

A Case Study of Yerba Buena Garden Area and Ceatrice Polite Apartments as a Model of Sustainable Community for Older Adults

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ABSTRACT: As Korean population ages and the number of older people who are “aging in place” increases, communities will face new opportunities and challenges in responding to this population’s needs. This study explores the ways in which the community may support or challenge older adults’ active aging enriching sustainability through a successful case in San Francisco. The key features of Yerba Buena Garden area and Ceatrice Polite Apartments were analyzed to inform the development of an elder-friendly community in Korea.

Keywords: aging in place, sustainability, elder-friendly community

1. INTRODUCTION

Population aging is a global phenomenon, the challenge facing Korea, however, is especially daunting. With life expectancy rising and birthrates plumbing record lows, Korea is about to undergo a stunning demographic transformation. According to the latest government projections, 38 percent of Korea’s population will be elderly by 2050, putting it in contention with Japan, Italy, and Spain for the oldest country on earth (Korea National Statistical Office, 2006). This explosive growth of older adults represents both opportunities and challenges at the community level, the wider residential environment.

Recent qualitative work has also sought to identify features of the wider community setting affecting the quality of older peoples’ lives. Feldman and Oberlink (2003) for example, propose a model of community ‘elder friendliness’, naming financial

security, health and health care, social connections, housing and supportive services, transportation, and safety as key categories. Whilst others have pinpointed local shopping and services, traffic and inadequate pedestrian infrastructure, neighbourhood attractiveness and public transportation as community contributors to quality of active aging (Michael, et al., 2006).

If communities support aging in place through appropriate infrastructure including housing, accessible and affordable transportation, health care, safety and community involvement opportunities, older adults can be empowered to continue as active citizens and volunteers for many years, enriching sustainability of community (Ally, et al., 2007). Faced with an aging population, we must look for new ways to ensure that older adults can contribute to and be cared for by their communities.

This study aims to explore the key features of a sustainable model of an elder-friendly community and to identify how neighbourhood design encourages active aging to inform the development of indicators to facilitate aging in place at community level. Yerba Buena Garden (YBG) area and an affordable house, Ceatrice Polite Apartment (CPA) in San Francisco were selected for this research.

2. CASE STUDY AREAS

2.1. Yerba Buena Garden Area

YBG is an 87-acre urban redevelopment project in the South of market (SOMA) district of San Francisco that includes a mixture of housing, open space, cultural facilities, children's facilities, a convention center and commercial development.

In 1953, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors designated a 19-block section south of Market Street as a Redevelopment Area. Due to setbacks and delays, not much was done until late 1970s, when the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA) began working with Bay Area artistic and community groups to collect information about practical needs and cultural aspirations. The Yerba Buena project was the result of this extensive community involvement. The project's creative plan placed much of the convention center underground, while providing low-income housing mixed with cultural and open space. In 1980, Mayor Dianne Feinstein and the SFRA issued an invitation to developers worldwide to *"create ... in the heart of one of the world's great cities, an environment in the form of a magnificent urban garden. . ."* The culmination of this process are the gardens composed of fountain and waterfall, Martin Luther King Junior Memorial, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Zeum Museum, Ice Skating Center, Bowling Center and Child Development Center. Moscone Convention Center, Metreon Entertainment

Center, restaurants, shopping centers, parking lots, museum and residential area are adjacent to the gardens.¹

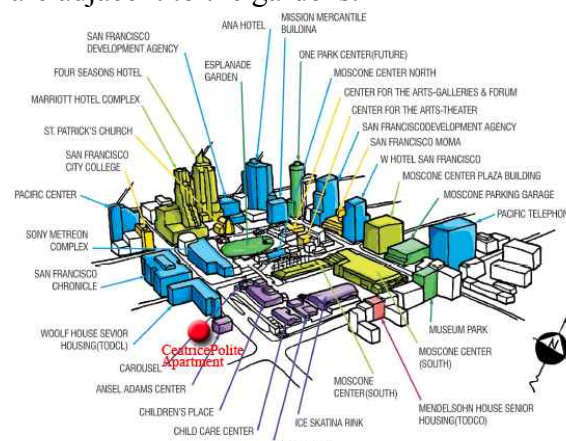


Figure 1: YBG area map²

2.2. TODCO Group and Ceatrice Polite Apartment

TODCO (Tenants and Owners Development Corporation) is a community-based nonprofit institution whose mission as "South of Market Neighborhood Builders" is to maintain SOMA's long-time working class, immigrant, and elderly communities as an integral part of their neighborhood's future. In addition to developing housing utilizing city, state, and federal programs, TODCO directs the management of its properties and provides supportive services for their residents.³

CPA lies at the heart of San Francisco, adjacent to YBG area. It is an affordable senior housing of nine stories, which was initially developed in 1983 by TODCO and has been being operated by the same company. This facility is composed of two types of units, studio and one bedroom. In 2007, renovation was conducted and its scope of work included new roofing, alarm system, laundry equipment, carpeting, kitchens, bathroom upgrades, accessibility

¹ <http://www.yerbabuenagardens.com>

² Lee, Yeunsook. 2008. Socially Sustainable Design Characteristics of Yerba Buena Garden in San Francisco. Journal of Korea Institute of Ecological Architecture and Environment. Vol.8, No.3. Korea

³ <http://www.todco.org>

improvements and refurbishment of the elevators (U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development- San Francisco Multifamily Hub, 2008).

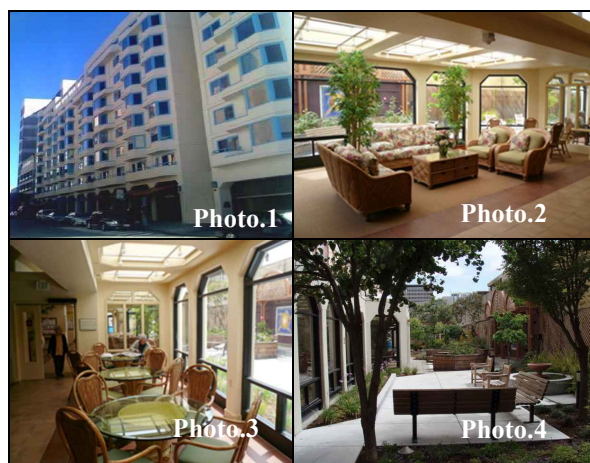


Figure 2: Ceatrice Polite Apartment (Photo1: Pacific Currents, 2007
Photo 2,3,4: by researchers)

3. METHODS

This study is purely descriptive and an extensive literature review and field research were conducted to explore the key features and potential values of Yerba Buena Garden area and Ceatrice Polite Apartment in San Francisco as a model of elder-friendly sustainable community. Data collection made use of interviews and field observation. Prior to analyzing the key features of the community (Table 1), components of an elder-friendly community were explored through literature reviews (Michael, et al., 2006; Feldman & Oberlink, 2003; Ministry of Land Transport and Maritime Affairs, 2000).

Table I: The Key Features of Elder-Friendly Community for Analysis

Themes	Key Features
Community Elements	• Accessible and Affordable Transportation • Exercise and Fitness Facilities • Parks, Trails, Recreation • Safety, Security, Crime Prevention • Shopping

Finance & Policy	• Financial Support
Social Network & service	• Social Programs, Activities • Social Services

4. RESULTS

4.1 Community Elements

4.1.1. Accessible and Affordable Transportation

Accessible and Affordable transportation becomes important as ability to drive or health decreases. It is thus an important aspect of walkable neighborhoods. YBG area is very conveniently located for the residents of CPA to use BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit, the regional transit system) station, bus, cable cars and train.

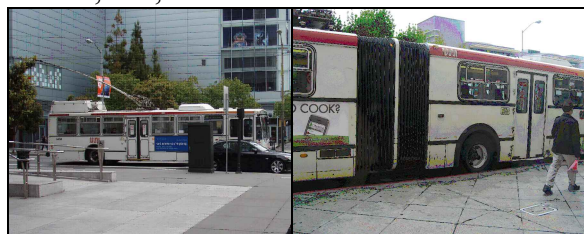


Figure 3: Convenient Public Transit (Photos by researchers)

4.1.2. Fitness and Exercise Facility

A Fitness and Exercise Room is in the first floor of CPA. Even seniors with walkers and wheelchairs, or those who have to sit down, raise their arms, move their legs, and keep-up with the trained coordinators. Approximately 40 seniors have signed-up for the half-hour class and groups of 10-20 participate in any one of the three classes offered during the week.

4.1.3. Parks, Recreation, Trails

1) Parks

Yerba Buena's central gardens (the Esplanade) is the cohesive public element that ties the complex project together and connects it to the community members. The Esplanade is a central open green space with simple planting. An extensive ramp and fountain system, capped by overlook, relates surrounding restaurants and cafes to the

green and performance areas and to a Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial below. Entrances to the Metreon, the Visual Art Center, and the Performing Art Center all open the green and SFMoMA's main entrance aligns with an east-west walkway that also joins the Center for the Arts to the Metreon. The park is well used by the residents living in the area, well maintained, and well suited to its passive functions as well as to the approximately 60 programmed events in the spring, summer, and fall of each year.



Figure 4: Esplanade garden
(Photos by researchers)

2) Recreation

Activities like Bingo keep seniors in CPA on their toes and provide them with an opportunity to socialize and to enjoy exercising their brain muscles.



Figure 5: Seniors Doing Bingo Game
(Photo by www.todco.org)

4.1.4. Safety, Security, Crime Prevention

Security arrangements are anchored by "face with place" program, in which the security personnel of all the buildings around the YBG – public and private – meet every two months to share security information and concerns. Because of this coordination, YBG's facilities all share a single, efficient central dispatch.

4.1.5. Shopping

Diverse services within a local neighbourhood area provide older adults with the ability to walk to daily activities. In YBG area, shopping centers like Bloomingdale's, restaurants, and cafes are accessible to the residents of CPA. Close destinations allow seniors to combine walking with other daily activities.

4.2. Finance & Policy

4.2.1. Financial Support

CPA has a Section 8 project of HUD (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development) based funding. Section 8 project is Housing Choice Voucher Program. A qualifying individual must apply for a housing choice voucher. Using the voucher, the individual can find an apartment (anywhere in the nation) that accepts vouchers. Tenants pay 30% of their monthly income; the voucher pays the difference up to the local market rate for the apartment.

4.3. Social Network & Service

4.3.1. Social Programs, Activities

Supporting community activities enhances well-being of older adults. Various social programs and activities are offered in CPA through the supportive community program, some of them regular classes, lectures, and the like, and some special events or social cares.

1) Youth Cares

Youth Cares is an inter-generational program where students from local high schools come and visit TODCO seniors. The youths participate in all sorts of activities with their senior partners including gardening, playing games and shopping. Programs like these are important because teenagers can lend their helping hands, share their energy and give companionship to our residents, while our seniors, in turn, tap into the lives of teenagers and share a part of themselves—their stories, their knowledge and wisdom. The program is administered

through the International Institute of San Francisco, an immigrant and refugee advocacy program.

2) Creative Writing Class

TODCO has been able to maintain this creative writing program for seniors in the South of Market. It has been able to tap into the richness and diversity of the senior housing community and lead each writer to find his or her own legacy, hopes, dreams, vulnerabilities and strengths in their own voice. The senior poets perform regularly at civic events and community readings and boast six commissioned poems.⁴



Figure 6: Regular performance at civic events (Photos from www.todco.org)

3) Gardens Program

Gardens Program is the single most popular program of TODCO to encourage physical activity and creativity in its seniors. This program gives seniors and the community an opportunity to plant in a real garden. TODCO provides several gardens for residents including roof gardens and a community garden to seniors living in Yerba Buena Neighborhood.⁵



Figure 7: Alice Garden of TODCO (Photos by researchers)

4) Arts and Crafts

Residents of CPA benefit from the creativity that the classes inspire as well as the relaxation associated with the different arts and crafts. Occasionally, one of the senior residents volunteer to teach the class. The art classes awaken the imagination to the benefit all participants⁶.

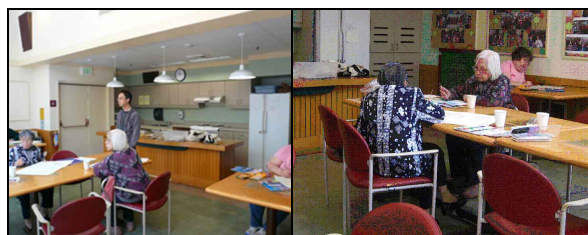


Figure 8: Art and Crafts class in CPA (Photos by researchers)

5) "Meet the Composer"

"Meet the Composer" is a music workshop combining the residents and the community together, which is sponsored by the Meet the Composer Program and the Yerba Buena Center. Not only is the class a mix of multilingual seniors, the participants also sing in different languages. This program encourages seniors to get out of their rooms and make their artistic expression. They perform at special events in the Yerba Buena Gardens.

4.3.2. Social Services

The supportive community program providers services that improve its members' quality of life and enables them to remain in the community by giving them a sense of security and well-being .

1) Nutrition Program

Recognizing that nutrition is vital to seniors and problematic in the Central City area, TODCO, in partnership with "Self Help for the Elderly" began its Nutrition Meal Program in 1985. The purpose of the program was to ensure that seniors, whether living on a TODCO property or not, had adequate nutrition despite their economic situation. Each meal is valued at an average

⁴ <http://www.todco.org>

⁵ <http://www.todco.org>

⁶ <http://www.todco.org>

of \$6.00. With over 250 participants, the value of the program to residents is over \$200,000 each year.

2) Brown Bag Distribution Program

In collaboration with the San Francisco Food Bank, TODCO began the "Brown Bag Distribution Program" to ensure that all tenants at TODCO properties would have access to basic nutritional needs. Approximately 200 seniors and low-income members are directly benefited.

5. CONCLUSION

Communities can support aging in place, however, unless they address issues of elder-friendliness, they may have to confront more aging-related problems in the future. However, new urbanism lacks emphasis on characteristics that may be more important to older persons, such as accessibility to community amenities, facilities, and services. The supportive community elements such as accessible and affordable transportation, finance and policy, and social network and services aimed at enabling the older adults to remain in the community for as long as possible may be the key features of elder-friendly sustainable community. Yerba Buena Garden and Ceatrice Polite Apartments show such an integrated aging infrastructure which meets the needs of the older adults in San Francisco. However, the specific nature and priority of these features vary according to an individual community's capacity and its older adults' needs. Therefore, an assessment of community needs will be an important beginning to becoming age-prepared before the design implementation.

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