Tokyo intergenerational day care center

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Tokyo’s demographic doom
Tokyo is facing a great demographic shift, where by 2050 more than 40% of the population will be over 65 years old. This has come to be because of the drastically decreasing population. Tokyo metropolitan government has estimated that by the turn of the century Tokyo’s population will be halved. The reason for the demographic change is the low childbirth rate currently below 1.3, brought on mainly by the women's emancipation from the role of stay at home mothers. In modern society Japan’s women are now able to strive for careers and in Japan mainly by the women’s emancipation from the role of stay at home mothers. Tokyo metropolitan government has estimated the population will be over 65 years old. This has come to be because of the drastically decreasing population. Tokyo’s demographic doom

History of Japan’s care system
Historically in Japan it was the eldest son’s, or in reality his wife’s job to take care of elderly parents in return for the family inheritance. In rural Japan during the 1950’s older people with sicknesses making them bedridden would often be left at home during the day with nothing but rice balls and water, this neglect and the insufficient medical care available resulted in an average lifespan of 65 years. In the 1960’s the sometimes neglective and abusive means of family care was recognized, but successive governments retained the filial piety and family responsibility of elderly through manipulative measures related to cultural norms. Accordingly public care of elderly remained a very stigmatized solution, associated with Obasuteyama, only available to abandoned elderly without financial means or a family to take care of them.

This system produced two separate issues, one related to the neglect sometimes occurring in family care and something called social-hospitalisation, where elderly without actual medical needs would become residents of hospitals, so that the families could avoid facing the shame of sending their elderly to a home. The social hospitalisation became a financial issue in Japan and the number of sick-beds was reduced to avoid it.

In 2000 Japan recognized the collision of cultural norms and the sometimes neglectful means of family care, thus enforcing the Long-Term Care Insurance System (LTCI) in an attempt to shift family care towards the socialisation of care. The LTCI led to great expenses and was revised in 2005, family care would once again become the main mean of care.

This development has led to that both privately run and public day care centers and day services has become greatly popular. The intergenerational day care center might be an improvement upon these two options, widening the facilities use as a social place and improving efficiency.

Japanese culture
The Japanese is a hard working and strongly ceremonial people. There are unwritten rules on how to behave. “Omotenashi” is a word that encompasses the ingrained public, formal and conventional aspects of behaviour. It can be applied to examples such as who shakes who’s hand first at meetings or how to greet different people. There are even distinctions on how low you should bow depending on how far up the hierarchy someone is. It defines how close one stand to each other when talking and determines how people should conduct themselves during business meetings. The correlative word “Ura” defines the behaviour of people in informal and private aspects of culture. An example is taking of your shoes when entering a house and then stepping up a small step to be inside. It is a routine which reinforce the uchi (“inside”) and soto (“outside”) distinctions. Uchi is a safe haven of belonging and soto is a space of danger and contamination.

Social ranking and status play a large role in interaction, in Japan everyone is aware of each other’s age and vertical ranking mostly determined by age decides everything from where desks are placed in a classroom to in which order tea is dishing each other in regards to age and social relationship.

Small children are given a very free reign to do as they like, since childhood is regarded as the only time during a lifetime that one is truly free. Children often learn discipline first when they start school.

There are harsh rules on how to conduct one self in public, signs indicate that you are not allowed to listen to music, eat or sleep on the subway cart and there are special areas designated for smoking on the street. Everything comes down to respecting the environment and people around you.

Colliding cultural issues: The legend of mountain Obasuteyama and “Hokatsu”
Japan has for centuries lived under the confusion ethic of filial piety, making the children responsible for the care of their elderly. Sending your parents to a home is viewed upon with great shame. The public residential homes are commonly associated with the legend of mountain Obasuteyama, where the eldest sons would leave aged, dependent parents who had outlived their usefulness, to die of starvation and exposure. This cultural stigma leaves a question mark of how to deal with a greying population, when the room for family care is surely dissipating. Two solutions have become popular, the day service, where you can receive help in your own home and the day care center where elderly can spend their days, while their children are away at work. These day care centers are unfortunately almost exclusively refurnished homes, and often ill-fitted for the purpose.

There is also an issue when it comes to child care, since women used to stay at home, but are now working, there is a lack of day care for children. Women would as soon as they become pregnant start the hunt for a day care facility, in fear that taking too long a maternity leave would cost them their jobs or be detrimental to their careers. Even though the government subsidized thousand of day care centers across the nation, the lack of them are ever increasing as more women enter the workforce. The hunt for day care slots has become grueling enough to merit its own name, “Hokatsu”. The problem of care is something that has come about because one part of the Japanese culture has changed (women role in society) but another has stayed the same (filial care-giving). It serves as an example of the complexities westernization and modernization present in Japan.

Intergenerational care
A solution to the cultural and demographic issues presented is to build a non-institutional, locally based, intergenerational day care center. By making this rather small intervention, the generation sandwiched between their elderly and children can receive some alleviation from home based care-giving. Providing a good solution for prospecting parents would create a better environment for having children, thus relieving the demographic issue.

The mixed day care center is widely popular in America and studies have shown that it is mutually beneficial for both the children and the seniors. The elderly show better physical health and are less prone to depression and the children indicate a steeper learning curve. It has been noted that for a mixed generation day care to function the elderly need to be treated differently than the children and allow the able to help out with the child care. This also allows the day care center to be more efficient than having two separate facilities.

% population over 65 years of age in Japan

 million people in Japan projection

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Tokyo

Tokyo is one of the world’s largest cities. Its isolation ended in 1869 when the Tokugawa Shogunate was overthrown and a fast modernization and westernization started. A rapid growth boom in population and economy was to follow, it is only recently that stagnation started. Today Tokyo consists of 23 districts populated by 13 million inhabitants. Tokyo has some of the world’s harshest building regulations, although none of the regulations control aesthetic qualities creating a chaotic architectural environment of different materials, shapes and styles.

Tokushima

Tokushima is one of Tokyo’s eight inner city districts. The district was formed in 1932 by the merger of four towns, Sugamo, Nishi-sugamo, Takadachi, and Nagasakicho, bordered by the quickly expanding former city of Tokyo. The area evolved from a suburban agricultural district in the Edo period. Today there are 267,000 people inhabiting the district with a population density of 26,000 people, making it the most densely inhabited district in all of Tokyo. The commercial and entertainment center is in Ikebukuro, apart from this center most of Tokushima consists of low rise 2-3 floor densely built residential homes. Making the district a perfect testing ground for the prototype.

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Higashinagasaki

Higashinagasaki is an area two stops by rail from Toshima center Ikebukuro. It consists of almost exclusively of low rise residential homes.

The site

Not far from the railway station there is a block of homes that is sparingly exploited. It lies by the intersection of 2 main residential roads, one leading from the railway station and one out to a larger traffic road. The site has an empty plot, a flag post plot and a small house that borders the two. This space will serve as the plot for the prototype of intergenerational day care.

The space lost through time

The low-rise residential neighbourhoods of Tokyo started out very differently from the way they look like now. To begin the plots were a lot larger, and there were more places to interact, meet and play, such as gardens facing the street and alleyways. These social spaces are called Roji, which can be explained as a private intervention to improve the city atmosphere.

Because of rising land prices and booming population the plots of Tokyo’s low-rise residential areas started to shrink. When selling land, the plot would be subdivided and sold in pieces. The spaces between the buildings started to decrease (one meter apart is minimum distance according to earthquake regulations), as well as the homes themselves. Homes in Tokyo are often sold for the price of the land, and when buying a new plot, you tear down the previous house to erect a new one. This has led to an expected building lifetime in Tokyo is slightly below 30 years. This type of residential homes started being built in the 1920’s and we’re already looking at the fourth generation of houses.

Though the character of this typology is unique and exciting, it comes with a set of problems. Because of the size of the homes they are mostly viewed as a place for basic functions such as sleeping and eating. Social spaces are placed outside of the home at places such as karaoke bars, cafes and public libraries. This development has led to houses being extremely introvert and ungenerous, all the windows of the buildings are of frosted glass or have curtains closing visibility. most of the plot boundaries are either enclosed by high walls, only leaving a minimal amount of space for gardens or have the facade aligned with the street. The neighbors no longer know each other and the interaction between dwellings has disappeared. The Roji hardly exist in Tokyo anymore.

Densification, the generational transition of homes

The generational transition of homes has already occurred four times in some areas. The previous generation of plots and homes were larger, had more space for gardens and were more communicative through spaces and openings. New homes are built and densification occurs, the “Roji” is dissipating. Because of the small plot sizes, building regulations on exploitation and the high price of land, as much of the plot as possible is built upon. Houses come closer together, homes become more private and introvert and walls are erect to protect the small private spaces. No space is left but the asphalted streets and their very specific program: transit.
Implementation

To create some extra public space, or Roji, the building is set back two meters from the road with a garden facing the street, benches are placed by the building. Such an intervention might seem irrelevant, but is of great value where the public domain consist almost only of asphalted streets.

The day care center is divided into volumes that relate to the local scale, in between the volumes small gardens are created where elderly and children can meditate, do gardening and play.

The building reacts to the introvert and ungenerous trend in the neighbourhood by having a translucent facade, silhouettes and lights can be seen through it, while still maintaining privacy. The translucent facade continues in front of the exterior gardens where large openings display the greenery and lets in sunlight. The screen defines the buildings border and makes the building approachable, without the feeling of intruding. This allows for social meetings to occur.

The center is built for 30 seniors and 20 children from infants to five year olds that reside in the area. The target group of elderly range from seniors who might want some extra attention during the daytime, or want a social environment to release them from isolation to more disabled elderly who might be on the verge of needing full time care.

Programmatically it is important in a intergenerational day care center that the elderly are not “infantilized”, even though they might have child-like needs, they are still adults. It should be clear that the building’s rooms are specific for different age groups and have their own staff members as hierarchy among age groups is paramount in Japan. Meeting children should be on the adults terms. Therefore there is a tatami room exclusively for the elderly which they can withdraw to. In the remaining rooms child and senior activities are mixed to a varying degree. The senior’s terrace will have children passing by, and a visual connection with the playground terrace. The workshop is a place for the elderly to spend their days socialising, playing games, relaxing and reading. On occasions the space is shared by the children for common activities, such as music, performance and film. Children might also come down to visit relatives or friends.

It should be explained to the elderly that the intergenerational day care center is in fact two separate functions within the same building. It is senior care and child care, just that the two functions are sometimes overlapping.

The building is a wooden frame construction designed in accordance with earthquake, handicap and fire regulations of the Japanese building standard law. The building is classed as a medium-sized, quasi-fire proof, first class residential area welfare building. It should be paid by the Long-Term Care Insurance system, as these kind of interventions might turn the expenditure into an economical advantage for future Japan.