergenerational activities.

However, we lack clear guidance on how to involve older adults in planning IGPs with action steps. To guide activity planning, previous IGP studies usually adopted contact theory as a framework [12–14]. The intergroup contact theory proposed by Gordon Allport in 1954 suggests that contact between different groups can reduce prejudice and stereotypes, playing an important role in improving intergroup relations [15, 16]. For example, studies by Jarrott and Martins have applied this theory to IGPs, demonstrating how structured interactions between the elderly and young people can reduce stereotypes and foster mutual understanding [13, 14]. Contact theory includes five tenets: support from authority, common goals, cooperation, equal group status, and opportunities for friendship [16, 17]. Although earlier studies applied this theory to guide IGP planning, they often overlooked the active involvement of older adults in the planning process. This study explores the integration of intergroup contact theory with planning frameworks, focusing on the role of elderly participation in IGP planning.

This study aims to actively involve older adults in the design and planning of IGPs, study the effects of participation, and identify the current challenges, including:

1. For the elderly: To evaluate the effects of their participation in IGP planning on mental health, including self-efficacy, loneliness, sense of meaning in life, self-value, and well-being.
2. For younger people: To evaluate the effects of their participation in IGP planning on ambivalent ageism, and sense of meaning in life.
3. To identify challenges faced by both older and younger participants during planning, organizing, and the event. This study also aims to propose practical recommendations to improve future IGP designs and foster more meaningful interactions.

2 Study Design

We carried out this research through an IGP organized by the first author, who was a member of the Active Aging Action Group, at the Xinhua Community Building Center in Changning District, Shanghai. The Active Aging Action Group is a volunteer organization and provides IGPs typically once a week at Xinhua Community. These IGPs cover a variety of engaging activities, including arts and crafts, board games, and flower arranging. These IGPs attracted many older people as participants but were typically organized by only young people. In this study, the first author organized an IGP following the intergroup contact theory and involved the elderly early in the planning stage. Through this IGP, we conducted questionnaires and interviews with participants to understand how elderly participation in the planning stage could affect both elderly and younger people's experiences.

2.1 Participants

All participants were recruited from an online community focused on active aging in Shanghai Xinhua Community and through WeChat posts. We recruited 13 participants for the planning including seven older adults (60–81 years old, six females and one male). Three of them had participated in over 5 IGPs held by the Active Aging Action Group, three had attended 3–5 IGPs, and one had attended 1–2 IGPs. The six young participants were aged 20–34 years, with five females and one male. Four of them never attended IGPs before, and two had attended 3–5 IGPs (Table 1).

Table 1. Background information of participants.

No.	Age	Gender	Level of education	The frequency of participation in IGPs
A1	70	Female	Senior high school	3–5 times
A2	71	Female	Senior high school	3–5 times
A3	60	Female	Junior high school	Over 5 times
A4	69	Male	Senior high school	Over 5 times
A5	64	Female	Senior high school	1–2 times
A6	72	Female	Undergraduate	3–5 times
A7	81	Female	Junior high school	Over 5 times
B1	24	Female	Postgraduate	3–5 times
B2	28	Male	Undergraduate	Never
B3	24	Female	Postgraduate	3–5 times
B4	34	Female	Postgraduate	Never
B5	34	Female	Undergraduate	Never
B6	22	Female	Undergraduate	Never

2.2 Procedure

The IGP process consists of three phases: planning, organizing, and the event (see Fig. 1).

The Planning: A Workshop for Planning the Event. To involve the elderly in planning IGP, we conducted a planning workshop with both older and younger adults in the community. We arranged the workshop following the “action guidelines of the intergenerational workshop” to ensure the achievement of the goals and the smooth progress of the activities [18].

First, the workshop began with a welcome and introduction session, where the goals and significance of the activities were clarified, enhancing mutual understanding and laying the foundation for collaboration. Second, participants brainstormed and voted to determine the types of activities (see Fig. 2). Both the elderly and young people

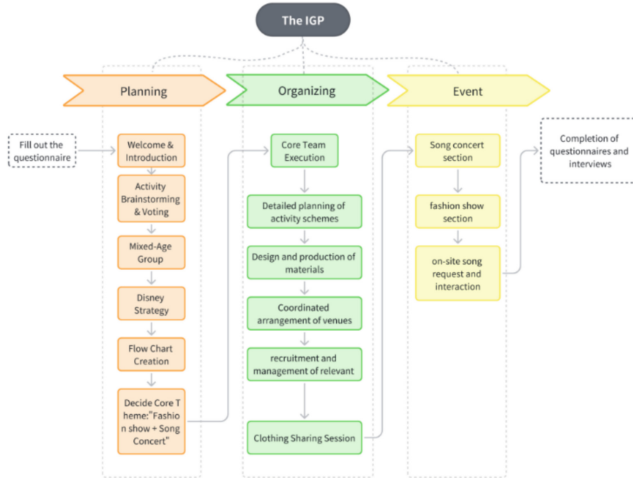


Fig. 1. The IGP procedure.

proposed ideas, which were recorded on a whiteboard for further discussion. Third, after evaluating the feasibility and appeal of each proposal, participants voted to select activities that balanced the elderly's interests with the young's creativity, demonstrating the strengths of cross-generational cooperation.



Fig. 2. Brainstorming & Voting.

In the next phase, a Disney strategy was adopted to design the content of the activities by categorizing the participants into three roles: the dreamer, the realist and the critic. The “dreamer” envisioned ideal scenarios, the “realist” translated these ideas into workable plans, and the “critic” pointed out potential challenges [19]. This approach ensures that the content is engaging and practical.

During the process planning stage, participants collaboratively created a flow chart, outlining specific steps, timelines, and responsibilities. The workshop employed the

PDCA cycle to manage subsequent tasks: “Plan” involved setting goals, focusing on task assignment, “Check” established checkpoints for evaluating progress and quality, and “Act” allowed adjustments based on feedback to refine the plans. Ultimately, participants decided on the core theme of a “Fashion Show + Song Contest,” combining creativity with broad appeal (see Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Outcome of the workshop.

The Organizing: Execution and Coordination. After its establishment, the core planning team quickly engaged in the specific execution and resource coordination of the activities to ensure the smooth progress of all preparatory work. The team handled detailed activity planning, material design, venue arrangements, and personnel recruitment, dividing tasks among members and tracking progress through online platforms. For the key fashion show, an offline clothing matching session was organized, where participants shared dressing suggestions and preferences. The team collected data on clothing sizes and styles through interactions and surveys, ensuring personalized preparations for the event. By aligning with actual needs, the planning team efficiently completed core tasks, integrating resources and laying a solid foundation for the activity’s successful execution.

The Event: A Fashion and Music Celebration. The “Fashion Show + Song Contest” event was successfully held at the Xinhua Community Construction Center, serving as a concentrated display of the achievements of cross-generational cooperation. The event attracted the active participation of all the young people and the elderly who were involved in the planning, and invited community residents as audiences or participants, jointly creating a grand gathering that promoted community interaction and intergenerational communication. The event unfolded around three main sections: the Intergenerational Golden Song Concert, the Fashion Show display, and the on-site song request and interaction.

In the song concert section, the elderly sang classic golden songs, presenting the memories of the era in music; the young people brought popular music, demonstrating their youth and vitality. The performances of the two generations alternated, embodying both the inheritance of intergenerational culture and the charm of different musical styles.

The fashion show section was one of the highlights of the event. Participants, according to the dressing suggestions collected earlier, wore custom-made clothes and took the stage one by one to show off, presenting both their styles and the creative achievements of cross-generational collaboration. Finally, the on-site song request and interaction pushed the event atmosphere to a climax. Residents could not only request their favorite songs but also interact with the performers instantly, further shortening the distance between them.

The atmosphere at the event site was enthusiastic, which not only promoted emotional communication between the two generations but also enhanced the community residents' sense of identity and participation in intergenerational cooperation.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

To evaluate the effects of participation and identify the challenges, we collected data by questionnaires and in-depth interviews.

Questionnaires. This study measured the older participants' self-efficacy, loneliness, self-value, and well-being, younger participants' ambivalent ageism, and all the participants' sense of meaning in life. All these constructions were measured by the five-point Likert Scale. Self-efficacy was measured by the ten-item General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) [20]. Loneliness was measured by the three-item Loneliness Scale (UCLA-LS-3) [21]. Self-value was measured by a six-item self-value scale adapted from the Self-Esteem Scale [22, 23]. Well-being was measured by the three-item Short Depression-Happiness Scale (SDHS) [24]. Ambivalent ageism was measured by the thirteen-item Ambivalent Ageism Scale (AAS) [25]. Sense of meaning in life was measured by the nine-item Meaning in Life Questionnaire (C-MLQ) [26].

We asked participants to complete the questionnaire once before and once after the IGP. Then, we compared the self-reported ratings of these constructions between the two points. A paired t-test was used to examine changes in the sense of meaning in life ($N = 13$). Since the data violates the normality assumption for parametric tests, a Wilcoxon signed rank test, is the non-parametric testing method for within-subject design. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests were applied to assess the differences before and after the IGP in self-efficacy, loneliness, self-value, and well-being for older adults ($N = 7$), as well as ambivalent ageism for younger participants ($N = 6$). These analyses were conducted using IBM-SPSS version 26.

In-Depth Interviews. After the event, we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with the participants individually. Seven elderly and four young participants (B1, B2, B3, B4) participated in the interviews. Our interview questions explored challenges faced by planners, participants' experiences, intergenerational interactions, psychological changes, and suggestions for program improvement. The average interview duration was 40 min. All elderly participants and two younger participants were interviewed face-to-face. The other two young participants were interviewed online via Tencent Meeting.

All interviews were recorded with the participants’ consent. The recordings were transcribed and analyzed by the affinity diagram method. The analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel and Feishu.

3 Findings and Analysis

3.1 Psychological Benefits for Elderly and Young People

The results (see Table 2) showed that older participants reported significantly lower loneliness after the IGP (M = 1.52, SD = 0.42) than before (M = 2.14, SD = 0.81, p = 0.027). They also reported higher well-being after the IGP (M = 4.00, SD = 0.58) than before (M = 3.24, SD = 1.15, p = 0.017) and higher self-efficacy after the IGP (M = 3.59, SD = 0.40) than before (M = 3.31, SD = 0.47, p = 0.034). They reported slightly higher self-value after the IGP, but the increase was not significant (p = 0.102). Younger participants reported significantly lower ambivalent ageism after the IGP (M = 2.88, SD = 0.45) than before (M = 2.72, SD = 0.33, p = 0.041).

Table 2. Self-reported loneliness, well-being, self-efficacy and self-value for elderly and ambivalent ageism for young participants.

	Items	Pre-IGP	Post-IGP	Wilcoxon signed rank test	
		Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Z	P
For elderly	Loneliness	2.14 (0.81)	1.52 (0.42)	2.214	.027
	Well-being	3.24 (1.15)	4.00 (0.58)	-2.388	.017
	Self-Efficacy	3.31 (0.47)	3.59 (0.40)	-2.120	.034
	Self-Value	4.00 (0.66)	4.24 (0.50)	-1.633	.102
For young people	Ambivalent ageism	2.88 (0.45)	2.72 (0.33)	2.041	.041

Additionally, we conducted a paired t-test to compare the self-reported sense of life meaning in young and elderly participants before and after the IGP intervention. Participants perceived a significantly higher level of sense of meaning in life post-IGP (M = 3.44, SD = 0.86) than pre-IGP (M = 2.77, SD = 0.96, t = -2.313, p = 0.039).

3.2 Interview Results for Elderly

Participants’ Gains from the IGP. We identified four main benefits for the elderly: enhanced intergenerational communication, facilitated personal growth, expanded social network and improved psychological impact.

Enhanced Intergenerational Communication. Participating in the activity provided the elderly with opportunities for intergenerational communication. The elderly mentioned appreciation of young people, “*I am very happy to be able to do some activities with you youngsters, to be able to be very enthusiastic and active, and not to mind us.*” (A7) which changed their stereotypes about contemporary young people. Meanwhile, the participation of young people added vitality and creativity (A7). The elderly also learned new things and found that young people and older adults could cooperate well (A1). This communication extended beyond the personal level. The elderly also recognized that young people’s participation positively impacted community activities and expressed gratitude (A7). The elderly felt that cooperation with young people was crucial for enhancing mutual understanding.

Facilitated Personal Growth. Participating in the activity provided the elderly with opportunities for personal growth. They experienced the joy of serving others through the activity and felt a sense of accomplishment from being needed (A2, A3), which strengthened their self-confidence (A1, A2, A3). The elderly also discovered new interests, such as photography (A2), and developed organizational skills and communication abilities. “*Would love to be with you guys, we can learn a little bit too, and the old ones are constantly learning as well.*” (A2). In addition, the activity inspired them to think about lifestyles, such as improving dressing and enhancing temperament (A7).

Expanded Social Network. A major gain for the elderly was expanding their social network. Most participants made new friends, enhancing their sense of belonging through the activity. The activity promoted connections with the community, making them feel a stronger sense of belonging (A1, A2, A3). The elderly also found that community activities could provide a communication platform for people with different interests (A6), which increased their sense of connection with the community (A3).

Improved Psychological Impact. The activity had a positive impact on the elderly’s psychological state. They felt happy and were able to show off the content they participated in with others “*I had a lot of fun and got to brag to people about what activities I was involved in*” (A1), which improved their psychological state (A2). The activity also helped them eliminate loneliness (A1, A6) and strengthened their self-confidence (A3, A6). The elderly gained more enthusiasm and motivation in the positive atmosphere of the activity and felt the innovativeness of the activity (A6).

Problems and Challenges in Planning and the Event. The problems and challenges encountered during the IGP, as reported by the participants, can be classified into the following three main categories: lack of elderly-centered recruitment and motivation, operational barriers to adapting to the elderly, Intrinsic and extrinsic constraints and Intergenerational differences.

Lack of Elderly-Centered Recruitment and Motivation. The elderly expressed a strong interest in participating in the activity but pointed out the problem of insufficient mobilization and encouragement. Lack of participation from male retirees (A5). The elderly who missed the activity due to poor communication or information gaps needed greater motivation and improved information flow (A7). Moreover, the elderly emphasized the importance of strengthening publicity and mobilization to enable more elderly people

to understand the activity content (A7). This indicates that to increase participation, more effective communication channels and incentive measures are needed to attract and mobilize the elderly.

Operational Barriers to Adapting to the Elderly. The elderly highlighted key operational barriers requiring attention for better adaptation. They raised concerns about the activity planning, including the scheduling (A1), the advance notice of activity details (A1, A4), and more elaborate preparations (A2). They also emphasized the significance of reasonable time arrangements to suit the physical and mental conditions of the elderly (A2, A3). In addition, the elderly mentioned the need for professional guidance and financial support in IGP planning (A6), as well as their expectations for the management of the activity process, such as music playback and organization (A4). This feedback suggests that more attention should be paid to details in the activity planning to ensure its smooth progress.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Constraints. Regarding intrinsic constraints, The elderly are concerned about their own physical and psychological limitations. They mentioned insufficient energy (A4) and mobility issues (A2), such as joint pain that made it difficult for them to access the second floor (A2). Additionally, they expressed a lack of self-confidence, as one elder said, “*It’s just that I’m not very confident because even though I didn’t go on stage, I learned a lot from this show.*” (A3) Regarding extrinsic constraints, the elderly highlighted the instability of the organizational staff and the reluctance of young people to participate stably in activities (A3, A6). “*How about getting this young man he doesn’t just flow through like tap water.*” (A3) Which affected the continuity and effectiveness of the events. This feedback highlights the importance of addressing the elderly’s special needs and ensuring staff stability to facilitate smooth activity progress.

Intergenerational Differences. The elderly also pointed out intergenerational differences. They mentioned their lack of understanding of topics related to young people (A4) and their difficulty in keeping up with the pace of young people’s thinking (A3). One elder expressed worry about missing information because they did not check their mobile phones on time (A3). These concerns reveal the need to address communication and inclusiveness issues during activity organization.

Expectations for Future Development. The elderly participants’ main expectations for future activities can be grouped into the following aspects: expectations for activity forms, planning improvements, intergenerational cooperation and activity promotion.

Expectations for Activity Forms. The elderly expressed diverse expectations for the forms of future activities. They suggested incorporating projects such as parent-child interaction(A1), photography (A1, A3), Lego(A1), and flower arrangement (A2, A3). “*I think parent-child activities are quite good, parent-child activities to communicate, you can bring the grandchildren to play.*” (A1) They also showed interest in adding outdoor elements like walking (A2). The elderly expected the activity forms to be more innovative, with increased entertainment, interactive segments such as “*More face-to-face discussions*” (A1, A3), and the integration of modern technology (A6). They proposed combining health management and lifestyle themes, as well as incorporating cultural elements (A6). These expectations reflect the elderly demands for the richness and interactivity of the activity content.

Expectations for Planning Improvements. In terms of planning enhancements, the elderly proposed suggestions such as preparing workshop themes in advance (A1, A6) to enable participants to convey their thoughts more effectively. They also underlined the significance of long-term planning and goal setting (A6), as well as arranging rehearsal time ahead of schedule (A1, A4) to boost the activity's effectiveness. Moreover, the elderly recommended listening more to the participants' opinions (A1, A2) and paying attention to health concerns, such as using anti-allergic cosmetics (A2, A3).

Expectations for Intergenerational Cooperation. The elderly anticipated that future activities could enhance intergenerational interaction (A1, A3, A7), for example, by jointly accomplishing tasks or sharing stories. They believed this would foster communication between the young and the old and invigorate the community (A6).

Expectations for Activity Promotion. Regarding activity promotion, the elderly suggested organizing more activities to draw in more elderly participants (A1) and hoped that community activities could reach a wider range of areas (A1, A6, A7), create a brand effect (A6), and thus attract more participants.

3.3 Interview Results for Young People

Participants' Gains from the Activity. We identified three key gains for the young participants: fostering intergenerational understanding, transforming perceptions of the elderly and enhancing organizational experience.

Fostered Intergenerational Understanding. Young participants noted that the activity strengthened their understanding of intergenerational cooperation. They realized that intergenerational cooperation could serve as a bridge and bond, deepening the connection between different age groups (B1). Through planning and participation in a team, the young participants were able to better understand the thoughts and habits of the elderly (B3, B4). They recognized that the elderly could show interesting programs and have a happy and open time under the right platform and opportunity (B1). This recognition prompts the young participants to pay more attention to the spiritual needs and cultural traditions of the elderly in future activities (B1, B2).

Transformed Perceptions of the Elderly. Young participants expressed a new understanding of the elderly. They found that the elderly are not as resistant to new experiences as expected, showing a strong thirst for knowledge and a desire for interactive communication while striving to avoid being marginalized by society. "*The elderly ideas were interesting and fresh, and their eagerness to learn new things surprised me.*" (B2) Through the activity, the young participants changed their stereotypes of the elderly, recognized the positive attitude towards life and rich life experiences of the elderly, and even regarded them as life mentors (B3, B4).

Enhanced Organizational Experience. The young participants learned a lot during the activity planning and organization process. They realized that when organizing activities for the elderly, it is necessary to consider the habits and feelings of the elderly and pay attention to activity details, such as being intense (B2).

Problems and Challenges in Planning and the Event. The problems and challenges encountered in the activity and planning can be summarized into the following main aspects: challenges in time arrangement for different age groups, cross-generational communication and value differences and lack of clear communication and organizational purpose.

Challenges in Time Arrangement for Different Age Groups. The young participants paid attention to the problem of time arrangement. They were worried that the elderly might not have enough time, and at the same time, they realized that it was difficult for young people to participate due to being busy (B1, B3, B4). This indicates that when planning activities, it is necessary to consider the time availability and physical conditions of different age groups to ensure the inclusiveness of the activity.

Cross-Generational Communication and Value Difference. In communication with the elderly, the young participants found that more listening and understanding were needed to avoid forcibly imposing ideas (B2). They recognized that the values of the elderly might be stubborn and difficult to change, so they suggested attracting those who recognize them by outputting their own values. This emphasizes the importance of adopting a more sensitive and strategic communication method in intergenerational communication.

Lack of Clear Communication and Organizational Purpose. The young participants pointed out the insufficiency of the public welfare organization in information synchronization, which might cause participants to miss the activity and increase the communication cost. *“I feel that the elderly, for online communication, may be less use of cell phones ah. The solution is to try to get in touch with as many people offline as possible.”* (B2) In addition, compared with commercial organizations, the activity organization lacked clear purpose, which might affect the activity results. This indicates that in the activity organization process, it is necessary to improve information transparency and enhance efficiency and participation.

Expectations for Future Development. The expectations for future activities can be summarized into the following main aspects: expectations for activity content and forms, interaction and learning and activity preparation efficiency.

Expectations for Activity Content and Forms. The young participants anticipated a broader spectrum of topics in the activity content, encompassing life discussions, elderly care, health, and family relationships. *“I hope that the event will not only be a fashion show, but also add topics such as life discussions, and output valuable content centered on the needs of the senior population”* (B2). They desired opportunities for expression and participant screening to ensure the depth and practicality of the content. Furthermore, they envisioned more diverse activity forms, such as skill exchanges and life experience-sharing sessions (B4). They believed these forms could attract more young people and foster mutual learning (B3, B4). Additionally, the participants stressed the importance of selecting content that both sides could understand and be interested in to enhance engagement (B1).

Expectations for Interaction and Learning. Young participants particularly emphasized the importance of interaction and learning. They expected that the activity could conceive interesting and mutually attractive links to promote learning between young people and

the elderly (B3, B4). At the same time, the participants valued the activity atmosphere and the sense of gain, hoping that the activity could provide valuable content and skills (B3).

Expectations for Activity Preparation Efficiency. The young participants had expectations for the efficiency of activity preparation, hoping that the preparatory party and the participating party could align the timeline and complete the tasks at each time point on time (B3). This indicates that efficient activity preparation is crucial for improving the satisfaction of participants and the success of the activity.

4 Discussion

4.1 Findings

This study confirms that planning IGP with the elderly benefits both generations psychologically and socially. For the elderly, significant increases in self-efficacy and well-being, as well as reductions in loneliness, highlight the value of social participation and meaningful interactions for improving their psychological health [6, 27, 28]. These results are consistent with existing literature on the positive impact of IGPs on the mental health of elderly people [7, 14, 28]. However, self-value did not significantly improve. This is likely because a single IGP alone cannot enhance self-value, requiring additional interventions to address deeper self-value issues. For younger participants, the decrease in ambivalent ageism suggests that IGPs effectively challenge and change stereotypes and prejudices [3, 29].

For the elderly and young people, significant increases in the sense of meaning in life suggest that IGP participation fosters meaningful connections and enriches their lives. The IGP provides structured opportunities for individuals from different generations to collaborate, share experiences, and learn from one another, directly enhancing their sense of meaning through mutual engagement [5]. Interviews further revealed that both elderly and younger participants in the IGP reaped personal growth and expanded their social networks, highlighting the reciprocal benefits of intergenerational participation.

Despite its positive impact, the IGP presented several challenges and problems during its implementation. Particularly among the elderly population, difficulties in participation, limited access to information, and issues in activity detail management have exposed the need for more targeted and effective strategies. Different health conditions of the elderly lead to diverse needs, highlighting the need to consider individual differences in event design. Moreover, young people also faced many challenges during planning and implementation, such as difficulties in coordinating time, communicating across generations, and organizing events.

4.2 Theoretical Contributions and Design Implications

Theoretical Contributions. The primary contribution of this study is its empirical investigation of the psychological and social benefits of involving older adults in IGP planning. Unlike previous literature that did not focus on the involvement of older adults

in the planning of IGPs [3, 6, 30, 31], this research provides empirical data on significant psychological benefits for older adults involved in planning, such as increased self-efficacy, well-being, and reduced loneliness. It also shows a decrease in ambivalent ageism among young people. The qualitative interviews further elucidate the reasons behind these benefits, highlighting the importance of social participation and meaningful interactions.

This study applies intergroup contact theory within the framework of involving older adults in the planning of IGP, thereby expanding its scope of application [15, 16]. Offering a new perspective on designing more inclusive and effective programs. And provides recommendations for future planning frameworks. Future research can explore the long-term effects of elderly involvement in IGP planning and test the applicability of this approach in diverse cultural and regional contexts.

Design Implications. The findings provide preliminary insights into the elderly's role as planners in IGPs, emphasizing its potential to improve mental well-being and strengthen intergenerational connections. Based on interviews with older adults and younger participants, we propose three design suggestions:

Varied Recruitment and Motivation Strategies. The elderly often miss activities due to limited access to information, while younger participants find recruitment goals unclear. To address this, organizations can adopt hybrid recruitment strategies, such as combining community bulletins [32], phone calls, and social media to provide timely updates. Volunteers can inform the tech-unfamiliar elderly face-to-face. For male retirees, tailored activities like chess tournaments can boost engagement. Clear and meaningful themes in promotion can also attract younger participants.

Flexible Scheduling and Inclusive Participation Strategies. Flexible Scheduling and Inclusive Participation Strategies. Older adults often face physical limitations or scheduling conflicts, while younger participants struggle to balance busy schedules. To address these issues, organizers can break long events into shorter sessions allowing flexible attendance. Low-intensity outdoor activities, such as photography and walks, reduce physical strain while engaging both groups. For those unable to attend in person, online forums enable ongoing conversations between participants. These strategies align with prior research on the importance of allocating time and resources effectively for IGP [33].

Intergenerational Cooperation and Mutual Learning. The elderly felt unfamiliar with youth topics, while younger participants perceived the elderly values as stubborn. To address this, intergenerational skill-sharing workshops can be organized to explore mutual interests. In addition, storytelling sessions can encourage personal experience sharing to foster empathy. Previous studies have also employed storytelling methods, successfully changing the perceptions of both generations toward each other [34].

4.3 Limitations

Despite the findings of this study, there are several limitations that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, with only 13 participants, which may

limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should consider larger and more diverse samples to validate the results. Secondly, the study focused on a specific community in Shanghai, which may not be representative of other regions or cultural contexts. A broader geographical scope could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the benefits and challenges of IGPs. Thirdly, the study's reliance on self-reported measures may introduce subjectivity bias. Incorporating more objective measures, such as behavioral observations or physiological indicators, could strengthen the validity of the findings. Lastly, the study did not explore the long-term effects of elderly involvement in IGP planning. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into the sustainability of the psychological and social benefits observed in this study.

5 Conclusion

This study found that the psychological benefits of the elderly were significantly improved by involving them in the planning of IGPs. Specifically, it was manifested in the increase in well-being, self-efficacy and self-value, and the decrease in loneliness. For young participants, the study revealed a decrease in their ambivalent ageism and an increase in their perception of assistance to the elderly. This shows that the younger generation has a more positive attitude towards the elderly through interaction and cooperation with them. These results support the contact theory, indicating that the interaction between different age groups can effectively reduce prejudice and promote mutual understanding. For the elderly and young people, joining IGP enhances their sense of meaning in life. IGP gives them a chance to work together, share experiences, and learn from each other. This makes them feel more connected and meaningful.

In addition, During the planning and implementation of the IGP, the elderly and the young faced some challenges, such as problems in participation mobilization, detail management, time coordination, and intergenerational communication. These challenges suggest that future projects need (a) varied recruitment and motivation strategies, (b) flexible scheduling and inclusive participation strategies, and (c) intergenerational cooperation and mutual learning, to improve the overall effectiveness of the project.

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