

CHAPTER 16

Intergenerational sites: new trends in urban planning, global trends and good practices from the US and beyond

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INTRODUCTION

The most powerful answers to the challenges we face at all levels of society are those that value and enlist the strength of each generation. Yet in the United States and many parts of the world the opportunities to build intergenerational friendships are the exception rather than the rule: for the most part, age segregation prevails. Babies and toddlers are in child-only care centers while children and youth spend their days at school, mostly among peers born the same year they were. Young and middle-aged adults cluster at work. And elders gather for clubs, classes, and meals that often expressly bar the young. Millions of college students and elders live in age-restricted housing (Generations United 2017). These separate spaces do not encourage inclusive societies and cohesive policies that support all generations of a family.

Most communities are multigenerational in their makeup meaning they are home to people of all ages. However, very few are intentionally planned to be inclusive of all generations or to excel at intergenerational engagement. Yet this is what the majority of people in the United States say they want. A 2017 national survey conducted for Generations United and the Eisner Foundation found 77% of respondents wished there were more opportunities in their community for people from different age groups to meet and get to know one another (Generations United 2016).

A study on multigenerational community planning determined that all generations are linked by the need for safe, walkable communities and adequate public transit as well as access to good schools, healthy food, quality child care and senior services (Warner 2010). All elements of a healthy, intergenerational community that takes into consideration the needs of children, families, older adults and people with disabilities.

Fueled by the World Health Organization's Age Friendly guidelines, many local municipalities and countries have embraced efforts to earn an "age friendly" designation. WHO invites "any city or country that is committed to creating inclusive and accessible urban environments to benefit their aging populations are welcome to join."¹ However, few of the roadmaps developed to accomplish this goal include intentional intergenerational engagement opportunities. Instead they generally have a statement that says communities that are good places to grow old in are also good places to grow up. But it is not that easy. Just because a sidewalk

curb that is cut for accessibility is good for a wheel chair and a stroller does not mean their occupants will ever cross paths and meet each other.

Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) is to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. This goal offers the possibility to move from age friendly to all age friendly communities and countries. Among the targets listed for SDG 11 are housing, transportation and “access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older person and persons with disabilities.”² This paper will review efforts underway to create spaces and resources that are shared by multiple generations and actively seek to integrate people across ages to create inclusive societies.

INTERGENERATIONAL SHARED SITES

Intergenerational shared sites provide an ideal blueprint for attacking age segregation and supporting all generations in families. Intergenerational shared sites are settings where children, youth and older adults participate in services and/programs together at the same site or on the same campus.³ There are planned as well as informal interactions between the different age groups. These are not to be confused with multigenerational sites which are those that provide services and/or programs for multiple generations but do not intentionally plan for people to interact outside of their own age group. While participants may cross paths, they do not necessarily interact with each other.

Examples of intergenerational shared sites include, but are not limited to, facilities that house adult day care and child care, a nursing or old age care home with one or more public school classrooms, an upper grade level school with a senior center, a senior housing complex with a youth recreation center or public library, and a housing development for older adults and homeless youth.

Intergenerational sites are thought to be cost effective and save dollars while making good use of available resources. A study by Virginia Tech found the programs saved money in personnel and rent costs which can make up 95 percent of a program’s budget. The report stated “operational costs per participant of shared site facilities with high intergenerational activity levels are the same or less than the operational costs per participant of shared site facilities without high levels of intergenerational activity” (Generations United 2008). Directors of shared sites also report cost savings due to higher staff retention rates. Monte Coffman, executive director of Windsor Place in Coffeyville, Kansas stated the staff turnover rate at his skilled nursing home, which houses a kindergarten classroom, is 26 percent compared to the industry average of 65 to 85 percent.⁴

Preliminary research has shown that intergenerational relationships which are nurtured at share sites have a significantly positive impact on the well-being of each generation. For example one study found preschool children involved in intergenerational programs had higher personal/social developmental scores (by 11 months) than preschool children involved in non-intergenerational programs. They are more likely to learn “soft skills” like patience, empathy,

compassion and sharing. They are as likely to look at someone who is seven or someone who is 77 and see a possible friend. And they are more likely to be accepting of people with disabilities (Rosebrook 2006).

Researchers at a shared site that includes older adults with dementia or other cognitive impairments found they experienced more positive affect during interactions with children than they did during non-intergenerational activities (Jarrott 2003). Another study found older people in shared sites who previously would not participate in activities would come out of their rooms when children arrived and kept better track of time in order to know when the children would be arriving. Older participants also had more energy and ate better when they shared their meals with children. Or as one director at a shared day care site said about the children and seniors “They each rise to meet the expectations of the other” (Lewis 2002). In other words they may be low functioning or acting out but when they came in contact with each other they focused and performed at a higher level.

Other research on intergenerational programs found older adults who regularly volunteer with children burned 20 per cent more calories per week because they were active, experienced fewer falls, were less reliant on canes and performed better on memory tests than their peers (Fried 2004). Such benefits are reflected in a 2016 study published in the *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, which compiled data from 42 nursing home staff within a nursing home planning to implement a shared site intergenerational program. Of the staff, three-quarters either indicated strong positive support or saw more pros than cons in opening the childcare (Weeks 2016).

A creative use of finite community resources can be found in Swampscott, Massachusetts. City officials realized the needs of the town’s elders “overlapped quite neatly with those of its teenagers.” While they did not plan to combine a new senior center with a new high school, the resulting Swampscott High School and Senior Center, which opened in 2007, allowed the city to braid funds from various sources and build a larger, greener facility. It made sense that if the town was going to make a large financial investment, it should meet the needs of residents of all ages.⁵

Interest in intergenerational programming is also growing among senior housing providers in the United States. A recent study by LeadingAge and Generations United found almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the survey respondents saw these as vehicles for connecting residents to the broader community, enhancing the well-being for both youth and older adults, reduce ageism and prepare a future workforce. The researchers went on to say staff in programs that engaged youth reported the youth had a greater understanding of issues faced by older adults while older adults reported feeling less isolated. Both youth and older adults reported increased self-esteem and feeling of self-worth, increased trust across ages, and increased sense of community (Henkin 2017). Generations United and The Eisner Foundation has released a new report, *All In Together* (2018), focused on intergenerational shared sites. It includes the results of a national study of shared sites and a public opinion survey designed to gauge interest in the models. It is available at <https://www.gu.org/resources/all-in-together-creating-places-where-young-and-old-thrive/>.

ACCESSIBLE SPACES

Outdoor space can be an even greater asset when designed to connect generations rather than separate them. For example, KaBOOM! a national non-profit dedicated to ensuring that all kids get a childhood filled with the balanced and active play needed to thrive has seen an increase in multigenerational playgrounds. They found that for adults and children alike, KaBOOM! playgrounds serve as places that build community and allow socialization and interaction across generations (United for All Ages 2018).

Neighborhoods and communities across the United States host intergenerational community gardens. In Washington, DC, Marion Street Intergenerational Garden by City Blossoms started in 2009. Considered a “community learning space,” it involves neighbors and volunteers of all ages transforming the garden and creating educational programs for families and people of all ages.⁶ Facilities have also created intergenerational bridges or pathways to signal the intent to mix age groups. Seniors on Broadway in San Diego County has a safe pathway between the senior housing project and the adjacent Chula Vista Learning Community Charter School making it easier for the elders and young students to visit each other, engage in joint programming and volunteer.

New Bridge on the Charles outside of Boston, Massachusetts is a residential community for older adults that is also home to the kindergarten – eighth grade Rashi School. Operated by Hebrew SeniorLife, an intergenerational pathway, featuring a metal sculpture of youth and older adults, connects to school to the main community. Young and old use the path to volunteer in intergenerational programs.

GLOBAL TRENDS

Intergenerational shared site programs are far from being US-only models. Innovative work is underway around the globe. Singapore, for example, is committed to becoming an age friendly country and promoting more intergenerational facilities to create a more tightly knit community across generations. The Housing Board plans to open 10 complexes that will, in various forms, include childcare and elder centers housed together. The first such kampong, or village, opened in 2017. Kampung Admiralty includes child and elder care as well as community gardens, street level retail, an active aging center and a playground.

Project Spring-Winter, which has the tagline “Integrated Intergenerational Intentional,” is under development in the Dover area of Singapore by St. John’s-St. Margaret’s Church. It will include Spring-childcare for 200 children-and Winter-273 bed nursing home and 100 slots for senior day care. The project’s inspiration is from the Bible Zechariah 8:4-5 “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets.”⁷

In Northern Spain, a team including Dr. Mariano Sanchez from the University of Granada, produced a feasibility study to redesign an old nursing home in a rural village of 3000 people to create an intergenerational hub. They plan to research whether an intergenerational site

can be the right response to counter the dual challenges of providing care to all generations while confronting the out migration of young people and families to urban areas. The project would involve all generations collaborating together to create a vision for the space and their future together.⁸

Researchers in Australia studied the feasibility of intergenerational care in a shared site setting to determine consumer interest and willingness to pay. They found there is a demand for shared campus and visiting campus models (Vecchio 2017).

A 2018 report by the British think tank United for All Ages saw “significant progress” in the “increasing interest in co-location and increasing recognition of the social and economic benefits.” That report, *Mixing matters: how shared sites can bring older and younger people together and unite Brexit Britain*, offers a glimpse into what is possible. The report, which acknowledges many more examples of shared sites in other countries, said the aim is to have 500 shared sites in the United Kingdom to be developed by 2022. “With some 75,000 care homes, nurseries and schools in the UK, there is massive scope for the shared sites challenge to achieve much more,” said the report (United for All Ages 2018).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Intergenerational shared site programs have demonstrated their value in connecting generations, enabling the human interaction that provides purpose for each generation and, at the same time, efficiently use financial and physical resources. What can civil society do then to accelerate the adoption of this approach and increase the number of these programs? Here are a few recommendations.

- Encourage national and local leaders to adopt an age integrated approach to community and urban planning and commit dollars to support the effort. Create an intergenerational council, ministry or task force charged with conducting an intergenerational environmental scan designed to determine what intergenerational programs exist and where the prime opportunities reside.
- Identify barriers, enablers and potential policy solutions to advance intergenerational shared sites.
- Build new alliances between ageing, children and youth sectors to support intergenerational shared sites that build inclusive societies and support families and communities to promote integrated, efficient and responsive support and opportunities for all.
- Commit to country-wide and local goals and action plans to reach the goal of establishing a certain number of intergenerational shared sites within a specific time period.
- Establish and grow the international learning community or collaborative for intergenerational shared site practice and research.

In closing, it is important to remember urban planners, academics, service providers, community leaders, advocates, and elected and appointed officials can all play important roles in designing, retrofitting and reinventing communities to support inclusive societies that value and engage people of all ages. Thoughtfully planned intergenerational use of facilities and space can lead to healthier societies for all.

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Notes

¹ www.who.int/ageing/projects/age-friendly-cities-communities accessed 4/15/18

² Undp.org. Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 11 Targets. Accessed 4/21/18

³ www.gu.org Shared Spaces. Accessed 4/20/18

⁴ Interview conducted on 4/11/18

⁵ Citylab.com. Why a Boston Suburb Combined Its High School and Senior Center. Oct. 12, 2015. Accessed 4/20/18.

⁶ Marion Street Intergenerational Garden accessed at cityblossoms.org 4/21/18.

⁷ St. John’s-St. Margaret’s Church Project Spring Winter. Accessed at psw.susm.org.sg 4/21/18.

⁸ Email exchange with Mariano Sanchez on 4/7/2018