

LEE LI MING  
PROGRAMME IN  
AGEING URBANISM

# Intergenerational Space for Healthy Ageing

US and UK <sup>1</sup>

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Intergenerational space (IGS) is often conceptualized as contact zones in the community where different generations can potentially come together in a number of ways and for a variety of reasons (Kaplan et al., 2016). Studies on IGS have emerged in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century with developments in ageing and child-friendly city initiatives <sup>2</sup>. Recently, the Follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Aging (2015) has adopted a resolution to foster intergenerational solidarity.

Although programmes on IGS have increased in scope and magnitude over the past few years in the US and Europe, comprehensive reviews on IGS programmes are limited in circulation (Vanderbeck and Worth, 2015). This article describes the concept of IGS with reference to some case studies in the US and UK.

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

<sup>2</sup> For more details about these initiatives, see World Health Organization (WHO 2007) and United

Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1990) respectively.

## Intergenerational Space in the US

In the US, terms such as intergenerational and grandparent-grandchild relationship were highlighted in the 1990s mostly by anthropologists, sociologists and geographers of childhood and old age. While anthropological and social studies focused on kinship and wider generational orderings, geographers of childhood underpinned the notion of spatial segregation among children and older adults. Emotional, cultural, and spatial distance between older and younger generation and merits and demerits of age-segregation have been discussed by many authors in the early 2000s including Matilda White Riley (Riley and Riley, 2000).

The benefits and challenges of IGS initiatives for both older adults and children have been documented in some studies in the US (Winchell et al., 2018). For example, older adults and children who participate in IGS programmes show high levels of engagement with each other. A study conducted by the Generations United and Ohio State University on 105 intergenerational shared site programmes in the US shows that IGS improves physical and mental health of older participants and creates opportunities for youth in terms of learning, social development and having better perceptions of older adults. Differences in levels of commitment and environmental interaction among older adults and

children are some of the key challenges for implementing IGS programmes in the US.

There are various business models of IGS in the US. Widely practiced IGS models focus on various forms of fleeting contact such as playing and singing together, care-giving, education, etc.

*The Joining Elders With Early Learners (JEWEL)*<sup>3</sup> programme, established in 1998 in New York, is an integrated IGS model that complements community efforts to support children and older adults in a safe, stimulating, and homelike environment based on changing developmental needs. The programme is a collaboration between Mount Kisco Child Care Center (MKCCC) and Family Services of Westchester's My Second Home (MSH). The purpose is to give the senior participants an increased sense of well-being and greater satisfaction with life while children experience the sense of security and self-worth that a caring relationship with a senior can provide. Each weekday the children from MKCCC and the "Grandmas" and "Grandpas" from MSH come together in small groups and engage in a variety of activities that include music, dancing, creating artwork, and enjoying each other's company as "Breakfast Buddies." These daily interactions between the generations are filled with fun, acceptance and affection.

*ONEgeneration Daycare*<sup>4</sup> in Southern California is a not-for-profit community organisation that aims to

<sup>3</sup> See, <https://patch.com/new-york/chappaqua/an--jewel-joining-elders-with-early-learners-program-844583e7bb>

<sup>4</sup> See, <http://www.onegeneration.org/>

promote healthy ageing, successful early childhood development, and quality intergenerational programmes. Founded in 1978, ONEgeneration offers intergenerational (adult daycare and childcare in a shared setting) services and programmes, e.g. older people recall favourite songs, games and projects of their past as they share their skills and expertise with preschoolers. The distinguishing feature of ONEgeneration is its intergenerational programming that seeks to unite older people, children and young people in daily multicultural activities. ONEgeneration manages a combined fund from multiple sources such as grants, donations and \$70.00 per day fees for services, etc.

*AARP Foundation Experience Corps*<sup>5</sup> is a volunteer-based tutoring programme that focuses on intergenerational literacy. The programme has nearly 2,000 highly-trained volunteers working in more than 20 cities and serves over 30,000 elementary school children every year. Experience Corps follows three intergenerational tutoring models: one to one; small group; and literacy assistance (where volunteers tutor and help teachers with classroom-wide activities). Evaluation studies show that children who go through this intergenerational tutoring programme become good readers by the end of third grade.

<sup>5</sup> See, <https://www.aarp.org/experience-corps/>

<sup>6</sup> See, <https://www.researchcatalogue.esrc.ac.uk/grants/RES-353-25-0008/read>

## Intergenerational Space in the UK

IGS programmes in the UK have evolved over the past couple of decades. In the 1990s, it was mostly school-based mentoring scheme. Presently, IGS programmes focus more on exchange and reciprocity. Settings are created for older adults and younger people to engage in mutually rewarding activities.

*The Intergenerational Helpdesk*<sup>6</sup> project organises a combination of events and programmes in England and Scotland for sustaining IT use by older people to promote autonomy and independence (Sus-IT). The project is a collaboration between the New Dynamics of Ageing Research, University of the Third Age (U3A), Older People's Fora and community groups across England. Older adults who wish to stay in touch with their children and grandchildren are taught to use digital technology to communicate with them. Approximately 750 older adults have participated in the programme. Life history interviews of older adults are conducted to explore their ICT usage. According to the organizers, the programme offers participants new linkages, especially for older adults who are unable to access IT support from their own grandchildren or children.

*The Intergenerational Fairness Forum (IFF)*<sup>7</sup> holds regular meetings and discusses relevant issues in the UK

<sup>7</sup> See, <https://www.bjf.org.uk/research-influence/intergenerational-fairness-forum>>

Parliament to promote better understanding of the impact of policy on intergenerational relationships and the ways public policy affects people at different life stages. The forum, initiated by the Beth Johnson Foundation, holds meetings involving Parliamentarians, IFF members and invited guests. IFF is supported by donations from Aviva and Ernst & Young Global Limited (EY). The forum collaborates with wide-ranging organisations, which share an interest on intergenerational issues such as sustainable funding for social care and intergenerational fairness.

## Summary

Case studies presented in this article portray a variety of IGS programmes in the US and UK. They show that schools, training centres, daycare centres, etc. are some of the common settings of IGS programmes in these two countries.

While the concept of IGS has received momentum in the late 1980s, public awareness on IGS has increased only in recent years in the US and UK. A survey conducted by the European Commission in 2009 reveals that more than 50% of EU citizens feel that opportunities for older and younger people to meet and work together in the community settings are insufficient. A 2018 poll by Generations United and the Eisner Foundation in the US shows that 82% of Americans support tax-funded intergenerational facilities and 89% believe that serving children, youth and older adults at the same location can enhance resource efficiency. Such public support entails the need for collaborative future research focusing on funding,

programming and spatial planning aspects of IGS and evaluating their role in enhancing the health and wellbeing of different generations.

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