
Intergenerational Communities as Healthy Places for Meaningful Engagement and Interaction

Debra Flanders Cushing and Willem van Vliet

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D.F. Cushing (✉)
School of Design, Creative Industries Faculty, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane,
QLD, Australia
e-mail: debra.cushing@qut.edu.au

W. van Vliet
Community Engagement, Design and Research (CEDaR) Center, University of Colorado, Boulder,
CO, USA
e-mail: willem@colorado.edu

Abstract

Shifting demographics, along with changing family structures and household dynamics worldwide, make it increasingly important to reflect on successful practices that provide opportunities for interaction, engagement, and support across more than two generations. This chapter, therefore, explores three key areas of research: (1) elder-friendly communities, (2) child-friendly communities, and (3) healthy communities, to identify how they align and intersect to form foundations for intergenerational approaches. Instead of a limited view that focuses on the amelioration of age-specific problems, research prioritizes shared principles that promote the development of intergenerational community assets. In addition, there is encouraging evidence suggesting the allocation of policy resources – financial, physical, human – is not necessarily a zero-sum game because intergenerational approaches can produce synergistic outcomes. The chapter concludes with recommendations for additional research.

Keywords

A Neighborhood for All Ages • Age-friendly employment policies • Baby boom • Built environment domains • Buildings • Housing • Outdoor spaces • Built environment domain transportation • Child-friendly city • Building blocks for framework • Definition • Initiative • Co-facilitation methods • Cohousing • Communities for All Ages • Convention on the Rights of Older Persons (CROP) • Cyber Seniors • Elder-friendly communities • Garden Mosaics • Golden Link model • Healthy communities • Home help services • Hope Meadows • Imagining Livability Design Collection • Implementation gap • Intergenerational communities • Aims • Challenges and opportunities • Community benefits • Individual physical benefits • Physical and social barrier reduction • Positive attitudes • Social and built environment • Built environment domains; social domains • Intergenerational community initiatives and policies • International migration • Life-course approach • Life-span approach • Making Connections • Multigenerational bonds • National Center on Grandfamilies • Naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs) • Normative gap • ONEgeneration • Pedestrian safety • Proactive neighborhood planning • Rights-based approaches • Salutogenesis • Shared housing • Social domains • Communication and information • Community support and health services • Employment and civic participation • Social inclusion • Social inclusion • The Marvin • Twin Creeks • Youth bulge • Zoning regulations

1 Introduction

Worldwide, family demographics are shifting. Migration, delayed fertility options, and same-sex partnerships, among others, are affecting household living arrangements in countries around the world. Divorce, temporary labor migrations for one parent, un-partnered childbearing, parental loss due to HIV AIDS or other causes,

and other such life events have led to situations in which children live separate from one parent (Cherlin 2010). In addition, young adults often leave home to head their own households, rather than live with their parents.

In many majority world countries, changes in lifestyle and family structure are intertwined with significant increases in the number of people aged 65 years or older (WHO 2007). Longer life expectancies and better health for aging baby boomers affect both the need for and availability of caregivers. Although elders can be an important source of care for children and grandchildren, they may increase the caregiving responsibilities of adult children, financially and otherwise (Cherlin 2010).

In countries like the USA, multigenerational bonds can be more important than the nuclear family ties experienced in the recent past (Bengtson 2001). For example, grandparents are raising grandchildren for many reasons, including parental drug use (Council on the Ageing in each State and Territory – COTA National Seniors, 2003). In the USA, the population living in multigenerational households grew from 45.3 million in 2006 to 56.8 million in 2012, and in 2009, 16 % of US households headed by an immigrant were multigenerational (Fry and Passel 2014). Grandparents in this situation often face considerable strain when dealing with the additional financial, legal, and social demands of raising children later in life, despite their love and dedication to protecting their grandchildren (p. 8):

Parenting our granddaughter (whom we love with every fibre in our bodies) has meant that we have once again become parents in our 40s [which] has taken the joy out of being grandparents. As I am a working grandmother, I have had to drop and change my shifts (loss of income) to accommodate looking after my granddaughter, as I am her primary carer. I take her to after school activities, assist with homework etc. and I find that by the end of the day I am totally exhausted. (Grandparent couple 46 & 49, Grandchild 9) (p. 29)

In the minority world, the patterns tend to be different. Here, many countries are experiencing what has been referred to as a youth “bulge” (Lin 2012). A similar demographic trend in majority world countries, after World War II, was called a baby “boom,” suggesting a different valuation by those setting the tone for the discourse. Within the minority world, the large and growing share of youthful populations is especially evident in cities. The youth dependency ratio in many African countries is upward of 75 %. And it has been estimated that by 2030, 60 % of the world’s urban population will be 18 or younger and most of the growth will occur in the developing world (Ruble et al. 2003). High rates of rural to urban migration by young people in search of jobs are largely responsible for this trend. Of course, it is only a matter of time before these youthful populations will age and present a new set of challenges for these countries. In the present time, young people in cities in the developing world have diminished social support networks, as their parents usually stay behind in rural areas, where they, in turn, forego the presence of their children, notwithstanding occasional visits and remittances they may receive.

International migration also plays a role in changing household dynamics, as young people from low-income countries seek work in high-income countries. Many

young women from, for example, Mexico, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines are employed as (often live-in) caregivers in more affluent countries like the USA, Germany, Israel, and Singapore (Ayalon et al. 2008; Barken 2014). In addition, young men may leave their homes to pursue earnings in dangerous jobs, with long working hours and substandard living conditions (Zuehlke 2015).

Spurred by these developments, social scientists have shown renewed interest in intergenerational relationships and increased opportunities for interaction and support across more than two generations (e.g., van Vliet 2011; Biggs and Carr 2015). National and local policy-makers in many countries are also giving renewed attention to intergenerational practice to counteract common negative perceptions of aging and to overcome the physical and social segregation of generations (Jarrott 2011; Hatton-Yeo 2010). Against this backdrop, there is a need to identify promising intergenerational practices that may hold lessons and serve as models.

This chapter discusses recent research and current initiatives focused on intergenerational communities. The chapter explores three key areas of recent interest and to identify how they align and intersect to form foundations for intergenerational approaches: (1) elder-friendly communities, (2) child-friendly communities, and (3) healthy communities. The chapter highlights key principles and findings from each of these three areas. The chapter then summarizes key physical and social domains of intergenerational communities, addressing the challenges and possibilities. The chapter concludes by identifying areas where further research is necessary to provide a fuller understanding of intergenerational communities.

2 Elder-Friendly Communities

Aging populations, particularly in majority world countries, and unmet needs of aging households have given rise to a growing interest in “elder-friendly” cities. Scholars emphasize that elder friendliness should address current requirements, as well as plan for the future needs of older community members (Alley et al. 2007). Common focus areas of elder-friendly communities include transportation, housing, health care, safety, and respect for older community members, among others. The importance of each varies among settings and populations. More specifically, it has been suggested that characteristics of an elder-friendly community include:

1. Accessible and affordable transportation, including adequate pedestrian and traffic controls
2. A wide variety of appropriate housing options, including in-home care services
3. Responsive and age-appropriate health care, long-term care, and exercise facilities
4. Safe environments and low crime rates
5. Recognition of and response to the unique needs of seniors, with elders considered to be a vital part of the community and elder-relevant issues present in local agendas

6. A wide selection of accessible and affordable services, including caregiver support services (Alley et al. 2007, p. 7)

These suggestions derive from various sources oriented to the USA (e.g., AARP 2005; Blue Moon 2006; Dumbaugh 2008; Cuyahoga County Planning Commission 2004). However, they are also underpinned by broader conceptual considerations and a global framework for age-friendly cities, endorsed by the World Health Organization (2007), with guides developed in France, Canada, Ireland, Australia, and the USA, among many other countries.

Complementing the need-based approaches referenced above, recent developments include rights-based approaches, consistent with renewed interest in “rights to the city” more generally (Harvey 2003). The Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP), established in 2011, is working toward the development of international instruments to strengthen the rights of older people, including a UN Convention on the Rights of Older People (GAROP 2015).

The 2015 GAROP report, titled “In Our Own Words,” discusses the ageism and discrimination that older people experience (Sleap 2015). Based on consultation with over 2,000 older people from 50 countries, the report describes their personal experiences, highlighting the common occurrence of age discrimination around the world. One participant stated, “I am considered a spent force with nothing left to contribute to society – that I have had my turn and should give way to the youth” (*Male, 70–79 years, Uganda (p. 4)*).

The GAROP participants suggest that generational conflict, partly caused by “a lack of communication and time spent between young and old,” can lead to discrimination against older people (p. 5). Based on this work, one of the key principles suggested for the UN Convention of the Rights of Older People includes the promotion of intergenerational solidarity (p. 6). In addition, to address the discrimination and violation of older people’s rights, the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing was established at the UN General Assembly in 2010 (for more information, see <http://www.rightsofolderpeople.org/open-ended-working-group/>). This approach addresses the needs of a specific, age-delineated target group and is similar to efforts focused on creating child-friendly communities. The next section briefly reviews this work.

3 Child-Friendly Communities

Extensive literature exists on the experience, needs, and participation of children and youth in community settings (e.g., Chawla 2002; Driskell 2002; Woolcock and Steele 2008). Much of this research is aligned with the child-friendly city work first developed under the auspices of UNICEF, which defined a child-friendly city as:

... a city, or any local system of governance, committed to fulfilling children's rights. It is a city where the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children are an integral part of public

policies, programmes and decisions. It is, as a result, a city that is fit for all. (Child Friendly Cities Initiative, www.childfriendlycities.org)

In 1996, the *Child-Friendly Cities Initiative* (CFCI) was launched to implement a resolution passed during the second *UN Conference on Human Settlements* (Habitat II) and make cities livable places for all (Riggio 2000). This initiative marked a turning point in how young people were perceived in the community, as valuable community members rather than “objects of protection” (Wilks 2010, p. 27). The UNICEF CFC Secretariat at Innocenti took the lead in developing a framework for defining and creating a child-friendly city and to address a range of needs (Schulze and Moneti 2007). The initiative framework includes nine building blocks:

1. Promote **children’s participation** and active involvement to ensure the views of young people are heard and taken into consideration in decision-making processes
2. Create a **child-friendly legal framework** to ensure the rights of children are protected in legislation and regulatory frameworks
3. Develop a **city-wide children’s right strategy** to ensure the development of a comprehensive strategy for the entire municipality based on the CRC
4. Establish a **children’s right unit or coordinating mechanism** to ensure children’s perspectives are given priority
5. Conduct a systematic **child impact assessment and evaluation** to assess the impact of law, policy, and practice on children throughout the process
6. Establish a **children’s budget** to ensure adequate resource commitment for children
7. Produce a **regular state of the city’s children report** to ensure systematic monitoring of the state of all children in the municipality
8. **Making children’s rights known** and ensuring that information about children’s rights is disseminated to all children and adults in the municipality
9. Support the **independent advocacy for children** by nongovernmental organizations and human rights institutions to promote children’s rights (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre 2004).

Associated with these building blocks are checklists for assessment by children, adolescents, parents, service providers, and child advocates. Although earlier CFC work included explicit reference to aspects of place, the later framework is mainly procedural and organizational, intended to guide governance structures and processes that are responsive to children’s rights. Nonetheless, much practice and research intended to support child-friendly cities has been oriented to the design of the physical environment, planning of public spaces, improving mobility, enhancing access to the natural environment, and life chances more generally. These physical environment characteristics, as well as the social environment context, are important to the well-being of young people and elders alike. Therefore, the next section will discuss work related to healthy communities more broadly.

4 Healthy Communities

Ultimately, elder- and child-friendly initiatives focus on the health and well-being of all residents. They include efforts to support physical, psychological, and social well-being. Therefore, healthy communities are an area of potential convergence.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines a healthy city as:

One that is continually creating and improving those physical and social environments and expanding those community resources which enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life and developing to their maximum potential. (Health Promotion Glossary 1998)

People are healthier when they are part of a community that offers possibilities for healthy living that are aligned with the realities of their life and support their everyday activities (Kang 2015). Common daily activities include those needed to meet basic needs. A healthy city also features “community participation and empowerment, intersectoral partnerships, and participant equity” (WHO 2015). Recognizing that the physical design of cities is critical for the health and well-being of its residents as well, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014) in the USA promotes healthy community design, improving people’s health, by focusing on the following:

- Enabling and encouraging physical activity
- Reducing injury
- Increasing access to healthy food
- Improving air and water quality
- Minimizing the effects of climate change
- Decreasing mental health issues
- Strengthening the social fabric
- Providing fair access to livelihood, education, and resources

More broadly, salutogenesis, a term coined by medical sociologist, Aaron Antonovsky, is an approach that focuses on health promotion within the built environment rather than the treatment of disease. Salutogenic design incorporates principles that promote health and well-being and relies on the sense of coherence construct, which references people’s ability to comprehend, manage, and cope with their environment (Antonovsky 1996). This model is consistent with current place-making efforts that focus on coherence, vitality, and functionality in designed spaces.

Creating healthy communities can help realize the synergistic potential of approaches to creating elder-friendly and child-friendly communities and can inform practice and guide research on intergenerational communities. Instead of a limited view that focuses on the amelioration of age-specific problems, it is preferable to identify shared principles that promote the development of intergenerational

community assets. In this vein, a study of European cities found that the WHO Healthy Aging Network encourages its members to adopt a healthy aging approach, rather than a more traditional orientation to illness and dependency (Green 2013). The next section describes research on intergenerational communities and their linkage with healthy communities.

5 Intergenerational Communities

The WHO (2007) promotes a broad focus on age friendliness, which “encourages active aging by optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age” (p. 5). Importantly, it acknowledges that aging is a lifelong process. Therefore, an age-friendly community as defined by the WHO is not simply “elderly-friendly” but a community that provides benefits and opportunities to all members (p. 6). Within this paradigm, in 2007, the WHO developed the *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide* as a platform for active aging, and in 2010, it launched the Global Network on Age-Friendly Cities with 33 participating cities (Biggs and Carr 2015).

Intergenerational practice involves three important commonalities: people of different generations participate; participation involves activities aimed at goals that benefit everyone; and the participants maintain relations based on sharing (Buffel et al. 2014, p. 1786). The International Consortium for Intergenerational Programs (ICIP) supports the development of intergenerational practice in the UK through “mutually beneficial activities, which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contributes to building more cohesive communities” (Beth Johnson Foundation 2001). To engage elders with and on behalf of vulnerable families with children, the Viable Futures Center has created a useful resource guide that includes ideas for policy and practice (JustPartners Inc. 2012).

Intergenerational cities should not be confused with multigenerational cities. The latter focus on addressing the needs of each age group separately and are representative of current trends to segregate populations by age in schools, workplaces, and housing (MacCallum et al. 2010). The former seek to foster meaningful engagement between generations (Kaplan et al. 2007). Yet, in countries such as Australia, intergenerational practice is relatively new compared to youth-focused practices that involve older adults (MacCallum et al. 2010).

Intergenerational programs often focus on reducing the physical and social barriers between seniors and young people (MacCallum et al. 2010). According to Generations United, a public policy organization in the USA, in the best intergenerational communities, “individuals of all ages are an integral and valued part of the setting” (Generations United 2015a). Research has found that young and elderly people both benefit from projects facilitating intergenerational exchange (MacCallum et al. 2010). The next section discusses these various benefits.

6 Benefits of Intergenerational Communities for Health and Well-Being

Research has shown individual psychological benefits of intergenerational interactions. A study of social interactions between adults and adolescents found that adolescents who worked with an older person on a difficult life problem showed much more pro-social behavior than adolescents who worked with a peer on a difficult life problem (Kessler and Staudinger 2007). Another study reported that more frequent contact, greater grandparent involvement in adolescents' lives, and better parent–grandparent relationships predicted adolescents' reports of higher levels of emotional closeness to, importance of, and respect for their closest grandparent's views (Attar-Schwartz et al. 2009). Research has also found less negative risk taking with alcohol and drugs among teens who have strong relationships with older adults (Kennison and Ponce-Garcia 2012). Of interest as well is a pre-post study that found that an intergenerational service-learning course dispelled myths about aging and reinforced career choices among undergraduate students in adult development (Blieszner and Artale 2001).

Intergenerational interaction can foster positive attitudes. An experimental study of pre-post cross-generational attitudes among adolescents and older adults found more positive attitudes in both groups following 1 h of dyadic or triadic contact for 6 weeks. The older participants also reported higher life satisfaction (Meshel and McGlynn 2004). Similar results were obtained by Gaggioli et al. (2014), who found that intergenerational group reminiscence is a potentially effective activity to improve psychosocial well-being and the quality of life in healthy older adults and to improve the way younger generations perceive the elderly (see also Au et al. 2015). This finding is consistent with the more positive attitudes to people with dementia reported by college students in a gerontology service-learning course (Yamashita et al. 2013) and positive observations of an intergenerational playgroup program involving persons with dementia (Skropeta et al. 2014).

6.1 Individual Physical Benefits

The policy framework set forth by the WHO in 2002 supports active aging (Green 2013). This life-course approach focuses on the premise that activity and healthy lifestyle changes in early and mid-life can reduce disability in older age. Healthy communities, therefore, should include spaces designed to support physical activity by both young and old. Parks can be designed with attractive and intriguing spaces for children, while also providing opportunities for adults to be active at the same time, thus benefitting both age groups rather than just one.

Recent developments show encouraging examples of such intergenerational public spaces, including supportive programming and facilities. For example, Fox Valley Park District in Illinois, USA, provides separate programs for young and elder community members, while also creating programs that embrace the family dynamic. ONEgeneration, a private nonprofit in California, also focuses on

intergenerational activities at their shared-site facility. The program offers day care for frail seniors, kindergarten students, and preschool children, bringing the groups together daily for movement, art, cooking, and music activities (Smith 2010).

6.2 Community Benefits

The literature on child- and elder-friendly communities identifies easy and safe access to spaces and facilities as one of the desirable characteristics in the environment. It is clear that characteristics such as this are good not only for children and elders but benefit other population groups as well. The WHO highlights many community-wide benefits experienced when a community enhances mobility and independence, increases security, fosters a sense of confidence to enjoy active leisure and social activities, reduces stress, and encourages volunteering and community engagement (WHO 2007).

Many older adults are committed, long-term community residents, who invest their energy into local issues that concern them. Communities that do not meet the needs of older people may forego significant benefits, such as a loss in their volunteer pool, higher stress levels for family caregivers, and increased levels of institutionalization (Alley et al. 2007).

During an intergenerational conference held in Massachusetts, USA, that incorporated an intergenerational community-organizing model, participants felt a sense of deep connection and mutual affirmation with each other, which in turn resulted in a sense of empowerment and collective efficacy (Kang 2015). Co-facilitation methods, during which adult educators teamed up with youth leaders, were most effective when youth were involved in the full process (p. 134). This partnership also fostered leadership skills for the participating youth.

Similarly, communities also see increased efficiencies when the needs of children and elders are jointly considered. For example, shared-site facilities reduce the need for separate, age-segregated buildings and, hence, decrease associated construction and maintenance costs, while fostering intergenerational cohesion.

7 What Does an Intergenerational Community Look Like?

Scholars have noted that the physical environment plays a critical role in creating an intergenerational community, yet it is lacking research attention (Kaplan et al. 2007). Older people usually prefer to age in place (Scharlach 2009) (Scharlach and Lehning 2013), which requires a physical context that accommodates their needs. However, they often experience declining capacity for independent living, and their ability to participate in community life and maintain their independence depends largely on accessible infrastructure and social resources (Alley et al. 2007).

Research has emphasized the importance of the social and built environment and the relationship between the two (Alley et al. 2007). The aim of intergenerational urban space should be to “enhance social and emotional understanding between age

groups, increase harmony and reduce generational conflict” (Biggs and Carr 2015, p. 10). In addition, research in Australia found that “intergenerational programs involve active engagement and participation of multiple generations” (MacCallum et al. 2010, p. 121).

The importance of both the social and built environment is also highlighted by the WHO’s eight key aspects of age-friendly cities. They include four built environment domains: (1) transportation; (2) housing; (3) outdoor spaces; and (4) buildings, and four aspects related to the social and cultural environment: (5) social participation, respect, and social inclusion; (6) civic participation and employment; (7) communication and information; and (8) community support and health services (WHO 2007, p. 9). These eight domains are also emphasized by the “AARP Age-Friendly World Tour” that provides a global overview of efforts to make communities more age friendly (Turner 2014). The following section discusses each of these key areas in greater detail.

8 Built Environment Domains

The design of environments must meet the needs of the elderly and youth and accommodate and encourage beneficial use. A study of the WHO European Healthy Aging Cities Network found that member cities focused heavily on the supportive physical environments as the context for supporting healthy lifestyle choices (Green 2013). Therefore, we next discuss built environment characteristics that can help form the context of intergenerational communities.

8.1 Transportation

Safety, reliability, accessibility, and convenience are vital considerations for the design of community transportation systems. In addition, the provision of well-designed walking and cycle paths is an important characteristic of a health-promoting, age-friendly community (WHO 2007). However, the design of many communities necessitates travel by automobile to meet everyday needs and can therefore be socially and physically isolating for people who are either too old or too young to drive themselves (Scharlach 2009).

For populations with limited incomes, such as the elderly and youth, the ability to navigate a community’s physical environment is often linked to the cost of living. Young people are restricted by transportation options if they cannot drive and cannot afford available public transportation options. Many communities subsidize public transportation by providing free or reduced rates on bus and train passes for seniors and school-age youth (WHO 2007). However, these subsidies can also contribute to a general concern that elderly populations create an economic burden on other groups (Buffel et al. 2014).

Safety for pedestrians is also a major concern for many cities. For example, in New York City, people aged 65 and older comprised 13 % of the population in 2001

yet represented 33 % of the pedestrian fatalities (Buffel et al. 2012, p. 602). Local authorities need to create safe, pedestrian-friendly streets with traffic-calming designs and sidewalks that effectively and efficiently connect residential areas to parks, public spaces, schools, and community amenities. In addition, street crossings must accommodate slow-moving pedestrians and give them ample time to safely cross the street (Scharlach 2009). In the USA, cities across the country are developing initiatives to create more walkable communities (Weidt 2015). This also makes good business sense. A recent study found that between 2010 and 2015, nearly 500 companies in over 170 different industries in the USA relocated or expanded to downtown locations with higher walkability scores (Smart Growth America 2015). The 2015 National Community and Transportation Preference Survey also found that 79 % of respondents indicated that being within walking distance of amenities such as parks and shops was an important factor in the decision of where to buy a home (National Association of Realtors 2015).

Proactive neighborhood planning and beneficial design principles are behind examples such as the Dutch “woonerf” (Karsten and van Vliet 2006), the British home zone (Gill 2006), and cyclovía initiatives, which have spread from Colombia to Peru, France, Italy, the USA, and elsewhere (Morhayim 2012). By prioritizing nonmotorized transportation, these solutions provide alternatives to traditional streets designed primarily to accommodate cars (Mehta 2013).

The Imagining Livability Design Collection produced by the AARP Livable Communities Group, in association with the Walkable and Livable Communities Institute, contains suggested tools for creating an age-friendly physical community environment (Morphy and Ping 2015). The tools include short-term, mid-range, and long-range projects, as well as planning and policy suggestions. Some of the design ideas are fairly common, such as incorporating street trees and mixed-use development, while others are more innovative versions of traditional design ideas such as parklets and pocket parks, modern and mini-roundabouts, and lane narrowing. The policy suggestions include concepts such as “complete streets,” in which streets are designed to accommodate sidewalks, bicycle lanes, bus lanes, accessible public transit stops, safe crossing opportunities, median islands, curb extensions, narrower travel lanes, and more (p. 15). Form-based codes, health impact assessments, and place-making concepts are also recommended to foster healthier and more usable public spaces for intergenerational use.

8.2 Housing

Baby boomers in the USA have shown a preference for aging in place as long as possible (Kennedy 2010). Principles of universal design facilitate staying in one’s own home when functional impairments would otherwise make this difficult or impossible (for a summary of universal design principles, see <http://nhi.org/online/issues/148/housingforall.html>). Home help services can further support this option. Whether aging in place helps create intergenerational communities depends partly on local population composition and turnover. In homogeneous communities,

comprising largely the same age group, naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs) are likely, which require supportive programs and community structures (Vladeck and Altman 2015; Capps 2015).

Another way to accommodate multiple generations in one place is to expand the selection of housing options and create places that attract both young and older people. There is a need for innovative housing models that are physically and socially integrated into existing communities (Kennedy 2010). Among these models, various forms of shared housing are getting attention. For example, students of the Cleveland Institute of Music live among a much older generation of neighbors in the Judson Manor senior citizen community (McIntyre 2014). Similarly, a retirement home in Deventer, a town in the Netherlands, offers local university students free housing in exchange for spending at least 30 h per month with its senior residents. They accompany them on shopping trips, prepare meals, play games, or simply spend time and talk (AFP 2014). In Spain, Barcelona City Council, Obra Social De Caixa Catalunya and the Universities of Barcelona, Pompeu Fabra and Ramon Llull, got together to test the idea of housing their students in the homes of older people. Started in 1996–1997 with around 20 older people, it has grown to a fully consolidated program across Spain, operating in 27 cities in seven autonomous communities (Pinto et al. 2009).

Cohousing is also gaining interest as an option for intergenerational living with a growing number of examples in Europe as well as the USA (Korkki 2013). In addition to accommodating a wide range of living arrangements (e.g., shared housing, cooperatives, cohousing), these models should also encompass intergenerationally shared public spaces. In Singapore, the Housing and Development Board provides public housing to promote intergenerational support among extended family members, enabling married children and parents to live in adjoining flats (Thang 2015). The next section describes the research on intergenerational outdoor spaces.

8.3 Outdoor Spaces

In many countries, zoning regulations typically support low-density, automobile-dependent urban growth patterns that have restricted transportation options and narrowed housing choices (Kennedy 2010). Yet, an age-friendly community should include multifamily buildings and mixed-use neighborhoods that bring different ages together and closer to daily services (Scharlach 2009). Local governments must remove regulatory barriers that hinder community livability and shared-use sites while establishing regulations for good community design for healthy living, sustainable transportation, and social interactions (van Vliet 2011).

By creating well-designed public spaces community design can support social cohesion and opportunities and inspiration for meaningful engagement between generations (Kaplan and Haider 2015). For example, parks and urban squares can facilitate social interactions between generations and increase opportunities for intergenerational play and active living. Intergenerational, shared spaces offer

children, youth, and older adults the opportunity to participate in joint programs and interact with each other. Interactions may be formal during programmed activities or informal due to the proximity of usable areas (Generations United 2005). For example, the Housing and Development Board estates in Singapore also offer colocated adult fitness facilities and playgrounds to promote intergenerational recreational activities and “void decks” which are empty spaces on the ground floor of a complex that can serve various purposes and have the potential to create opportunities for intergenerational interactions (Thang 2015, p. 22). Despite the value of these types of shared spaces, as Solomon (2014) points out, most research on intergenerational activities and spaces has been limited to institutional settings.

Nonetheless, some innovative open space designs are beginning to take shape. For example, the demographically diverse transit-oriented development of Twin Creeks in Oregon, USA, is working with Age-Friendly Innovators Inc. to design an intergenerational park that will accommodate both younger and older residents to promote physical activity for age-diverse abilities (for information, see <http://agefriendlyinnovators.org/intergenerational-park/>). Also important in this regard are the provision of green infrastructure and easy access to nature (Sullivan et al. 2004). For example, Garden Mosaics is a US-based youth and community program, also implemented in South Africa, that incorporates youth participation and engages young people in learning from elders, many of whom are immigrants, about growing food in urban gardens (Liddicoat et al. 2007).

8.4 Buildings

Buildings that are accessible through the inclusion of elevators, escalators, ramps, wide doorways, nonslip flooring, rest areas, adequate and clear signage, and public toilets are important characteristics for an age-friendly community (WHO 2007, p. 16). Although toilet facilities, clear signage, elevators, ramps, and similar features are common requests for aging people with limited mobility, many of these characteristics are important for families and young people as well.

Buildings that serve as community schools can provide an opportunity for intergenerational exchange to connect and educate individuals of different ages. A study of an intergenerational school in Ohio, USA, established in 2000, describes the school as the context for multiage intergenerational learning. Local high school students, college students, adults, and seniors mentor primary school students on a daily basis. In addition, all classes make routine visits to local-assisted living facilities and take joint trips to local attractions. Qualitative findings show that, as a result, seniors with mild symptoms of dementia expressed an elevated quality of life as indicated by greater cognitive stimulation and improvement in mood and an increased sense of purpose and usefulness due to the educational mentoring (George et al. 2011).

9 Social Domains

An intergenerational community must encourage connectedness and involvement through various means. Social participation and social support are important in maintaining health and well-being and often contribute to developing competence, enjoying respect and esteem, and maintaining or establishing supportive relationships (WHO 2007).

9.1 Social Inclusion, Participation, and Respect

Social inclusion is an important aspect of intergenerational communities that promotes the health and well-being of its residents:

Independence alone is not enough if we want to improve the quality of life of older people and tackle exclusion. Everyone, including older people, has the right to participate and continue throughout their lives having meaningful relationships and roles. Older people's vital role and responsibility to help build social capital will become ever more apparent as our society ages. (A sure start to later life- Communities and Local Government, 2006 as quoted in Harding 2007, p. 12)

In addition, intergenerational exchange often provides opportunities for participants to break down barriers and develop new understandings of one another (MacCallum et al. 2010). Research has found adolescents' attitudes toward the elderly become more positive after increased contact with older adults (Meshel and McGlynn 2004). In addition, reducing the "invisibility" of children and elders will help nurture "intergenerational empathy" (Biggs and Carr 2015, p. 10). Further, an evaluation of a science-based intergenerational program with at-risk fourth graders in the USA found that school-based activities can improve attitudes toward the elderly and can facilitate improvement in children's school-based behaviors (Cummings et al. 2003). The study concluded that the use of a structured setting and the avoidance of death-oriented discussions contribute to positive effects.

9.2 Community Support and Health Services

When people get to know one another and begin, often in very small ways, to take responsibility for making their community a better place, they create a socially sustainable web of support. Generations can work together to improve their neighborhoods in a variety of ways that create and strengthen feelings of intergenerational solidarity and community belonging (Hatton-Yeo 2007).

Intergenerational practice is instrumental in facilitating relationships between people who would not otherwise be connected (MacCallum et al. 2010). Neighbors of all ages may begin to watch out for one another and reduce risk factors for crime and violence. Such approaches contrast with deficit-based perspectives that focus

narrowly on problems, seeking instead to build on the developmental assets of children and youth and the communities in which they live (Scales et al. 2001).

Intergenerational exchange also fosters both “bonding” and “bridging” social capital (MacCallum et al. 2010). For example, Hope Meadows is a planned intergenerational community containing foster and adoptive parents, children, and senior citizens. In Hope Meadows, adopted and foster children find a home, parents, grandparents, playmates, and an entire community designed to help them grow up in a secure and nurturing environment. In exchange for reduced rent on an apartment, senior citizens volunteer as “honorary grandparents” at least 6 h per week to act as crossing guards and tutors and to read aloud, play cards, or play board games with children (Smith 2001). Hope Meadows inspired a similar development in Portland, Oregon, USA, on the site of a former elementary school (Macht 2013).

In another example, in intergenerational community support, at The Marvin in Norwalk, Connecticut, USA, congregate senior housing with optional assisted living services shares a single facility with an accredited school readiness and childcare program. Community activities dispel stereotypes and build relationships – educational experiences for all age groups, exercise programs, gardening, holiday activities, and more (Under One Roof 2012).

Ample research testifies to the beneficial health outcomes of social capital formation (Kawachi and Berkman 2000). Recent research in 14 European countries suggest that policy interventions should target individual social capital to achieve the double effect of improving personal health and enhancing community social capital, as well as supporting an asset-based approach (Rocco and Suhrcke 2012). The ways in which communities are designed affect opportunities for forming and maintaining social capital and, thus, population well-being (Eicher and Kawachi 2011).

9.3 Employment and Civic Participation

Older people represent a significant economic resource in the community when they continue to be active later in life. They often continue working longer, volunteer for community organizations, care for others, and take on civic duties (Harding 2007). Older people are often eager and willing to work and have job qualifications but may face barriers such as age limits, retirement requirements, and a lack of flexible work options (WHO 2007).

Age-friendly employment policies will enable older adults to adjust their working schedule and responsibilities, without losing their benefits or seniority (Scharlach 2009). Similarly, child-friendly policies will provide opportunities for youth to compete for entry-level jobs and gain skills necessary for future employment.

Seniors can also contribute their skills as volunteers in schools and the community at large. Examples in the USA include the models developed by Experience Corps and Seniors4Kids, which engage older adult tutors with young students in disadvantaged schools to support literacy and tap into the experience of older community members (for more information see <http://www.aarp.org/experience-corps/>).

9.4 Communication and Information

Intergenerational communication can impact one's ability to establish satisfying relationships and communicate with others effectively (Giles et al. 2010). It can be especially important within the workplace setting. The sharing of experience-based knowledge between younger and senior workers is important as workforce demographics shift and the recognition of the competence of older workers becomes critical (Hilson and Ennals 2007).

Models such as the "Golden Link" were developed to increase active aging and counteract views of seniors as problems while promoting the use of technology. The model employed a simple dialogic technique to connect the computer skills of younger workers with the experience-based competencies of the senior workers (p. 36). Similarly, the documentary *Cyber Seniors* shares the experience of a group of senior citizens who take their first steps into cyberspace under the tutelage of teenage mentors (Rusnak and Cassaday 2015).

The preceding brief descriptions of built and social environment characteristics point to interventions that support healthy communities across the life-span. However, some have questioned the value of universal checklists for characterizing age-friendly cities given the complexities and unique characteristics of cities and of population groups (Buffel et al. 2012). It is, therefore, helpful to develop a better understanding of the practices that support intergenerational communities. To that end, the next section describes select policies and initiatives in an international context.

10 Policies and Initiatives that Promote Intergenerational Communities

Community planning efforts often focus on the needs of specific population groups seen to be most in need. For example, many US communities are committing themselves to becoming more "child- and youth-friendly" through the creation of youth master plans (Cushing 2014), while other communities are adopting plans to become "elder-friendly" through the creation of master plans for seniors (Alley et al. 2007), embracing principles that are often very similar. Although these community plans may address intergenerational issues, it is also important to identify community initiatives and policies created intentionally to address *all* age groups and develop a shared vision of livability.

In 1989, the UN General Assembly ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). To monitor and support its implementation, a Committee on the Rights of the Child was established, and, in 1996, the UN International Emergency Children's Fund (UNICEF) launched the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) (Riggio 2000; van Vliet 2008). From a policy perspective, child-friendly city programs are more firmly grounded in a rights-based approach (Chawla and Van Vliet *in press*) than age-friendly programs (Biggs and Carr 2015), likely due to the widespread ratification of the UN CRC.

Around the world, there is growing support for the creation of a similar Convention on the Rights of Older Persons (CROP). These efforts draw attention to the lack of specific, international human rights legislation that protects against age discrimination, referred to as a “normative gap” in existing global conventions. Older people also remain invisible in the new Universal Periodic Review system through which the Human Rights Council monitors implementation, referred to as the “implementation gap” (HelpAge International 2010). CROP would provide an explicit, legal framework for governments to ensure the protection of older people’s rights.

10.1 Initiatives

Empowerment of elders and acknowledgment of their agency in urban development are gaining currency. Yet, mistaken notions of predominant dependence remain an issue (Boermel 2006; Vera-Sanso 2006). The following section describes several initiatives around the world that incorporate intergenerational practice.

The Communities for All Ages, an initiative in the USA, promotes a life-span approach that “emphasizes values of interdependence, reciprocity and collective responsibility” (Brown and Henkin 2014, p. 63). The initiative represents an asset-based, community-wide, multiagency effort that intentionally brought together diverse people of all ages to promote age-integrated approaches instead of age-segregated approaches (Henkin et al. 2005). Through intergenerational assessment tools, the 23 participating project sites identified common issues of concern and created an action plan that developed alliances across diverse organizations; engaged community members of all ages in leadership roles; created places, practices, and policies that promote interaction across all ages; and addressed issues from a life-span perspective. Outcomes experienced by the project sites include the creation of opportunities to match complementary skills and needs, investment in community improvement efforts by all generations, and counteracting the negative effects of age segregation (Brown and Henkin 2014, p. 65).

Lifetime communities in the UK focus on providing all residents with the best chance of health and well-being, as well as social, civic, and economic engagement (Harding 2007). Within this model, elderly people are seen not only as beneficiaries of quality environments but are active creators as well. In addition, lifetime communities focus on many of the themes identified in other initiatives, such as social cohesion and sense of place, built environment, social inclusion, innovation and cross-sectoral planning, housing and services and amenities (p. 8). Within lifetime communities, lifetime homes form an essential component of the physical environment. Developed in the 1990s by Habinteg Housing Association and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, lifetime homes incorporate 16 design criteria primarily related to access and circulation and based on principles of inclusivity, accessibility, adaptability, sustainability, and good value (Habinteg 2010).

Support for grandparents that are caring for grandchildren are a focus for some organizations. Generations United in the USA has established a National Center on Grandfamilies to enact policies and promote programs addressing the challenges

faced by households headed by grandparents and other relatives (Generations United 2015b). Similarly, in Victoria, Australia, the YMCA (2015) sponsors the League of Extraordinary Grandparents. Supported through donations, the program enables grandparents and grandchildren to attend a 3-day camp to have a much-needed respite from daily challenges, receive information about support services, develop social networks, and focus on their personal well-being.

Other initiatives focus on the neighborhood scale. For example, the Netherlands Institute of Care and Welfare developed a 3-year intergenerational program called “A Neighborhood for All Ages” to promote intergenerational work within local social policy (Penninx 2003). The monitoring program determined policy goals for intergenerational practice: greater safety in public spaces, reinforcement of the pedagogical infrastructure around young people, and more cohesion between policies aimed at housing, care, and welfare for senior citizens (p. 106).

Similarly, “Making Connections,” a 10-year-long initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, fosters intergenerational dynamics within disadvantaged neighborhoods in cities across the USA (Hebert 2014). The initiative provides various kinds of assistance to communities, such as flexible financial assistance, leadership development support, peer networking, and result-based accountability training. Participating communities have seen many capacity improvements for children, families, and neighborhoods, although they have yet to see population-level change. The initiative produced important lessons related to creating mechanisms for ongoing resident participation, developing skilled resident leadership as drivers of accountability, building essential change capacities across networks of organizations, and addressing the difficulties that communities experience such as dysfunctional systems and practices (p. 32).

11 Intergenerational Communities: Challenges and Opportunities

The literature identifies various challenges to introducing intergenerational practices into community planning. Yet, each of these challenges also represents an opportunity to improve the understanding and success of intergenerational practice. First, there is still limited understanding of the direct impact that intergenerational strategies have at the community level, which may be due, in part, to inadequate monitoring and evaluation of intergenerational practices (Buffel et al. 2014). This limited understanding can be addressed through educational and awareness raising initiatives, as well as research to provide additional evidence of the impact of intergenerational communities.

Second, stakeholders typically have organizational missions and mandates that are age specific, rather than broadly focused on intergenerational opportunities. Organizations representing the interests of aging populations may offer in-home services, whereas youth-serving organizations may focus on skill development programs. These missions are also aligned with separate funding streams earmarked for the age groups they serve (Henkin and Butts 2002). Funds are often allocated to

organizations for specific activities and specific target populations. Even if they are inclined to collaborate across age groups, organizations may be restricted from doing so by their financial statutes and contractual obligations.

Third, children and youth as well as elders may be in situations of disadvantage and marginalized as a result. Particularly, those of low incomes and minority backgrounds are often in the social and economic margins of society. Age discrimination and financial constraints can limit the availability and accessibility of resources and social networks in a community (Green 2013). As a practical implication of these mobility restrictions, the logistics of social interactions and community or program participation become more difficult (Dickerson et al. 2007; Sanderson and Richards 2010). For youth, school schedules present additional constraints that limit their participation in daytime intergenerational activities.

Yet, research has shown that intergenerational programs offer enormous potential to help vulnerable populations. For school systems and social service agencies with limited budgets, intergenerational programs can foster the development of supportive relationships, increasing social interaction and facilitating positive role models and social support available to at-risk young people. Similarly, older people can benefit from continued activity, creativity, and engagement with young people and be recognized for their contributions and talents (Cummings et al. 2003).

Fourth, misconceptions between different generations are not uncommon. For example, contrary to common myth, intergenerational assistance predominately flows from older generations to younger generations in the family (Bengtson 2001). In addition, research has found evidence of stereotypical images of elders in widely different cultures, from Nigeria to the USA to China (Boduroglu et al. 2006; Okoye 2005; Okoye and Obikeze 2005). Therefore, the elimination of ageism across the life-span is necessary so that those who engage in community development do so on equal footing and based on mutual respect (Pain 2005; HelpAge International 2010). It is also important to raise awareness of the role and status of aging community members, focusing on positive aspects, including older people participating in civic and family life, rather than negative characteristics associated with illness, dependency, and mortality (Green 2013).

Fifth, children, youth, and elders typically have different levels of skill, knowledge, and experience that can hinder joint activities and be perceived as a burden. Yet, varying levels of preparedness and skill can also be seen as an opportunity for interaction and shared learning. For example, young people often need training and practice to learn how to effectively speak in public, conduct or participate in meetings, collect and analyze data, resolve conflicts, and prepare and present recommendations. These are activities with which elders may have experience and can mentor young people. Similarly, young people may be more proficient in using computers and social media and share this knowledge with elders (van Vliet 2011).

Sixth, children, youth, and elders frequently experience life transitions that can undermine the sustainability of relationships and processes. Youth may move away for school or jobs, and when they become young adults, they do not always transfer their experiences to the next cohort. Elders may become too frail to be able to

continue their engagement in the community. Other threats to sustainable practices are organizational in nature, having to do with staff turnover and training, lack of administrative buy-in by political appointees, etc. (van Vliet 2011).

12 Conclusion and Future Research Needs

With shifting demographics around the globe, intergenerational work is becoming increasingly relevant. This work can benefit from different areas of research and practice, including child-friendly communities, elder-friendly communities, and healthy communities. We are just beginning to understand how these three areas align and intersect in this emergent area of inquiry. This chapter presents a selective, international overview that suggests opportunities and challenges for policies, programs, and research.

Some scholars have pointed to the risk that shifting the focus to “all ages” may eclipse the needs of a specific age group and reinvent a “universal urbanite” (Biggs and Carr 2015, p. 7). Therefore, future evaluation is needed to assess if and how the interests of specific age groups are being negatively impacted by efforts that seek to address the needs of everyone. However, there is encouraging evidence suggesting the allocation of policy resources – financial, physical, human – is not necessarily a zero-sum game because intergenerational approaches can produce synergistic outcomes (van Vliet 2011). This poses important questions for further investigation as intergenerational projects increase in frequency and scale.

Further, it is important to understand the impacts of change, such as advances in information technology and the prevalence of social media, on intergenerational relationships. Although the Internet and mobile technologies offer opportunities for different generations to stay connected with each other, become more informed about social activities, and reflect on their family history and culture (Ward and Smith 1997), technology may also hinder and reduce face-to-face interaction. Similarly, information technology can facilitate the sharing of activities and interests in support of intergenerational connections. Yet, it can also lead to a lack of connection when one generation has limited knowledge and skills regarding specific technologies on which interactions depend (Ward and Smith 1997). The challenge of overcoming this digital divide can become an opportunity for intergenerational learning, and further research is needed to better understand the opportunities and challenges of technology in this context.

Finally, most intergenerational initiatives studied to date have focused on outcomes for individuals or small groups. Community-level impacts are harder to determine and take longer to materialize. Additional research is needed to better understand the impacts of intergenerational practice at a larger scale. Despite this need, the projects and policies presented in this chapter show an increase in opportunities for meaningful engagement, and interaction can occur between generations. The benefits of these interactions are promising as a way to promote healthy communities for all ages.

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