

Housing for Elderly in Osaka

Some thoughts on two projects

by Anna Hrdlicka



Age is not about the number of years we put behind us.

Life goes on in a steady pace. We just have to adapt to the changes and live our lives as we find most enjoyable.

We do not have to “live according to our age”, but always care for the child within...

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Elderly housing in Osaka March 2006

This report summarises two study visits in two different elderly housing facilities in Osaka in March 2006.

I would like to start by heartedly thanking my host Mr Oniishi from Total Life Service Ltd in Osaka who invited me to take part of a very interesting development and to give some reflexions on these facilities, and were the facilitator for inviting me to a confernece on e-health in Waseda University, Tokyo. Without his support and kind invitation this study visit would never have become a reality.

The two Osaka based projects visited were ; Kansai Electrics elderly housing and Pana Home elderly housing. I will come back to the projects below, but would like to start this report with a short introduction.

Global “problem”, same solutions?

Over the last five or six years the discussion on elderly and old people has escalated in many parts of the world. The debate is about how old people should lead their lives, where, and how much assistance they might need. What system would be the best for society and what system would benefit the individual old person?

The discussion is different in different parts of the world but all boils down to the same basic question - how could this be organised?

In Sweden the debate is to a certain extent lead by the large group of people born in the 1940ies, not wanting to experience the kind of housing choices provided to old people today. They are “retiring young elderly” and see their future as

“active” and are not interested in leading a pas-sive life. Travelling, sports and social life is part of their plan – they are a group of (today) “young elderly” that will require other solutions than their parents, they are in some cases planning their own housing alternatives together with friends.

Being active is the choise of this group, and it is both feasible and desirable as long as physical and mental status is the same as the day they retire. Healthy and active people will still have the opportunity to chose. The issue of housing for elderly is more focused on aiding people with physical impairments, and degenerative dis-eases.



Since Japan and Sweden, along with major parts of the Western World are facing the same demographic development with an increasing number of elderly and very old people there is a need to discuss (amongst other things) the need of housing especially adopted for elderly – what does housing like that look like? Is there a need for special housing for elderly? What groups are likely to stay there?

How old is old?

I would like to start with a short reflexion on the terms “old” and “user”. The people discussed in

the case of housing for elderly – the old people supposed to live in these facilities – and the problem of understanding their needs generally and how to implement solutions in the develop-ment of a project like this.

Many times the users are considered as just “elderly people” or “old people”. The debate has been about how to adopt living environments to “the needs of elderly people” but how does that group look like? Is there really one group? The notion that elderly are one homogenous group are as wrong as saying that “middle aged” are a specific homogeneous group. People age dif-ferent - we are all individuals even in high age. Some are healthy until very high ages and are able to continue with their “normal” life. Life goes on but they have to adopt to normal issues of growing older.

Is age really the issue?

Age is not the basic factor that determines if or when an elderly person need to move from their own home. The ability to care for one self, chron-ic or degenerative diseases like Alzheimer’s, or functional disabilities that makes life impossible in the old environment are on the other hand fac-tors that will. Today even relatively young people - born in the 1940ies and 50ies - are diagnosed with early stages of Alzheimers,

If an elderly person is healthy and well and able care for herself there is no need to change the way or place of living. But if a person is sick, or weak by age or illness there might be a need to change the housing situation – or to think of the possibility of the options in advance. Maybe move before the situation become to insecure. The hard thing is to decide when this transition should be made.

Old elderly, 85+

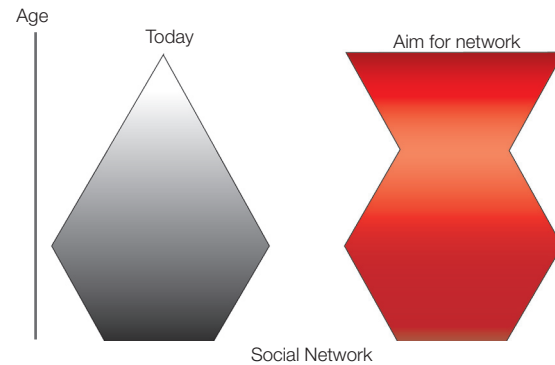
However, even if age is not the main factor to decide when an individual should move to elderly housing what is? The discussion is about groups, and what are likely to happen to people of high age is an increase of diseases and a decrease of physical strength. One group that has come into focus in Sweden is the old elderly, people over 80-85 yrs. Above this age people are not as active as the young elderly and they are likely to start being affected by one or many illnesses and diseases.

For this group there used to be old people's homes, but that has changed and the policy (in Sweden) today is that they should grow old in their homes – this is seen as good for the individual; being able to grow old in a known and environment will affect both physical and mental health in a positive way, being able to continue the normal life to as great extent as possible.

This policy is, however, partly being challenged today, since many old people feel lonely and insecure being alone at home. Another issue that is being discussed is that much of the care for old people are carried out by their relatives, mostly spouses (wives) or children (daughters). Putting an extra strain on them having to care for rather ill relatives.

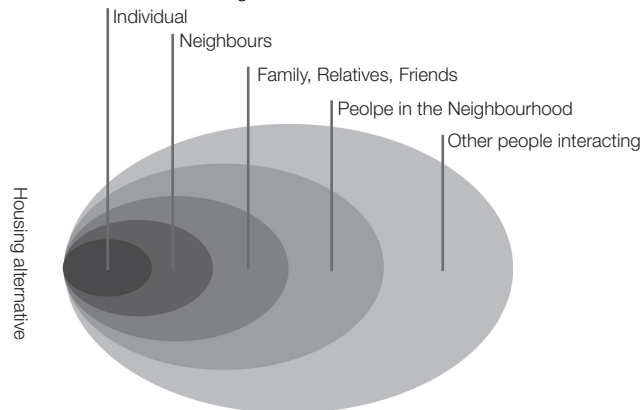
User focus

What should be the aim of an “ideal” home for elderly? That of course depends on the user group and their specific needs and wishes. But as a baseline an elderly housing facility would probably benefit from having a basic aim to break isolation and to increase the social network. That can be hard to accomplish with i.e.



This graph shows the present and aimed for situation presented in a visionary workshop around elderly housing in Sweden 2006. The left hand graph shows the increasing social network facing an elderly person growing older. The right hand graph shows the wished for situation in an elderly housing project that are aiming at letting their tenants: PARTICIPATE, EXPERIENCE and GROW. Instead of being passive this environment should stimulate. There is nothing worse than being bored!

Source: Sommar-designkontoret Gotland 2006 - Comfort Zone.



This figure shows how the built environment can hold social contacts in the private sphere / your home and that other kind of social interactions contacts can take place in form of activities or other form of interaction. An example given is interaction between old people and school children.

Source: Sommar-designkontoret Gotland 2006 - Comfort Zone.

Alzheimer's patients, but again - the goal is to focus on user groups.

In the early years of 2000 the focus on “smart solutions” implemented in home environments, for all groups, were in focus. Solutions that many times have a technical focus. The debate has been about how to adopt living environments to “the needs of elderly people”. However, many of the solutions have been developed without sufficient focus on the elderly person.

Non-regarding the type of solution there is important to stress the need of understanding the specific user group focused for each project. Healthy “young” elderly are requesting other solutions than aged people with multiple diseases and handicaps.

Therefore, there are probably many different needs to be met planning for housing for elderly people. There is also a need to discuss different concepts of housing for elderly, full service, cooperatives, collective housing, part service in your old home, and technology as an aid to stay longer in the environment of your own home. Places that are close to, or even integrated with other types of housing.

A Home! Somewhere that gives both control and freedom, intellectual stimulation, context and a feeling of warmth and belonging.

Below there is a short description of the study visits at Kansai Electric Home and Pana Home in Osaka. After that description of a project carried out in Sweden during the summer 2006 aiming at implementing design processes in the development of built environment. The project turned out successful and will most probably be repeated during the summer 2007.

Kansai Electrics

This facility has been developed by Kansai Electrics and is a concept for full service elderly care. The facility are welcoming both couples and single old people in different need of care.

The building is completely new and at our visit there were no inhabitants yet. The concept is built on the elderly people buying a “condominium” concept with different degrees of service.

The services provided to the tenants are many and varied. Everything from the traditional Japanese bath to full care for those who cannot move by themselves. For those that want there are shuttle buses to commercial and other centres. The facility also offer guest rooms for visiting relatives.



The relax room offers massage chairs and tread mills, the latter probably for healthy and mobile elderly.

This housing solution is offering safety, security and a good life for people that are willing to change their living condition to something more comfortable and secure than living in their own home.



The traditional Japanese bath.

This facility feels very thought trough and is able to care also for people that are very ill or have mobility impairments. As I understand the concept they will be able to provide good care even for very weak elderly with mobility impariments.

From a Swedish perspective the space for each tenant is small, and this is obvious since Sweden and Japan adopts different building standards in this area. There are also a number of technical solutiions seldom or never seen in an old peoples home in Sweden, such as massage chairs and tread mills.



Pictures above and below show the capacity to care for even people with mobility impairments and paralysis. Above shower bed, below chair bath.





The guest room has a nice setting, The space in the room is a bit narrow - not wheel chair accessible.

From good to better

However, any project there is room for reflexion on how to excell even further. How could user experience be enhanced, how could the usability of the apartments and the common areas.

The above text on visual and cognitive impariments might give some lead to some future improvements. For people with visual and cognitive problems help for orientation is important. One thing that could be given some extra thought is the colouring of walls, doors, and floors.

For people with visual impairment there might be hard to distinguish the floor when the floor has the same colour. Also there might be hard to se doors. And to know onwhich floor or corridor you are.



Above an example of patterns / visual signs that might be strenghted by colour or patterns. This is the entrance to womens and mens bath. The curtains are slightly distinguished in colour and the signs are small in the right hand side. With the picture blurred (just as a rough example) the entrance is harder to distinguish.



Another example is the adaptive kitchen in one fo the appartments. The shelves are able to lower for better reach for short persons. But the kitchen itself might be hard to use for somebody in a wheel chair.



One system is the paths with tactile patterns - used i.e. in the Tokyo Subway. These paths could be used by both seeing and non seeing. An alternative is to adopt the pattern on the wall to feel it with your hand.

One way to come up with further ideas on this site might be a multidisciplinary workshop.

Pana Home

This elderly housing concept has been developed by Pana Home and their centrally located concept developing department.

The facility has been developed as a full service facility and includes everything from dining rooms in traditional Japanese style to care facilities for inhabitants of Pana Home that have become ill.

It is a very thought through projects in terms of functions an environment and concept. All appliances are provided by Panasonic and the development team seem to have thought about everything from common areas to private rooms.



The impressive entrance of Pana Home in Osaka



The spacious entrance with interesting floor, a small fountain and an altar.

The entrance of Pana Home is light and inviting, the flooring gives a good tactile reference and the fountain in the middle gives both a relaxing sound and a possibility for orientation. Both these details can serve as a good help for people with visual impairments.

This facility seems to be planned for more active people but at the same time has both services and details that are aiming at more inactive groups.

There also seems to be a great focus on wellbeing. Details such as social interaction areas - private dining room, the traditional Japanese dry sauna and the jacuzzi on the terrace, all tell the visitor that this is a place for active elderly, that are still active and mobile.



A traditional Japanese dining room. This kitchen and dining room can be used by the tenants and visiting friends and relatives.

Other details, such as the dog house - at our visit still no dog - signals elderly people. Dogs are used in therapeutic situations to break isolation, especially in care for patients with dementia or Alzheimer's disease. However, that did not seem to be the main focus of the dog in this facility.

Another detail that is very interesting is the terrace outside the lobby. This place serves both as



The nice little dog house



The traditional Japanese dry sauna.

tation could be tested. In Sweden therapeutic gardens are successfully used in the work with people with cognitive impairment and stress related diseases. As with the case with people connecting to a dog working with plants seem to be positive for the health and wellbeing.

From good to even better

As in the case of Kansai Electrics this is a brand new housing project and all the ideas has not been properly tested yet. This however, is not an obstacle to think even further. As in the case

a relaxation area, with jacuzzi, dog house, common area to just sit down and relax and a small garden. This garden was originally planned to be a garden for the inhabitants of the house to care for, plant their favourite plants and get a feeling of wellness by working in the garden. But, it seemed at our visit that this idea had been abolished and the plantation were managed by the staff.

It would be interesting if the tenant lead plan-



The daily guest room - very spacy!



The dining room interior. Very light colours and few contrasts.

above there is always room for improvement.

Handrails are available in the whole facility but as in the case of Kansai Electrics house there are few contrasting colours on the floor and no tactile paths to help the visually impaired to orientate themselves. Furnishing and floors are all very light.

There might be helpful to work with contrasting colours and paths - this give support to people with both cognitive and visual impairments.



The outside jacuzzi.

Another thought is around the jacuzzi. Is there any possibility to use that facility for people with impaired movement? Could a lift or some arrangement around the pool be of assistance.

Also this facility would be interesting to study and maybe using workshops and multidisciplinary groups to come up with further ideas.



The daily schedule.

Visual impairment

In Sweden approximately 100 000 people have visual impairment – but only few of them are completely blind. The usual case is a person with some vision and an ability to see approximately one square meter in front of their on feet and at a distance of 10-30 cm from the eyes. All important information have to be presented within this radius. There is also issues of being able to distinguish between light and darkness.

There are different ways of marking the handicap – a long or a short white cane. The short one is basically a sign for others that the person wearing it might need extra room to move and the ability to react on others. The long cane acts as a probe, making it possible for the person to “feel” his or her way forward. Via the cane it is possible to feel different levels in height and other obstacles.

To think about in developing environments for people with visual impairment:

1. a logical pattern at the floor, easily understandable from each persons individual situation. One example is the tactile fields in the subway of Tokyo.
2. Visual clarity – use contrasts in light and colour to mark and increase the ability to see. Use the same colour to mark i.e. handrails, door knobs, light switches and windows.
3. Refrain from blinding / dazzling light. Place lamps to avoid shadows that might be confusing by creating optical illusions.
4. Look at the whole situation!

Mobility / Physical impairment

A physical impairment will affect the person’s ability to move freely. Physical impairments can be from birth of acquired during the span of life. Acquired impairments can be caused by stoke, rheumatism, MS and other diseases affecting the central nerve system (CNS), Parkinson’s disease. Another factor possible to affect a persons ability to move are high age.

When designing an environment for this group, positive effects are likely to follow for other groups as well – people as well; children, parents with trolleys, people with luggage, deliveries etc.

To think about in developing environments for people with physical impairment:

1. a logical pattern at the floor, easily understandable from each persons individual situation. One example is the tactile fields in the subway of Tokyo.h
2. Visual clarity – use contrasts in light and colour to mark and increase the ability to see. Use the same colour to mark i.e. handrails, door knobs, light switches and windows.
3. Try to create a floor that is as flat as possible – avoid levels if possible.
4. Stairs; long stairs need to be combined with lift as an alternative. Shorter stairs should have handrails on specified level, adapted to the group of people living there.



Cognitive impairment

Cognitive impairments can are likely to affect a persons every day life in many ways. There is a spectrum from mild dysfunction of i.e. time or ability to orientation, to memory problems – usually increased over age as the disease progresses. The grave dysfunctions are people with no ability to share the world with people around them. Often given examples of cognitive disabilities are Alzheimer disease, senility.

These disabilities are often “invisible” to people around the person affected, but are seen as great problems as the disease progresses and the behaviour of a spouse drastically changes over a period of time. These changes are many times not recognised as an illness until they are grave.

To think about in developing environments for people with cognitive impairment:

1. a logical pattern at the floor, easily understandable from each persons individual situation. One example is the tactile fields in the subway of Tokyo.
2. Visual clarity – use contrasts in light and colour to mark and increase the ability to see. Use the same colour to mark i.e. handrails, door knobs, light switches and windows.
3. Use signs that can help a person to remember and to orientate.
4. Offer options, i.e. alternative routes to use by people to increase their ability to fend for them selves.

The Summer Design Office (Sommardesignkontoret)

The Summer design office is a concept developed by the Swedish board for design (SVID) and that are carried out as regional and local projects spread all over Sweden. During the summer 2006 one project was aiming at implementing design processes in built environment. The project was initiated and lead by Anna Hrdlicka.

The Summer Design Office aims at creating "real life" practice work for students in the field of architecture, design and related educations.

Given the short period of time this project lasted the results were impressive. Since the work was multidisciplinary and the focus at all times were the individual - the user - the outcome represented a non traditional approach and solution to this kind of problems.

One project - Comfort Zone

One of the projects dealt with a elderly housing project in Gotland. This house were obsolete as a elderly housing facility and are about to be taken over by private interests. The question of the project were what the house could be

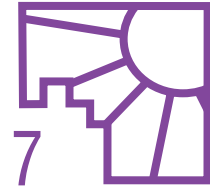
be misunderstood. Those sentences are going to lead our continuing work and will set the rules for which areas of interest that will be explored by us.

From this workshop and some other activities the target group were set to be:

"Independent, active people, willing to change their settings":

- Socializes in activities and gather around discussions. New groups are formed around every different situation.
- Are very independent, but slower, and appreciate a certain amount of service. Are aware of that their physical status will change

SOMMARDESIGNKONTORET GOTLAND 2007



The project at Gotland aimed for the first time at addressing problems within the built environment focusing different types of housing - elderly, young, tourists etc. The project runs for 7 weeks during the summer (June and August) and are presented for project owners by the end of the period.

The group of students this summer was picked to represent different academic / work backgrounds and different national backgrounds. The group were multilingual, multicultural and multilingual with representation from Sweden, USA, Japan, Norway, France and Denmark. Competencies from design to architecture were mixed together.

The method chosen were the design process applied on housing and built environment projects and the results were interesting and exceptional.

turned into. Hotel? Elderly housing in some other form? School? Community centre? Below you can follow in short how the group was working. These are some notes from a workshop aiming at establishing the focus group.

1. There is a need to establish if a project is aimed for everyone or oriented for a specific group of people. (social status/ economical status/ health status/ age etc...).

2. It is of utmost importance that we know our target group well. The target group should be specified in just a few words. The words should not contradict each other, and they should be as exact as that anyone can understand the meaning of them.

3 The target group should be characterized with at the most 6 short sentences that can't

in the future.

- Experience their first physical problems and had some time to consider their life situation and have experienced a change in their economy.

The key focus for this new facility should be:

- Break the isolation
- Be less dependent of the seasons
- Get intellectual stimulation in your daily life even after retiring
- Don't lose your independency
- To use the physical environment to create an atmosphere that opposes the sensation of a deteriorating health.

The vision of the new use for the facility should be set to be:

Moving to Östersol should be associated with possibilities, not with giving up on things.

- Create a feeling of being needed even at late stage in your life.
- It's never too late to learn.
- Your quality of life should be less associated with your ability to move.
- Reversing isolation at an early stage

Our motto:

Participate! Experience! Grow!

Participate in the daily activities around the house, all from their own capabilities. Experience new things or get reacquainted with old “forgotten” skills. Grow as a person by being seen and respected.

This project has attracted a lot of interest and are one of the project from 2006 on the list for possible further development.

Working in multidisciplinary teams

The work in this project has proven interesting and an interesting experience for all involved. The supervisors (architects and designers) stated that this way of working were different and rewarding in terms of results. It did also prove to be positive in terms of having a better planning position with more things taken into account than normally at the same stage of a project - planning.

To let (for the building industry) non traditional competences work together in early stages might be a new and exploratory way of working in the field of built environment and housing.

During the autumn of 2006 the project “Design in Built Environment” have been granted funding from the Swedish National Board for Housing (Boverket) to develop these ideas and methods further. This with an international outlook as part of the project. Another part of the project is to



This is the visionary picture that was presented in the project Comfort Zone during the Summer Design Office at Gotland 2006. The basic idea is to create an environment open to people that are interested in experiencing, develop and take part in an inspiring housing environment. Plants and animals are natural components as are contacts between generations.

establish a Summer Design Office 2007 at Gotland with 8 new students and 8 new projects. But the coming summer will hopefully also hold another project involving the 8 students from 2006 coming back to dig deeper into three (3) of the projects from 2006.

The summer of 2007

The Summer Design Office Gotland 2007 and the Re Design Exp 2007 will serve as an interactive arena to develop these methods and to discuss issues on architecture, planning, design,

user involvement and other things focusing our homes and housing.

The plan is to go forth with the international connections and invite students from other countries than Sweden to participate. This year we would also like to invite companies from abroad to take part in the development. As for now there might be joint project between Gotland and Freistadt in Austria concerning design for all, and accessibility.

The Summer Design Office 2007 will be located in Fårösund on the northern part of Gotland.



Conclusion

Even though Sweden and Japan are very different in some aspects we also have many things in common. Things that are based on the same basic problem are addressed in slightly different ways, with different approaches and basic assumptions. Many times these differences are seen as barriers impossible to overcome when they on the contrary can work as catalysts for change and innovation.

Exchanging ideas, working together, giving and taking is all part of the idea in working in multidisciplinary teams and task forces. As are the international aspect of this kind of development. Seeing the possibilities in adopting new methods in areas that are ruled by strong tradition is a challenge - as are all shifts in paradigm.

Further development

Work on developing the methodology (design - architecture - concepts) will continue within the project Design i Built Environment, in the Summer Design Office and around the group formed by Anna Hrdlicka.

We welcome further cooperation and development in the field of housing and built environment but also in fields where creative, multidisciplinary teams can make a difference by adopting cross thinking non traditional methods.

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