



Taking Care of The Old — Sustainable Aging Community

ASBM10: Degree Project in Sustainable Urban Design

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FINAL REPORT

Background Research: why is the topic?

According to the global statistics from World Health Organization, the population is getting old globally, and China is aging faster than any other countries in history. Meanwhile, China has been a country with a close-family-ties-tradition for over thousand years. However, on one hand, the urbanization process as well as the Internet and technological revolution is having a new impact on the family model. On the other hand, one-child policy coming out in 1970s had an after-effect of shrinking families and creating large elderly population. As the family structures are getting smaller, people's lifestyle is also changing over time. Nowadays, the word 'a distance of a bowl of soup' is quite popular in between all generations. It represents an ideal way of family living, that with a distance when a bowl of hot soup will not cool down over way. Then, how to create an urban space for providing aging-care design and keep private boundaries, social connections and family-care at the same time becomes a question and a challenge of this project.

Local Analysis: what is the local situation?

The site is located in Xiangmen, Suzhou ancient city of China. As be in one of the eldest areas in China, Suzhou ancient city area has a severe aging degree—over 30%, which means that one of three is over 60 years old. Therefore, a large demand for aging-friendly planning and design is happening in local society.

On the basis of doing the site analysis and a site visit, the results can be shown in aspects of strengths, weakness, opportunities and threatens as follows:

Strengths:

The site has a good location in the ancient city area, so it is connected well to the city center with accessible public transport facilities. With traditional gardens and an eastern park surrounded, it can also provide a safe, quiet and livable environment. Because of the long history, rich historical and cultural elements are also advantages of it.

Weakness:

The local constructive environment is old and decaying. The street space is chaotic with car parking occupying large areas. In terms of local users, working labors are moving out with elderly and children left, but the site is still in lack of aging-friendly facilities.

Opportunities:

Meanwhile, it can be seen as an opportunity to have urgent needs of aging population. As is close to Suzhou Industrial Park, It has the potential to catch people coming back to the site.

Threatens:

The large flow of tourists can be a threaten and how to get a balance between developing and protecting is also a challenge on site.

In order to know what do local people think about their way of living for elderly, an online survey was done for further bottom-up ideas, which can also give support to the design proposal. During the survey analysis, the basic needs of local people are received, that physical connection is significant for local elderly of feeling not separated from society. The community belonging especially family bounds is key for providing mental health. Also, diverse housing types are needed in different age groups (apartments, family houses, senior houses...), and finally professional nursing service was seen as a serious lack in current local aging estate.

Design Vision & Goals: how is the vision?

Vision:

As facing such an urgent problem of increasing aging population in China, Suzhou, especially in old city area, the vision of the Xiangmen project is to focus on catching the true needs of local aging population and create a sustainable new aging community, aiming for achieving the following goals at the same time:

Goals:

1. Keep a BALANCE between preserving local characters in ancient city and creating new, livable urban space at the same time.
2. Focusing on solving aging living problems, providing AGING-FRIENDLY DESIGN for the community and make it plays a better role of helping elderly merging into the urban functions and urban life.
3. Considering possibilities of CO-LIVING between MULTI-GENERATIONS by creating inclusive, flexible spaces.

Design Strategy: how is the strategy?

By going through the whole researching process, design strategies are made responding to the design vision.

- Diverse building types combined by traditional and contemporary elements are designed for different user groups (family houses allow multi-generations living, apartments for youth and mixed groups, nursing houses and senior homes)
- Functional buildings are set in between diverse housing types. They meet local needs and connect life space of different user groups at the same time.
- Central gardens, gathering squares, waterfront spaces are designed for offering inclusive and flexible public areas for co-living lifestyle.

Summary

As the aging society continues to develop over the world, demands of aging population such as housing and other sectors will keep increasing. Then how to create livable space for aging groups should be paid more attention during urban development.

Meanwhile, because of different cultural contexts, people may have diverse needs in both physical and mental aspects over the rapid changes. In order to get the balance between tradition and contemporary life, the great challenge will be taken for keeping pace with the transition.

With the strong tradition of family tie in China, I hope people can always live with such a sustainable life in urban areas, which allows multi-generations to live together, so that they can take care of each other in

between families or neighbors without feeling lonely, and that a bowl of warm soup can always be received over way, with a warm loving heart.

Reflection

In terms of the project, I have learned a lot during the whole design process. Firstly, the opinions of local people can be a significant reference of the design. Although issues are often understood well from a general perspective, there are gaps between planners/designers and users. Therefore, the bottom-up participatory can make it up from different aspects. Secondly, different culture create different urban context as well as diverse needs, it would always be helpful to study from each other from unique cases in different sites, so that the ideas can be improved in a better way. Thirdly, it was a pity that local interviews could not be done because of the corona, which could have made better supplement of the design process. Finally, it was found during the proposal design that a better way of mixing living should be considered in my following works, that urban space of inclusivity, vitality and diversity is necessary to a sustainable life.

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