

LEE LI MING
PROGRAMME IN
AGEING URBANISM

Recreational Spaces for Older Population¹

Café for the Elderly

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In recent years, various cafes have emerged to serve the old in different countries. These cafes serve as a meeting place for the elderly and the community. Some examples of these cafes are the Honeywell Ibasho House in Japan, MatherLifeways More Than A Café in the United States and Songpa Silvertrack in the Republic of South Korea.

Seoul, Republic of Korea

Seoul is one of the fastest ageing cities in the world (Park and Lee, 2008). Statistics reveal that around 4 million people in the Republic of Korea are over 65 years old (with around

¹ This is an evolving database. We will be adding more examples and cases over time.

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500,000 aged above 85); a quarter of these are living in Seoul. With increasing socio-economic changes plaguing South Korea, there is a need for an environment, ideally multi-generational where the elderly can congregate and participate in meaningful activities alongside children and adults.

Seoul Café – Songpa Silvertrack

is an example of an inter-generational cultural space where older people in Korea are given the opportunity to come together, communicate with and spend their time meaningfully with other elderly and the community. First of its kind in South Korea, Songpa Silvertrack is modelled after various international leisure concepts such as the Mather Lifeways More than a Café model and Road Scholar (travel plus study) model from the United States, and Club Tourism (travel plus café) model in Japan but adapted to the culture, traditions and character of senior citizens in South Korea. It is located in the eastern part of Seoul and designed to function as a café, campus and community for seniors and their families at a central location. The café was opened in March 2013 and now has an enrolment of 1168 participants.

Developed as a public-private cooperation, the facility is about 2888 sq m and universal design is applied throughout to provide both active and disabled older adults easy access to its programmes and services. The primary

concept is a senior complex where the older participants can fulfill and enjoy their five senses (vision, listening, eating, touching, enjoying) in one location. It is oriented towards uniting generations and promoting inter-generational communication in family and communities. The café is divided into three zones:

Job and Work Zone - elderly are trained and learn new skills (e.g. handyman services, technology, art) with a volunteer-income structure;

Health and Wellness Zone – provision of therapy, yoga, fitness, and adult day care;

Leisure and Hobby Zone – provision of a gift shop, beauty salon, cafe, theatre, artworks exhibition and social space.

Songpa Silvertrack is expected to continue to evolve through trial and error. Local governments in South Korea are benchmarking this case.

Source: International Association of Homes and Services for Aging, http://www.iahsa.net/Seouls_Cafe_Plus_Is_Unlike_Anything_in_Korea.aspx Accessed 16 January 2015; B. H. Park and H. O. Lee (2008) A comparative study on housing welfare policies for the elderly between Korea and Japan, *Journal of Asian Public Policy* 1(1):90-103.

Chicago, United States of America

Similar to Seoul, Chicago's population is aging. According to demographer, William Frey, the number of people aged 65 and older will increase to an estimated 1.7 million by 2030, and 1 in 6 people in Chicago will be 65 or older by 2030. Further, the baby boomers are reaching retirement age. Provisions have to be made to cater to their post-retirement needs so as to ensure their quality of life is maintained and possibly enhanced with the goal of ageing gracefully.

Mathers Lifeways More Than a Café Model or the Café Plus model is an example of a space designed to reach out to younger-older adults (aged 50 and older) by providing a range of activities that promotes continual learning, health and wellness in the United States. Statistics reveal that the Café Plus concept, utilised by various organizations in the country, has 65% increased community outreach and engagement, 57% increased customer engagement and involvement, 57% offering a variety of classes and programmes, 38% enhanced culinary services, 38% utilizing new marketing techniques. Lifelong learning participation has increased. In some cases (e.g. Mather's More than a Café), volunteers have shifted from 'doing for' to 'doing with' and the

café has become a 'third place', serving as hubs for important community programmes such as 'Staying Put, Staying rented', Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, Parkinson's Support Group, transportation programmes, etc.

The concept could be applied in various ways, shape or form, either as a new space (e.g. free-standing café incorporated into a senior living community) or in updating an existing senior centre. Since 2006, it has been replicated by more than 35 organisations within the United States as well as in other countries, each with its own unique community programmes. Some examples include: Birt's Bistro and Bookstore in Surprise, Arizona; Tanglewood Café in Muskegon, Michigan; Carrie's Café in Columbus, Ohio; School House Grill in Alton, Illinois; Ruth's Table, Bethany Center in San Francisco; Café Evergreen, and Millcreek Community Center in Salt Lake City, Utah; Plainville Senior Centre, Plainville, Connecticut; and Yu-Yu Chiteki in Nagoya City, Japan (Box 1). What the Café Plus model offers is a catalyst – 'might start with a cup of coffee, but its possibilities are endless once a customer walks in the door'.

Box 1: Three Variations of Café Plus Spaces

Birt's Bistro and Bookstore in Surprise, Arizona - Birt's Bistro and Bookstore opened in 2009. It modified the Café Plus model with a literary perspective by including a used bookstore. It has become a community

resource and popular event space, featuring live performances by local musicians twice a week, communal classrooms and social workers' offices.

Ruth's Table, Bethany Center, San Francisco – Located on the ground floor of Bethany Center Senior Housing, Ruth's Table (once in artist Ruth Asawa's house) is an arts and wellness space where people of all ages could come together to discover their creativity. Using the Café Plus model as a framework, Ruth's Table has built a community space around art, offering diverse and unique programmes and workshops including art workshops, professional gallery shows, tai chi, yoga, dance workshops, musical performances, concerts, films, computer training. The workshops are open to all 165 residents of Bethany Center (average age is 82) and the public. Bethany Center has provided housing for low-income seniors living in San Francisco's Mission District for over 40 years. The addition of Ruth's Table is part of its goal to achieve a sense of wellbeing among its residents.

Plainville Senior Center, Plainville, Connecticut – Constituting the hub of the Plainville Senior Center, this café concept is open two days a week to the general public. It is run entirely by volunteers (from food preparation, menu planning, cashiering to cleaning). In addition to volunteers, municipal workers, friends and family have contributed to its success – business is booming, according to Plainville Senior Center. The café has developed close links

with the community, e.g. it relies on contributions from a nearby high school for special-needs students who get on-the-job training experience in the café. The café offers meal specials to encourage adults to try new things such as goat cheese tart. There is a nutrition programme working out of the kitchen as a separate addition to the café.

Source: Mather Lifeways, Café Plus in Action, <http://matherlifeways.com/cafe-plus-model/cafe-plus-in-action> Accessed 15 February 2015.

Source: J Pletz (2011) Crain's Special Report: The Graying of Chicago, <http://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20110205/ISSUE01/302059982/craains-special-report-the-graying-of-chicago> Accessed 12 February 2015; Mathers Lifeways, Transforming communities, one concept at a time., <http://matherlifeways.com/cafe-plus-model> Accessed 14 February 2015.

Iwate, Japan

Japan has the world's oldest population. Japan's debt has increased due to health and security costs arising from an aging population. There is a pressing need for action to ensure that the older population continues to remain strong and healthy to reduce the economic and social costs to society. A strategy is to build more informal spaces to meet their social needs; places where the elderly (both retired and those in the workforce) can congregate based on common interests, build strong ties

and contribute back to society with their wealth of experiences and skill sets.

Honeywell Ibasho House, located in Ofunato, Iwate, Japan, is a community space where people can come together, feel at home and be oneself, where seniors are respected as valuable assets to the community. Initiated in February 2012 and opened in June 2013, the aim is to transform the perception and role of the elderly in disaster recovery from people to be cared for to advocates who help others (32% of population in post-disaster Ofunato is aged 65 and older). It is the culmination of international and local effort to create a place where the entire community can gather and work together towards post-disaster recovery and where the older adults take a leadership role and service their community, thus strengthening bonds and building resilience. Led by teams from non-profit organisations – Ibasho and Operation USA, a partnership was established with Honeywell, the city and community of Ofunato (earthquake and tsunami hit zone) to set up Honeywell Ibasho House using the Ibasho café model.

The Ibasho café is built and operated on 8 principles, mainly:

1. Elder wisdom - Older people are a valuable asset to the community;

2. Normalcy – Older people can participate in places of normalcy at any time at their leisure;
3. Community ownership - Community members drive development and implementation, sharing a sense of ownership and pride in place;
4. Multi-generational - All generations are involved in the community;
5. De-marginalisation – All residents participate in normal community life;
6. Culturally appropriate - Local culture and traditions are respected;
7. Resilience - Communities are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable;
8. Embracing imperfection – Community growth is organic and embraces imperfection gracefully.

The vision is to embrace the positive qualities of aging while addressing its challenges. Making the café a place for everyone, the café serves as a nodal point where the local community, especially the elderly are seen as active participants rather than passive recipients of services. They are encouraged to engage in food preparation and service to others, actively joining in the planning, construction, management and operation of the place as a normal part of everyday life.

A group of local older adults has gone on to form a not-for-profit organisation - the Ibasho

Sozo Project – to manage the operation of Honeywell Ibasho House and develop programmes to encourage those with physical disabilities and cognitive illness (e.g. dementia) to participate to their fullest ability. They have travelled abroad to share their Ibasho House experiences with other disaster-recovery area, namely, Typhoon Yolanda affected area in the Philippines in January 2015. Other members have initiated programmes like teaching the elderly current generation skills (e.g. how to use capuccino machine, how to make latte), provision of free wifi and children’s English books to attract young parents, gardening to spruce up the aesthetic appeal of the Ibasho House. The architecture and design utilized reclaimed wood framing and traditional Japanese architecture and construction technique while integrating modern technology that allows this café to withstand future earthquakes.

Post-development projects have been initiated (e.g. by the World Bank, Osaka University, Hokkaido University) to analyse its impact - whether the café and the participatory planning process that developed it has enhanced social connections, social capital and community involvement in Ofunato, among others.

Source: Ibasho Café,
<http://www.ibasho.org/web/projects/ibasho-cafe>
Accessed 14 February 2015; E. Kiyota et al (2014)
Ibasho Café Booklet, Washington DC: Ibasho.