Cross-cultural perspectives on aging, care and community in a local and global context; the cases of Japan and Sweden


Introduction:
Cross-cultural perspectives on ageing and care focusing on Japan, often take the point of departure in traditional family values, based on filial duty, assuming that family care is fundamental. Moreover, it is based on a notion that community care is the nurturing surrounding to harbor family care. With the change triggered by the national long term care insurance (in 2000), the care became socialized, yet this happened within the value system of communities as the ideal place for it to take place. Sweden, in another way emphasizes community care in terms of ageing in place.

Methods:
The study was carried out in different steps during a time span of 2002-2005, centered around qualitative interviews which were analyzed and discussed with literature and official data. We have labeled or method “the joint participation model” as we endeavoured to participate in each others’ empirical studies by visiting the empirical fields, taking part in some interviews in Japan respectively Sweden, doing interpretative discussion on the results and analyzing the results together, in meetings and through e-mail communication.

Results and Discussion:
This paper discusses a cross-cultural comparative research project (2008, Anbäken & Kinoshita et al) from the perspective of 1) ageing and life at home in the community and 2) ageing and life at care homes for older adults. In the case of the first category, how can/do older adults live in an inclusive way in the community? What are their views on the local welfare society? Instrumental, cognitive and activity strategies to cope with ageing in the community were found in both settings. Awareness of care services was told of from various angles, cultural and individual. In the case of the second category, was there a sense of community within the care homes or in relation to their surrounding environment? “Community” may be a farfetched concept within institutions, but when viewing the role of visiting family members, volunteers and staff contributing in a variety of ways, we may label this as a sense of “community” involvement. Can it be maintained to the very last part of life? These are some questions that are asked as we here view the results of the study in the back mirror. While answers are not always clearcut, they shed some new light on the concept of “age friendly society”.

Conclusions:
Both studies (a and b) showed similarities between Japan and Sweden while cultural and structural differences were also found. The importance of having a mentally and physically active life and enough possibilities to exercise selfdetermination and participation (in different ways) in the local society/care homes was seen. The way community care and institutional care were carried out in both countries did not always match the priorities of the older citizens/residents. The need for all levels in eldercare to listen to the voices of older people emerged as a conclusion.

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