

# Sociology Between the Gaps: Forgotten and Neglected Topics



Photograph by Helene Souza

## Civil Engagement of the Future: Creating Liveable Communities in Increasingly Aging and Diverse Racial-Ethnic Societies

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# The “Golden Girls”: A Sociological Analysis of One Model of Communal Living for the 21st Century

By  
Josephine A. Ruggiero

“The Golden Girls” is a popular primetime sitcom that ran on NBC for seven seasons, a total of 169 1/2 hour episodes, between 1985-1992. See the wikiquote website for a list of the titles of each episode and some of the dialogue shared among the women in various episodes across the seven seasons: [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/The\\_Golden\\_Girls](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/The_Golden_Girls).

“The Golden Girls” still remains a popular sitcom in syndication, more than 20 years after its original run ended. What explains the staying power of “The Golden Girls” *and* what makes this sitcom relevant to the theme of creating liveable communities? The sociological analysis that follows addresses both questions.

## WHO ARE “THE GOLDEN GIRLS” AND WHAT EXPLAINS THE CONTINUING POPULARITY OF THIS SITCOM?

The “golden girls” are four older, previously married women: man-hungry Blanche Devereaux, the divorced homeowner, played by Rue McClanahan; tall, loud, opinionated Dorothy Zbornak, a divorced teacher, played by Bea Arthur; Rose Nylund, a sweet but ditsy recently widowed woman from St. Olaf, Minnesota, played by Betty White; and Sophia Petrillo, Dorothy’s

elderly, Sicilian, strong-willed, widowed mother, played by Estelle Getty. Sofia is generally accorded the status of the matriarch of the household-- a status which she uses to her advantage as often as possible. Blanche has a tender spot for Sofia and the sitcom viewer gets the impression that Blanche, a woman raised in the south, admires Sofia’s strong will and, in a cajoling way, respects Sofia as a mother figure and let’s her get away with some things that Dorothy would not. As mother and daughter, tiny Sofia and tall, outspoken Dorothy are often at odds. But underlying the frequent bluster in their conversations is love.

Feminists would surely have preferred that the word “Girls” in the title of a show of that time frame be replaced by “Women.” The characters did, however, refer to themselves as *girls* in conversations with each other. Regardless of the title of this sitcom, the four principal characters were so original, feisty, and funny that calling them “girls” did not affect watcher’s enjoyment negatively. I speak from experience here. My then younger age and their older ages were irrelevant. I loved them all and could relate to the challenges of three unrelated women over 50-- Dorothy, Blanche, and Rose and the fourth, the generation-older character of Sofia, Dorothy’s mother, who joined the others after an unhappy stay at a nursing home. These women put

Miami, FL on the map for female sitcom viewers over 30. To adapt the name of Gloria Estefan's musical group of the same era, the Golden Girls could have easily been dubbed "The Miami Laugh Machine."

Although they did not get along well all the time—evidence the barbs and insults flying back and forth, fundamentally, Dorothy, Blanche, Rose and Sofia were a lot like the four musketeers of housemates. As housemates often do in real life, they disagreed, even argued, but pulled together when any of them felt threatened by an outside influence. It was clear to viewers that, when the dust settled, these women were "in it" together. Despite their individual idiosyncrasies, different personalities, and the challenges of house sharing, they formed a group bound by financial need and by personal choice. Most importantly, these women cared about one another's wellbeing. The fact that ordinary women across generations could relate to the "golden girls" and to their sometimes oddball adventures endeared them to us.

### A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF "THE GOLDEN GIRLS" AS ONE MODEL OF A SHARED LIVING EXPERIENCE

The "golden girls" meet the sociological usage of the term group, defined as consisting of two or more individuals who interact repeatedly according to some pattern of social structure. Both large (secondary) and small, intimate (primary) groups develop a social structure as members interact with one another over time. Examples of the former are societies and organizations within a society. Examples of the latter are families and friendship groups.

Social structure refers to the pattern of rules and roles that shapes the way people relate to one another. The emergence of a social structure organizes both large (macro) and small (micro) groups into predictable relationships.

Can art mirror life in a house-sharing situation or is a shared domestic living by very different people inevitably a recipe for disaster? The sociological answer is that a lot depends on several key elements through, or around which, interaction is structured. These elements are goals, norms, roles and statuses, the effectiveness of social control, and the existence and nature of a

ranking system among members. A sociologist would probably *not* call unrelated housemates a group when these individuals first begin to interact. However, over time, their continued interaction shapes how they relate to one another and tends to make them more like a true group. Who will forget the intimate late-night kitchen scenes of the "girls" sitting around the table, sharing cheesecake, secrets, and concerns?

Goals, the purpose for which the group exists and the focus of coordinated interaction, are both individual and collective. For example, the individual goals of those who share living arrangements include it being affordable and safe; located near access to public transportation, care sharing, or Uber service, having private access to one's own bedroom and bathroom; the opportunity to interact, e.g., socialize, share meals with other housemates, and get assistance from them as desired, but not required. Their collective goals typically include sharing living expenses as agreed upon by the individual and others living in the abode; house maintenance responsibilities including cleaning of one's own room and bathroom, shared responsibilities for cleaning the rest of the house on a rotating basis, grocery shopping, and meal preparation, the latter depending on one's ability to cook and interest in doing so; private time to entertain family and friends at mutually agreed-upon days and times—for example, on weekends or when other housemates are at work or out. In short, goals draw us to involvement in groups.

Norms specify the rules of interaction among members of a group—in this case, those who share the household. Examples of norms include, but are not limited to, the following: good housemates respect each other's privacy and belongings; keep confidences; refrain from gossiping about housemates; settle disputes amicably or, if necessary, by mediation by a third party; do their fair share of chores; contribute to the quiet enjoyment of the premises (quiet times and spaces) at agreed-upon time; lock all doors upon entering or exiting the house and lock all windows on the lower level when no one is at home.

Sociologists view roles as *expectations about behavior* and the actual behavior of the person playing the role. Ideally, roles define the norms of the person holding a particular status in the group. If the abode is owned by one housemate, she or he has more power, and a higher ranking, than those who are renters. The owner may

or may not choose to exert that power in day-to-day situations but, ultimately, the domicile owner ranks at the top of the hierarchy of those sharing the household. Financial considerations can also impact on one's ranking.

Do all renters pay equal rent or is rent based on the size of one's room, access to a private bathroom, or having a prior friendship with the owner? These become variables that affect both the formal and informal ranking systems of the household.

How order gets maintained in the household is through the use of positive and negative incentives known as sanctions. Positive sanctions may include praise, being empathetic to a person's circumstances (e.g., "You are not feeling well. Let me help with that chore and we'll finish more quickly."); saying "Thank You" when warranted. Negative sanctions may involve a kindly-made request to lower the volume on the television, for repeated violation of norms, housemates may call a meeting to discuss what is going on and agree upon a sanction IF the behavior in question is serious and continues. The ultimate sanction is being required to move out of the dwelling unit and pay for damages to the dwelling, if damages are incurred.

Just as tenants usually sign leases on apartments or houses they rent, the idea of a written contract among the tenants in the shared household my help to avoid serious problems and misunderstandings. This contract would include defining individual and collective goals, norms, roles, what sanctions may be used to reinforce following the rules and performing one's roles to the group's satisfaction, and who has decision making power to evict a renter. Before signing the contract, potential renters should read each clause carefully, write down all questions and concerns, and raise them in a constructive general discussion. Once the contract is finalized, all housemates sign and date the contract. Housemates may agree to review the contact after 90 days to see how things are working out. Parts of the contract may be revised at that time if there is a consensus of house mates that specific clauses need to be changed. If no changes are needed, housemates sign and date the contract in its current form again. This time for the period of six to nine months. If changes are made to the first signed contract, there should be a trial period of 90 to see if the revised clauses are working better.

## CONCLUSION

This concluding section begins with dialogue excerpts from the next-to-last episode in *Season 7: One Flew Out of the Cuckoo's Nest*. The context is that Lucas, played by Leslie Nielsen, has just asked Dorothy to marry him. She has accepted and they are getting ready to leave Miami. They have invited Sofia to move to Atlanta with them. In what follows, the "girls" are saying their goodbyes.

**Dorothy:** Well...

**Blanche:** Well...

**Rose:** Yea...

**Sophia:** ...I guess this is it.

**Dorothy:** *[nodding]* Right. Listen-

**Blanche:** Dorothy, you don't have to say anything.

**Rose:** What can you say about 7 years of fights and laughter...secrets...cheesecake...

**Dorothy:** Just that...it's been very...it has been an experience that I'll always keep close to my heart. *[sobbing]* And that these are memories that...I'll wrap myself in when the world gets cold and I forget that there are people who are warm and loving and...

**Blanche:** We love you, too...*[girls embrace and cry]*... You'll always be a part of us

**Dorothy:** Your friendship was something I never expected at this point of my life, and I could never asked for a better surprise

**Blanche:** *[sobbing]* That's how we feel too.

**Dorothy:** I have to go.

**Rose:** Dorothy.....is this goodbye?

**Dorothy:** *[walks to the door, looks at the girls and nods]*...I love you, always *[leaves room while the girls stare at the door. Dorothy re-appears from the door]* Oh god I love you! *[girls embrace again]*

**Blanche:** *[sobbing]* Oh Dorothy...Dorothy...

**Dorothy:** *[sobbing]* Lucas is waiting *[heads to the door again, looks at girls]* You're angels...all of you *[leaves room again while the girls stare at the door again. Dorothy comes out from the backyard hall]* OH GOD, I'LL MISS YOU!!! *[girls embrace once more]* Listen I have a flight... *[heads for the door once more]* ...you'll always be my sisters... *[sobbing]* always *[leaves room for good while the girls stare at the door again then at the backyard hall and at the kitchen door. The three remaining girls embrace, sobbing]*

[https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/The\\_Golden\\_Girls](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/The_Golden_Girls)

The “Golden Girls” sitcom provides a down-to-earth, funny yet reasonably functional model for how very different individuals can come together and make a communal living arrangement work. By the end of the series, the “girls” shared a level of intimacy, empathy, and caring for each other that created a haven from the troubles of the outside world.

This model of sharing a household can also work well if the members are a mix of older and younger housemates. When occupants of a dwelling share common goals, have a sense of cooperation, and are treated as status equals by other housemates, despite differences like age variations, many positive outcomes can occur. For example, younger tenants can bring energy, new experiences, interests, and skills into the living environment. Older residents can bring wisdom and perspectives on life and work to share with interested house mates of any age.

Of course, even with clear goals and rules, the unexpected can happen and throw a wrench in interaction among housemates of any age. For example, someone may need to move out because of financial or health reasons. Family members in another city or state may want or need their loved one to move closer to them. Anticipating possible changes may help to keep the composition, ebb and flow, of house mates in a state of dynamic equilibrium.

#### CITATION

[https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/The\\_Golden\\_Girls](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/The_Golden_Girls)

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# The DaVinci Center for Community Progress: Making the Community More Liveable<sup>1</sup>

By

Helmut E. Reinhardt & Josephine A. Ruggiero

## Abstract

There are many innovations, projects, and programs which can make a community more liveable. The elements that they have in common are 1) the vision of the founder (or co-founders), 2) a dedicated connection to the community and populations in which the innovation or project is located, 3) the necessary social skills and contacts of the founder(s) and other key people involved in the innovation, 4) hard work, and 5) funding sources that continue over time to keep the services (or project) going, as well as to add services as needs change. The DaVinci Center for Community Progress, in Providence, RI, is an excellent example of how to make a community more liveable for diverse populations for whom it has provided services since it opened its doors in 1972. The DaVinci Center is a multi-purpose facility based on the settlement house model in regard to many of the services it offers. It differs from the settlement house model in that the DaVinci Center staff does not live at the Center. The Center was co-founded by John DeLuca who has also served as its longtime Executive Director. The content for this article was gathered, in part, through a lengthy, structured interview both authors conducted with John at the Center, a review of written materials produced by the Center, and information provided on the Center's website.

**Keywords:** DaVinci Center for Community Progress, multi-purpose center, settlement house model, diverse populations.

## INTRODUCTION

Social activists are familiar with the existence of settlement houses. When sociologists and other social scientists think of settlement houses in historical perspective, we think of the hordes of immigrants that entered many of the large cities of the U. S. in the 19th and early 20th centuries. We also think specifically of the city of Chicago and of *Hull House* co-founded by Jane Addams and her friend, Ellen Gates Starr, in 1889. Although Hull House was the most famous of the settlement houses in the U. S., it was *not* the first settlement house in the U. S.

In 1886, Stanton Coit founded *the Neighborhood Guild*, later renamed *University Settlement*. This first settlement house in America was located on the lower East Side in New York City. Beginning with the founding of Toynbee Hall in 1884, in South London, settlement houses operated on the philosophy that

students and people of wealth should “settle” in poverty-stricken neighborhoods both to provide services to help improve the daily quality of life, as well as to evaluate conditions and work for social reform. (<http://www.unhny.org/about/history>)

The “people of wealth” in the above statement referred to middle-class Londoners. The social reformers involved in the first settlement house focused on providing social services and education to the working-class poor in South London.

The number of settlement houses in the U. S. continued to grow. By 1887, 74 settlement houses had been established. By 1890, that number had more than quadrupled to over 400. Historical records document that “Forty percent of settlement houses were in Boston, Chicago, and New York—the leading industrial centers—but most small cities had at least one settlement.” (<http://www.unhny.org/about/history>)

<sup>1</sup>This article is based, in part, on a personal interview both authors conducted with John De Luca on May 26, 2016.

[ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/settlement.htmlv](http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/settlement.htmlv))

Until the mid-1900s, the staff of settlement houses in the U.S. lived in the same buildings in which neighborhood residents participated in programs and activities offered there. Living in close proximity to the people it served was an important aspect of the settlement house model. Living in the neighborhood allowed the staff of settlement houses to view the people who participated in its programs as “neighbors,” rather than as “clients,” thus creating a shared sense of community among staff and “neighbors”. Even today, it is common for staff who provide community-based services at multi-purpose centers to live in the community which they serve. (<http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/settlement-houses/hull-house/>)

## PRINCIPAL FUNCTIONS OF SETTLEMENT HOUSES

The principal function of settlement houses in the U.S. was to aid immigrants in assimilating into their new society. Many immigrants needed to learn English and to get and keep jobs. Settlement Houses, therefore, included teaching classes in adult education and English language, providing schooling for children of immigrants, organizing job clubs, offering afterschool recreational activities, initiating public health services, and advocating for improved housing for their poor and working class “neighbors.” Hull House also provided social services which focused on reducing the effects of poverty. These services included a homeless shelter, public kitchen, a daycare center, and public baths. (<http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/settlement.htmlv>).

In the early years of the 20th century, leaders of New York City settlement houses assisted in establishing a national organization of settlement houses, called the *National Federation of Settlements* (NFS). This entity was known as *United Neighborhood Centers of America* (UNCA) for 100 years. UNCA membership consisted of 150 neighborhood centers in 57 cities and 22 states. (<http://www.unhny.org/about/history>). Several years ago, UNCA merged with another national service organization, the *Alliance for Strong Families and Communities*.

John De Luca, a co-founder of the DaVinci Center served a nine year term on the Board of Directors of UNCA at UNCA's invitation. With his professional experience, as a trained counselor, he has interacted with many individuals connected to settlement houses throughout the country. John had a unique opportunity to incorporate the vision of the settlement house into the DaVinci Center.

## THE DAVINCI CENTER FOR COMMUNITY PROGRESS

The DaVinci Center is a multi-purpose center based on the settlement house and social welfare agency concept in a non-partisan environment. This center is one of 11 multi-purpose centers in Providence, RI. The DaVinci Center was started in 1972. At that time, John was a school counselor and a Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) advisor at St. Ann's Church, the Catholic church which anchored the neighborhood. He and four other individuals who were also concerned about challenges to the social fabric of the Charles Street/Wanskuck area of Providence, formed a corporation. John stated that, according to the 1970 U. S. Census of the population, the three census tracts (27, 28, and 29) comprising the Wanskuck and Charles Street areas consisted of 18,000 people and was 74% Italian-American. He described the neighborhood as a warm and compassionate one. However, the population of the Wanskuck-Charles Street area was in great need of resources and social services. Teenager drop-out in schools had grown to an alarming rate. Businesses were going bankrupt. Eighteen of the 35 storefronts were boarded-up. Those who knew the neighborhood well saw that teens were dropping out of school. The community was becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Families were struggling. Senior citizens were lonely and financially strapped. St. Ann's Roman Catholic Church was still the heart and soul of the community, but economic and social issues of the time were challenging the integrity of the neighborhood.

John had a vision of what the community he came from needed and he had the determination, social skills, contacts and expertise to make the DaVinci Center a long-term reality. To counter the negative images portrayed in the Godfather movies, the Center was named for Leonardo da (from) Vinci, a positive role model and well-known figure in Italian history



and culture. Leonardo's many areas of interest and achievement included inventing, painting, sculpting, architecture, mathematics, science, engineering, music, literature, writing, history, anatomy, astronomy, botany and cartography. As a role model, Leonardo was a man of many interests, talents, and accomplishments -- truly a Renaissance Man and a role model for all time.

The DaVinci Center first opened as a rent-free storefront drop-in center located at 525 Charles Street in 1972. It then expanded to a second storefront where they extended services to senior citizens and a third store-front. The current building, where the Da Vinci Center has been located since 1978, was designed by John, his staff, and Board of Directors. The building was funded by a community development federal grant and initially accredited by the United Way of Rhode Island. John became Executive Director of the DaVinci Center in 1976, and has held the title ever since. With its small full-time staff of 12 people and 30 unpaid volunteers along with occasional interns from Rhode Island College and Community College of Rhode Island, the Center continues to provide substantial services to the community which has continued to become more racially and ethnically diverse over time.

The mission statement of the DaVinci Center is to serve the surrounding community by assisting its residents with education, job training, counseling, housing issues, and senior services. The Center has also run valuable first-time home buyers' seminars and AARP Driver Safety Program courses.

The Center serves approximately 5,000 to 6,000 *different* individuals a year. John made a point of saying that many people who come to the Center have more than one need. So, if one adds up the number of times each person the Center serves receives a service, this number totals, on average, between 100,000 to 125,000 *service units* each year.

Service users range in age from young to middle-age to older residents of the community. The Center brings in people through its very effective website, referrals agencies throughout the state of Rhode Island, and announcements in local papers. Many people who come to the DaVinci Center need basic resources including food assistance, clothing, help with getting their G. E. D. so that they can access to jobs, housing assistance, and English language literacy. At one time, the Center also

provided health care assistance.

## **BUDGET AND FUNDING SOURCES**

Since it opened its doors, the annual operating budget of the DaVinci Center has ranged from \$320,000 to \$1,000,000. Funding sources include the federal and state governments and private donations. Private donations have become especially important in recent years. Sadly, the Center is struggling financially, with local, state, and federal funding consistently late in forwarding payments due. Donations from small corporations and private individuals help the cash flow problem. However, more consistent and better income sources and grants are needed to keep the essential work of this important Center going. It seems accurate to say that the growing number of neighbors in need of various services outweighs the financial ability of the DaVinci Center to provide all the services it would like to offer.

## **CONCLUDING STATEMENT**

At the end of the interview, John was asked to complete the following statement: *The DaVinci Center makes the community a more liveable one by \_\_\_\_\_* (fill in the blank).

He promptly stated that the *DaVinci Center makes the community a more liveable one* by "being all things to all people. When they come to the door, either we give them what they need or we refer them to someone who can," He was also asked to *rate the community's perception of the DaVinci Center on a scale of from 1 (very positive) to 5 (very negative)*. John answered without hesitation: "Very positively. They love the Center. This is their home."

No one could have summed up people's view of the DaVinci Center better than its co-founder and longtime Executive Director. John should know because he has dedicated more than 40 years of his life to identifying and addressing the needs of his "neighbors" in the community he loves. He and his staff and Board have worked very hard to make the DaVinci Center an outstanding model of enhancing the liveability the Wanskuck-Charles Street community for thousands of neighbors.

The DaVinci Center is located at 470 Charles Street, Providence, RI 02904 USA. For more information about the DaVinci Center, the services it offers, or about making a donation to help to support the services those who come to the Center need, visit their website at [www.davincicenter.org](http://www.davincicenter.org). Donations can be mailed to 470 Charles Street, Providence, RI 02904 in care of John DeLuca.

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**About the Authors:** **Helmut E. Reinhardt** first met John DeLuca when he started to teach AARP Driver Safety courses for senior citizens at the DaVinci Center in spring, 2004. Helmut continues to offer this course at the Center. **Josephine A. Ruggiero** met John several years ago when her younger daughter served as a “Bingo” volunteer at the Center. Josephine has been a social activist “at heart” from childhood and an advocate for positive change for underserved populations at the micro and macro levels of society for decades.

# Like Disney for Adults: Life in Freedom Village

By

Janice G. Schuster

## Abstract

With an increasingly aging population, American society needs to more effectively address living options for the aging population in the present and future. Older adults have unique needs due to their age, physical and mental condition, varying needs for medical and health care and assistance with their daily activities. Freedom Village is an example of a very successful continuing care retirement community (CCRC) in Holland, Michigan. Using a case study approach and structured questions to ask two residents of Freedom Village, her aunt and uncle, over a period of several months, the author learned that they have lived very happily at Freedom Village since 2009. The community provides them and other residents with a safe environment; high quality medical care options that are flexible enough to change as their needs change; opportunities for social contact with both their peers and with younger people; and caregivers who are trained in and understand the unique needs of an older population. One disadvantage of Freedom Village, however, is its steep cost, both to buy in and to pay the monthly maintenance fees. The author concludes that care for older adults should be the responsibility of both their families and the state/federal governments, through policies and legislation that encourage family members to care for their older parents. This will ensure that livable communities such as Freedom Village will be as accessible to older adults with limited resources as they are to those with more extensive means.

**Keywords:** Freedom Village, continuing care retirement community, life care community, older adults, quality of life

## INTRODUCTION

With an increasingly aging population, American society needs to more effectively address living options for the aging population in the present and future. A key issue includes quality of life in all its dimensions: physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, that contribute to a good and meaningful life (Galambos 1997:27). Older adults need safe environments; high-quality medical care options that are flexible enough to change as needs change; support for activities of daily life such as bathing, cooking, cleaning, etc.; opportunities for social contact with both their peers and with younger people; and caregivers who are trained in and understand the unique needs of an older population.

In the past, the needs of older adults as they aged were met in various ways. In the 1700s, there were public

poor houses; in the later 1800s, more humanistic not-for-profit homes for the aged; and by the mid-1900s, less humanistic, particularly proprietary nursing homes. (Tobin 2003:53). In large families, one child was often responsible for the care of one or both parents as they aged. On farms where the family members worked the land, this was not as much of a challenge as in cities where home and work were separate spheres. In modern households where two or more adults work, there may be no one at home to care for one or both elderly parents. Also, for many older Americans, a prime consideration in planning for old age is figuring out how best to get into the appropriate institutional care at the appropriate time and to have sufficient resources to stay there until death. (Case 2015:501).

The content of this article is based on a series of email exchanges between the author and her aunt and uncle,

between May-July of 2016, and on a telephone interview between the author and Steve Stickel, Director of Sales and Marketing at Freedom Village, on July 25, 2016.

## FREEDOM VILLAGE

One very successful example of a facility that has evolved in addressing the changing needs of the older population is Freedom Village in Holland, Michigan (<https://www.brookdale.com/communities/freedom-village-at-holland/>). The history of Freedom Village, including websites to pictures of this community, can be found in Appendix A at the end of this article.

This article focuses on how Freedom Village provides a community that meets the quality-of-life needs of older adults as well as a safe and fulfilling environment for them, allowing them to stay in independent living for as long as possible until they need to transition to more services and care, all within the same facility. Importantly, Freedom Village provides supportive care for activities of daily life for residents who do not need medical care on a daily basis but who do need support for bathing, cooking, cleaning, etc, prolonging the ability of older adults to remain in independent living longer than they would otherwise be able to. Communities such as Freedom Village mimic living arrangements and services that were previously provided by towns and villages. The author's aunt and uncle have lived at Freedom Village since 2009 and report that they are very happy with how it has met their needs over those years. Importantly, they are also confident that it will continue to meet their needs as they age and might need more care and services. For demographics of current residents, see Appendix B at the end of this article.

Freedom Village distinguishes itself from other retirement centers, such as independent living facilities, nursing facilities which offer short-term rehabilitation and long-term assisted living, and facilities with only lock-down Alzheimer's and dementia units, in at least three ways. **First**, it is owned and operated by a for-profit corporation. It does not rely on Medicaid and endowment funding but instead uses the resources from the lump sum payments and monthly maintenance fees of residents to fund its operations. Due to its for-profit nature, Freedom Village is able to maintain a high ratio of staff to residents: approx. one staff for every 4-5 residents (430 full- and part-time staff and 500 residents.)

Nursing care is provided on site 24/7 for all levels (independent living; assisted living; skilled nursing; memory unit). When a resident pulls an emergency cord in an apartment, trained medical staff respond. In not-for-profit retirement centers, the responder is sometimes a concierge who then calls 911, delaying assistance. **Second**, a continuum of care (independent living; assisted living; skilled nursing; memory care) is guaranteed at Freedom Village. **Third**, unlike other retirement facilities, there is a contractual agreement between the residents and Freedom Village which guarantees services for life, even if the resident's resources are exhausted during his or her lifetime.

## Decision to Move to Freedom Village

The author's aunt and uncle both had parents who lived in retirement living centers in their last years, which paved the way for them to consider such a center for their senior years. In 2009, when they were in their late seventies, they felt the upkeep on their house and garden was getting to be more than they wanted, so they considered moving into a condo. One downside of moving to a condo, though, was that they would have to move again if they needed more services in the future. Moving to Freedom Village would allow them to start in independent living and then move to assisted living, memory care, and skilled nursing, if the need arose. They had the luxury of being able to carefully consider their decision since both of them were healthy at the time, with no hasty decision necessary due to a hospitalization or other crisis. In addition, Freedom Village is in the same town where they had lived for 20+ years, and they had friends who were already living there. It was somewhat difficult for them to downsize after having lived for many years in a larger house. They hired a "downsizing expert" who helped them decide what to discard or give away and what to keep. Their adult children removed their belongings from the house's basement as well, in anticipation of the move. The author's aunt and uncle were able to give to their children some items of sentimental value and were also fortunate to have their children's help in preparing for the move to Freedom Village.

## Application for Admission and Finances

*Residents:* An applicant's overall wealth must reflect a good probability that the resident won't outlive his or her assets. The admissions staff at Freedom Village rely on an insurance model, taking into consideration government longevity statistics and physical limitations of the applicant. Potential residents with fewer resources can apply on the basis of resources of family members or others. That is, a potential resident must either have significant resources on his or her own or he or she must have family members or others whose resources can be considered.

In addition to a thorough analysis of an applicant's financial resources, the admissions staff look carefully at the applicant's age, overall health, and physical limitations. Parkinson's disease, dementia, and brittle diabetes disqualify an applicant from admission, since those diagnoses guarantee that the applicant will require a longer stay at a higher level of care and will, most likely, exhaust his or her resources before death. Rejecting applicants with disqualifying diagnoses protects the financial stability of Freedom Village and prevents existing residents from incurring additional costs.

Admissions staff assist accepted residents in choosing the appropriate size apartment. They make every effort to put residents into the largest apartment that is sustainable by their assets. Apartments range in size from studios to luxury two bedroom/two bath units. Regardless of the size of the apartment, residents receive the same level of care. The services are all-inclusive, even in independent living, and include everything in the resident's apartment except for breakfast, lunch and phone service.

There are several buy-in plans at Freedom Village. The author's aunt and uncle chose to pay a fairly large "lump sum" when they moved in to the facility. The amount of their upfront payment gives them a discount on their monthly maintenance fees and also ensures them lifelong care even if they exhaust their resources before their deaths.

When a resident dies or leaves Freedom Village voluntarily, it is possible that some of the lump sum payment may be refunded to the resident's estate or to the resident, if alive. The amount of the refund, if any,

depends on the contract that the resident chose initially.

The monthly maintenance fee, which ranges from \$2,200 to \$6,000, includes electricity; heat; air conditioning; transportation to doctor's appointments; special entertainment; fitness classes; swimming and sauna facilities; weekly housekeeping including vacuuming and scrubbing the kitchen and the two bathrooms; security practices; and a daily food allotment that can be 'spent' in one of the five dining rooms or in the Bistro (a feature added in 2014).

If the author's aunt and uncle transition into a different level of care, i.e. assisted living, acute nursing care, memory unit, etc., there will be an additional charge each month. For example, skilled nursing costs \$275 per day. However, since they made a large lump sum payment when they bought in to Freedom Village, they are guaranteed lifelong care even if they exhaust all of their funds.

The residents do not use cash in their daily transactions; everything is done with their Freedom Village credit card, which results in a monthly bill. Residents are not allowed to tip employees, waiters, servers in the dining area, etc. Instead, since the staff in the dining areas are mainly high school or college students, a Scholarship Committee, consisting of eight residents, solicits and accepts scholarship applications. All staff who are college students (or who will be in college in the upcoming academic year) are eligible to apply. The committee interviews each applicant, examines transcripts, essays and recommendations, and then agrees upon who will receive the scholarships and in what amount. In 2016 the Scholarship committee is awarding 30 scholarships for a total of \$37,500. Funds come from an endowed Scholarship Fund, consisting of the original endowment plus proceeds from a pancake breakfast, which is prepared every Saturday by volunteer residents. Participants contribute whatever they wish for the breakfast, and all proceeds go to the Scholarship Fund. However, given that Brookdale's current CEO earned compensation of approx. \$8.8 million in 2015, it seems disconcerting to the author that so much effort goes into raising \$37,500 for the Scholarship Fund to be split among 30 college student staffers when the Brookdale CEO earns millions of dollars each year.

*Freedom Village:* Freedom Village has a track record of financial stability. For the last 2-3 years, its independent living units have had an average occupancy rate of

98% of capacity, which is high for the industry and contributes to the financial stability of the center. When it is necessary to increase the monthly maintenance fees, the administration levies a smaller percentage increase to existing residents than to new ones. For example, existing residents might see their monthly maintenance fees increase by 3.5% while new resident monthly fees would be 4.5% more than for new residents previously.

### **Living Arrangements**

Of the many apartment location and floor plans to choose from, the author's aunt and uncle chose a first floor, 1,344 sq. ft. unit. They appreciate being near the many trees and vegetation outside their patio, and they also make good use of walking paths out to the famous Windmill Island nearby. Other residents choose apartments on the upper floors so they can look out over the trees, etc., to the pond and river leading to Lake Michigan. Freedom Village also provides guest rooms which residents can rent for a minimal cost. The author's cousins, the son and daughter of her aunt and uncle, along with their spouses, have stayed many times in the guest accommodations.

The apartment of the author's aunt and uncle includes a large (16' X 23') living room, two bathrooms, two bedrooms (one of which they use as a den/TV room), a kitchen, a laundry room, many closets, and a 9' by 16' patio with screens and windows. They have plenty of room for the furniture they chose to bring with them from their house.

There were many aspects of the apartment that they were able to customize before they moved in, including: the layout; the direction the apartment faces; paint (or wallpaper); floor covering (they chose carpeting, but their neighbors across the hall chose hardwood flooring); ceiling light fixtures (they chose to bring some special fixtures from the house they were leaving after 20+ years and had them installed in the apartment); laundry facilities (they chose to have a washer/dryer installed in the apartment rather than using the shared laundry room available on each floor of the building); window treatments (they installed honeycomb blinds with no curtains while other residents have draperies, curtains, and venetian blinds); kitchen cabinet finishes, counter tops, and appliances.

### **Buildings/Grounds/Location**

The Freedom Village campus consists of two buildings: first, a seven-story building in the shape of the letter 'H' with roughly 40 apartments on each floor which is divided into the five 'legs' of the 'H.' The entire building is referred to as The Lakes because each of the five 'legs' is named after one of the Great Lakes. The author's aunt and uncle live on the first floor of the Lake Erie leg facing east, which gives them a good early morning view of water and trees from an island where an authentic Dutch windmill is located. It is also nice in the late afternoon when they sit on their porch and relax while enjoying a snack and perhaps a sip of a locally brewed beverage.

The Inn, which is connected to The Lakes, is the second building on the Freedom Village campus. It houses the rehabilitation unit, the assisted living section, acute nursing care, and the memory unit. The author's aunt used the rehabilitation in 2015 after a knee replacement, and she was very happy with the care she received. The Inn has been under construction in 2016 in order to convert it to single rooms, and the entire area is being given a much-needed refreshing. The author's aunt and uncle will transition to those areas when needed as they age.

The town of Holland, Michigan was named one of America's Prettiest Towns in 2013 (Giuffo 2013). Freedom Village is located within walking distance to the downtown Holland area and to Hope College. The author's aunt and uncle take advantage of the close proximity by walking in the area as often as possible: she on foot, and he on his scooter. Freedom Village has a close relationship with the college since the president and some faculty members from Hope were instrumental in its founding. Freedom Village offers field trips to cultural events at Hope such as plays, concerts, etc. In addition to the college, there are many things to do in Holland. See Appendix C for a list of things to see and do in the surrounding community.

### **Services/Amenities**

There are a myriad of services and amenities available at Freedom Village, including: Health/medical: occupational, physical and speech therapy; physician on site; nurses available 24/7 to respond to

emergencies; transportation to off-site appointments; social workers; vision clinics. Other: Post office with a locked mailbox for each resident and ability to post outgoing mail; beauty salon; barber shop; small grocery/convenience store; computer lab, including a computer coach; gym, including a variety of exercise machines, a walking track, table tennis and daily fitness classes; pool; bank; in-house library with magazines, books, assisted reading devices, computers, and talking books, as well as transportation to the city library; bus transportation several days per week to various grocery stores and shopping malls; bus transportation to the airport (45 minutes away) for a nominal charge; and bus transportation to church, movies, concerts, etc.

Local churches provide buses from Freedom Village to their Sunday services as well, at no additional charge. In addition, residents may have their own cars, and complimentary valet parking is provided. The author's aunt and uncle take advantage of this service and appreciate the convenience of having their car brought to the front door of their building when they need it. As at Disney, the services and amenities at Freedom Village contribute to an environment where safety, courtesy, and efficiency are top priorities. (Disney's Four Keys to a Great Guest Experience. 2016).

## **Staff**

Freedom Village enjoys a high ratio of staff to residents: approx. 1 to 4-5. There are approx. 430 staff, many of whom are part-time. The largest number of staff work in three areas: nursing (including CNAs) to maintain 24/7 coverage; housekeeping; and dining services.

## **Dining**

The food is one of the selling points of Freedom Village, which is known throughout the community as 'the place to be invited for dinner.' The author's aunt and uncle usually prepare and eat breakfast and lunch in their apartment and then join friends in one of the five dining rooms for dinner. Residents can pay for guests to join them for dinner. Residents order from a menu, which changes daily and includes a variety of main entrees, accompaniments, desserts, and an extensive salad bar. There is a registered dietician on site who is responsible for accommodating special dietary

needs such as vegetarianism.

The dining rooms resemble restaurants both in the variety of options and in the tableside service; no buffet lines. The dining rooms offer free wine on Saturdays and are open Monday-Saturday for the noon or evening meal. On Sunday the dining rooms are open for brunch only.

Mealtime is an opportunity to socialize, and a large percentage of residents, 85%-90%, eat at least one meal together with others in one of the dining rooms. It is easy to make new friends, if one wishes, by asking to be seated together at the dining tables, which accommodate two, four, six or eight people. There is also a Bistro, open 7:00am-8:00pm every day, with snacks, drinks, and full meals available. All of the meals in the dining rooms are part of the monthly dining bill. Residents never need cash; they just swipe their meal card. The dining room servers are part-time high school and college students. Residents often become acquainted with them and enjoy the interactions with young people.

## **Events, Activities and Volunteer Opportunities**

Freedom Village is a very active, social place if residents choose to participate, and the majority do so in varying degrees. Options include: heated pool and hot tub with daily exercise classes; gym with exercise equipment and classes; game room equipped with board games, jigsaw puzzles, computers and room for small groups such as the bridge club and regularly-scheduled meetings of church groups that have members who are Freedom Village residents; woodworking shop with a lathe and tools to make a variety of bowls, trays, jewelry, etc.; arts and crafts room for quilting groups, knitters, and the residents who volunteer to mend and alter clothing (proceeds go to the Scholarship Fund); dance classes; dominoes; reading groups; choir; bicycle groups; movies; Sunday worship service; a pool table; a card and game room that offers a variety of weekly card games; book groups; billiards room; among many others. One or two evenings a week there is a scheduled lecture or musical performance. Transportation is provided by bus to community events and events at the college.

Social interaction is an integral part of life at Freedom Village. When the author's aunt and uncle lived alone in their house, their social activities had to be much more planned and scheduled. At Freedom Village, contact

with others occurs in the hallway, elevator, dining room and elsewhere, making social contact part of everyday life. Also, residents are expected to always wear their name badges in public areas. Wearing name tags allows new residents to quickly know the names of others and allows them to greet each other by name, adding to the sense of connectedness among the residents.

In addition, many volunteer opportunities are available to residents at Freedom Village. For example, the author's aunt belongs to a volunteer group of about 20 residents called "Baggie Books." Freedom Village provides bus transportation for "Baggie Books" volunteers to go to a local elementary school one half day each week. Each volunteer is assigned to a classroom for the year; they follow a curriculum and work with the teacher to read one-on-one with each student in the classroom. The author's aunt enjoys getting to know the students, observing the diversity in the student body (her school has a majority of non-white students), and seeing the improvement in reading ability of the students.

### **Resident Participation in Freedom Village Governance**

There is an elected Resident Advisory Council (RAC), which meets monthly and consists of two members elected from each of the seven floors of the building. Representatives serve 2-year terms and one half of the representatives are up for election each year. Officers of the council are elected by the representatives for a one-year term. All residents are welcome at the meetings and are encouraged to attend if they choose. Residents are also encouraged to communicate opinions, ideas and suggestions to council representatives. Following each monthly meeting, a report is distributed to all residents including an extensive written report of the business section of the RAC meeting, a report from each of the standing committees, and a report from Freedom Village's Executive Director, keeping residents informed about the administration of Freedom Village.

In addition, there is a standing Food Committee to which residents are invited to submit suggestions to assist in planning dining options. To encourage submissions, each month the committee draws one suggestion from the over 100 monthly comments, and the winner receives a free dinner for a guest.

There is also a standing Activities Committee that provides suggestions for the myriad available options

which Freedom Village might "sponsor." Many times these activities require transportation that is provided by the two Freedom Village buses, one of which is equipped with a lift for wheelchair occupants.

### **Families/Visitors of Residents**

Many residents at Freedom Village have visitors. Guests may park free-of-charge in the public parking lot. There is no charge for guests to visit private residences, but there is a charge for guest meals and accommodations. Children are always welcome, and may use all of the facilities (pool, gym, etc.) while they are there. There are no ongoing activities for the children.

### **Daily Schedule**

There is no structured or required daily schedule that all independent living residents follow. However, there is a daily schedule of events and activities, which are available if residents choose to participate. All residents in independent living must pull a cord that hangs in the bathroom before a certain time every morning to signal that everything is okay. If the cord not pulled, the front desk will call to check. This practice provides a level of comfort for the residents. In other parts of Freedom Village, i.e. rehabilitation, memory unit, extended care, and skilled nursing, there is a more rigid schedule to accommodate the needs of the residents in those units. Since the author's aunt and uncle are in the independent living area, they are free to do as they wish when they wish, just as they were when they lived in their previous houses.

### **Quality of Life**

All of Freedom Village's services contribute to the quality of life of the residents. In addition, the staff help residents form support groups for issues such as grief; vision impairments; and Parkinson's disease. Pets are allowed: one dog, or a maximum of two cats, is allowed in any first-floor apartment. A maximum of two cats per apartment is allowed on any floor. No dogs are allowed on the upper floors. Pets are not allowed in any common area, and there is a nominal additional charge per month to keep a pet. Research shows the benefits of human-



animal bonding, including a positive physiological effect on the heart, a reduced need for medication, and assistance for persons with disabilities. Pets also give love and friendship that boosts morale and raises the self-esteem of their owners. (Hoffman 1991).

### **Satisfaction**

The author's aunt and uncle are extremely happy with their living situation at Freedom Village. Overall, they love the non-institution atmosphere and appreciate very much the freedom that they have to live their lives independently. At the same time, Freedom Village provides them with safe accommodations; easy access to medical care; and a variety of social events/activities.

The author's uncle's Parkinson's disease causes his need for assistance to vary; he knows that he can easily and quickly receive the help he needs. He uses an electric scooter to get around, and the building is designed to accommodate walkers, scooters and wheelchairs: no steps, convenient elevators, and large hallways. When they need rehabilitation services, as the author's aunt did in 2015, these services are readily available in-house. If their needs change in the future, the author's aunt and uncle will be able to easily move to assisted living, memory care, or skilled nursing, without leaving Freedom Village. In addition, they have many friends at Freedom Village, including some from before they moved there and many more from their time living there. They appreciate living in close proximity to the other residents, most of whom share their values and interests. Both speak very highly of the staff as well.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Freedom Village community offers a successful model of living options for the aging population. The Village addresses quality of life issues of older adults by providing many options for the physical, emotional, medical and spiritual well-being of its residents. The Village also provides a safe environment, including appropriate security; flexible medical care options that adapt to the changing needs of its residents, including skilled nursing, memory care, and rehabilitation services; opportunities for social contact with both peers (i.e. other residents) and with younger people (i.e. staff); and caregivers who are trained in and understand the unique needs of an older population.

The life spans of residents are increased by 10%-15% due to living in Freedom Village. Within six months of moving in, residents are consistently happier and healthier than when they arrived. Their improved health and happiness are due both to the peace of mind that comes from having all of their needs met and from the myriad of available social activities (Stickel 2016). Almost 20 years earlier, Moorhead and Fischer (1995:316) reported a similar finding about mortality among residents at CCRCs: "The overall...mortality experience...indicate(s) that the selection techniques, living conditions and residents' sense of security produce the excellent mortality experience of many CCRCs."

One disadvantage of this model of a continuing care retirement community, however, is its cost. The author's aunt and uncle put down a considerable lump sum in order to buy into Freedom Village. Their steep monthly maintenance fee would be out of the reach of many elders. A tax break might be available for all or part of the lump sum (Tax Break Helps Pay for CCRC Fees 2013) but even with potential tax credits, more effort needs to be put into providing communities such as Freedom Village for lower-income seniors, so that they, too, can enjoy its benefits.

The author agrees with Wise (2002) that caring for seniors should be the responsibility of both their families and of the state and federal governments. In regard to the latter, specifically, state and federal policies should be enacted to give families both financial and other types of support (i.e. respite care). Such multi-level policies would make it possible for adult children to support their parents and would reward them for doing so. Wise (2002: 565-566) points out that such policies would benefit the elderly, their families, and the state. For example, senior care tax credits, similar to existing child care credits, should be offered to adult children who support their parents. There should be additional options for older adults who lack the necessary financial resources to apply to continuing care retirement communities. In the case of Freedom Village, the author further asserts that both Brookdale and the local social services agencies should provide financial support for potential residents who do not have the resources that are necessary to apply.

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## APPENDIX A

## History of Freedom Village

In the late 1980s, a group of thoughtful and insightful leaders from the Holland, Michigan (<http://www.holland.org/>) community envisioned Freedom Village. The leaders included the president of and some faculty members from Hope College (<http://www.hope.edu>), a 4,000-student Christian liberal arts college located in Holland. Initially Freedom Village was funded by Freedom Group, Inc. after the Holland visionaries pitched the idea to Mr. Steven Roskamp, a Freedom Group partner. Freedom Group applied its expertise in retirement communities and its financial backing to the project. In July of 1998, American Retirement Corp acquired Freedom Group (American Retirement Corporation entry in Mergent Online 2016), and Brookdale Senior Living acquired American Retirement Corporation (ARC) in July of 2006 (Brookdale Senior Living entry in Mergent Online 2016). Brookdale (<http://www.brookdale.com>), of Brentwood, Tennessee, remains the owner of Freedom Village. When Brookdale acquired ARC, many of the ARC staff remained, including the CEO. Since Brookdale is a for-profit corporation, the goal of Freedom Village is, first, to care for its residents in the best way possible and, second, to generate a profit. Brookdale owns and operates over 1,200 facilities nationwide, including other Continuing Care Retirement Communities, defined as offering independent living, assisted living and nursing home care all in one campus (<http://www.aplaceformom.com/senior-care-resources/articles/continuing-care-retirement-communities>). Brookdale considers Freedom Village to be a national model and the benchmark for Brookdale's other retirement communities, including in the areas of occupancy, staffing levels and low turnover of staff, and various financial metrics. It is a for-profit model. Freedom Village is licensed by the state of Michigan for their skilled nursing, and they are licensed by the state as a Home for the Aged ([http://www.michigan.gov/lara/0,4601,7-154-63294\\_27717-245180--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/lara/0,4601,7-154-63294_27717-245180--,00.html)). They accept Medicare for rehabilitation services.

Many of the Freedom Village staff members are local to the Holland area and have worked there since it opened 25 years ago, providing consistency and continuity.

**Photos of Freedom Village** <https://www.flickr.com/gp/51367313@N05/78ND5D>

## APPENDIX B

### Demographics: Residents and Facility

Currently there are 500 total residents at Freedom Village; the majority are in independent living units, with fewer in assisted living. There are 118 beds available in skilled nursing and 39 Medicare beds.

The minimum age to buy in is 55, and residents range in age from 55 to 106, with the average age in the mid-to-late 80s. The socio-economic background of the residents varies widely. There are 7 bookkeepers and accountants; 2 lawyers; 17 ministers and missionaries; 10 physicians; 101 teachers and professors; 16 registered nurses; 4 librarians; 31 homemakers; 12 psychologists, counselors and social workers; 4 chemists; and several farmers and factory workers; as well as many who were in business of various kinds. The majority of Freedom Village residents are well-educated. The author's uncle is a retired university professor and her aunt is a retired school counselor. However, there are also residents who would not have been considered "professional" in their younger years, including women who were homemakers before the time when it became more common for women to work outside of the home, who contribute a perspective that is useful and interesting to the others. There is no racial diversity. Because of the importance of Hope College in the community, many Freedom Village residents are or have been connected with the college.

## APPENDIX C

Area attractions include:

Holland State Park

<http://www.holland.org/includes/redirects/webcount.cfm?listingID=22;>

Big Red Lighthouse

<http://www.holland.org/includes/redirects/webcount.cfm?listingID=372;>

DeGraaf Nature Center

<http://www.holland.org/includes/redirects/webcount.cfm?listingID=55;>

DeKlomp Wooden Shoe & Delft Factory

<http://www.holland.org/includes/redirects/webcount.cfm?listingID=56;>

Holland Museum

<http://www.holland.org/includes/redirects/webcount.cfm?listingID=59;>

Nelis' Dutch Village <http://www.holland.org/includes/redirects/webcount.cfm?listingID=63;>

Veldheer Tulip Gardens

<http://www.holland.org/includes/redirects/webcount.cfm?listingID=73;> and

Windmill Island Gardens

<http://www.holland.org/includes/redirects/webcount.cfm?listingID=74.>

There is also an annual Tulip Time Festival, held each spring, which was named the "Best Small Town Festival" by Readers Digest and USA Today's 2016 Best Flower Festival (<http://www.hollandsentinel.com/x407219020/8-decades-of-Tulip-Time>).

Livability.com ranked Holland as a Top 10 "Best City for Families" and one of the Top 10 "Affordable Places to Live" in 2016 (<http://www.livability.com/mi/holland>)

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# Building Age-Friendly Community: Notes from the Field

By

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## Abstract

Building age-friendly communities is a global as well as a national concern. The purpose of this paper is to explore fundamental tensions underlying the formulation of age-friendly goals and their implementation, based on a review of age-friendly projects and reflections on the journey towards age friendliness in one state (Rhode Island). The authors conducted a comprehensive investigation of the relevant literature on previous age-friendly initiatives, which included case studies of individual projects, meta-analyses of age-friendly work, and educational toolkits for promoting age-friendly community. They also collected original data from ten focus groups with older adults, interviews with key informant service providers, surveys of older adults and observational environmental audits. Through this multi-faceted approach, they identified recurrent questions often not overtly addressed in building livable communities, despite their being central to decisions made in age-friendly projects. This paper focuses on six questions: Age friendliness for whom? Older adults viewed as a burden or a benefit? Age friendliness by or for older adults? Is age friendliness affordable? Should the target be the aged overall or the needy aged in particular? Should interventions aim to change people or places? The Aging in Community Report, (prepared by the authors and submitted to Rhode Island's General Assembly), reflected decisions made—albeit sometimes inadvertently—in response to these questions. It showed that priority was given to age friendliness over livability, assistance to vulnerable, older adults was given precedence over helping the entire older population, and top-down interventions were emphasized more than grass-roots endeavors. Its recommendations were geared to leveraging or modestly increasing existing resources to better serve older adults and enhancing opportunities for older adults to contribute to their community. Following the release of the report, the focus shifted from modifications of the environment to facilitating changes in individual behavior to optimize person-environment fit.

**Keywords:** Age friendliness; livability; aging in place; environment

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to explore six fundamental tensions underlying formulation of age-friendly goals and their implementation, based on our review of age-friendly initiatives and reflections on our own experiences in a multidisciplinary team assessing age-friendliness in Rhode Island. The research we conducted was incorporated into the “Aging in Community Report” that was presented at the Rhode Island State House to members of the legislature, Long Term Care Coordinating Council members and senior

advocates and disseminated through the General Assembly's and Lieutenant Governor's Office websites. The report was the culmination of many deliberations

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by our team and a larger committee of stakeholders but the tensions we disentangle from the decision-making were those that tended to remain under the surface of discussions, despite being influential. We contend there is heuristic value in articulating the internal contradictions and structural constraints that may dictate—typically without being acknowledged—the path that an age-friendly initiative will follow.

In 2006, the World Health Organization (2007) launched its age friendly cities initiative in response to the converging global trends of rapid growth of the older population and urbanization. Designed to support the health, participation, and security of their citizens, such environments would enable older adults to “age in place,” retain their autonomy, and remain engaged in their communities. The principal traits believed to constitute “livability” were distilled from reports from older adults, caregivers and service providers in the public, private and voluntary sectors. These traits were organized into eight domains by which communities could be assessed for their “age friendliness.” The domains are outdoor spaces and public buildings; transportation; housing; social participation; respect and social inclusion; civic participation and employment; communication and information; community support and health services.

Cities or towns whose elected leadership was committed to pursuing continuous upgrades in these areas to foster “age friendliness” could apply for membership in the international network of age friendly communities. As of this writing, 332 cities and communities in 36 countries (World Health Organization) across the world are part of this network, including 123 American communities (AARP). Within the United States, the American Association for Retired Persons--the foremost advocacy organization on behalf of older adults--became an affiliate of the WHO initiative with its “Livable Communities” project, providing guidance and encouragement to age friendly enterprises. Additionally, the age-friendly movement has branched off into differentiated endeavors by segments of the community, such as college campuses (cf. Montepare et al. 2016) and on behalf of subgroups of the population, such as dementia sufferers (cf. Charras, Eynard, C and Viatour 2016; Dementia Friendly America (n. d.).

Efforts to transform communities into places where residents can thrive across the lifespan go well beyond pursuit of the “age friendly” designation bestowed by WHO.

Designation as a WHO Global Age-Friendly City/Community requires written support from a local official, but not all initiatives are characterized by top down activism shepherded by elected leaders. Other approaches feature a more grass roots orientation, with outcomes such as the creation of neighborhood virtual villages to provide support to older persons through volunteers. Alternatively, some age-friendly endeavors have been organized regionally, covering multiple jurisdictions and, therefore, might not qualify as age-friendly cities or towns. Hence, the inventory of members of the WHO “age friendly” network is likely to seriously understate the extent of involvement in attempts to advance an age-friendly agenda across the world.

In the state of Rhode Island, at this writing, none of its 39 cities and towns has officially acquired the “age friendly” moniker, but efforts to improve age friendliness across the state have nevertheless been underway. In 2014, the state’s general assembly passed the Aging in Community Act of 2014 (RIGL 42-66.11) that called for creation of an Aging in Community Subcommittee of the Long Term Care Coordinating Council with the following purpose:

*“to develop a plan to provide the needed infrastructure and program improvements in support services, housing and transportation that will enable the state’s growing elder population to safely remain living at home and in community settings. The aging in community plan shall include an inventory of available services, identification of service and program gaps and resource needs. In addition to members of the long-term care coordinating council, the subcommittee shall include those members of the state’s academic community with expertise in aging services and community-based long-term supports and services as the council deems appropriate.”* (Aging in Community Legislative Sub-committee. 2016a: 3)

An “Aging in Community” subcommittee comprised of advocates for older adults, faculty from each of the state’s colleges, representatives from the state unit on aging, social service providers and other interested parties was subsequently established. During its eighteen months of meetings, local experts shared with the committee information that gauged the level of age friendliness in Rhode Island across the major domains previously delineated by livability proponents with added domains for Economic Security and Nutrition Assistance/Food Security. The expert testimony and original and secondary data were synthesized into a

report authored primarily by the committee's chair. The report laid out service gaps, resource needs, and recommendations for strategic action. The report's recommendations are provided in an Appendix.<sup>1</sup>

The authors of this paper were members of the Aging in Community subcommittee whose primary responsibilities were to prepare a demographic profile of older Rhode Islanders, review the extant empirical evidence on age friendliness and related issues, gather original data from older adults and key informants within Rhode Island, construct an inventory of available resources and services that assist older adults to age in community, and integrate findings and recommendations into the final report. Execution of these tasks occurred during a period of intensified activity in age-friendly projects across New England. The concurrent rise in interest across locales may be attributable in part to the stimulus of support from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation (2015) which contributed funding to: 1) age-friendly initiatives throughout the region; 2) research analyzing over 120 indicators of health aging across municipalities in Massachusetts and Rhode Island; and 3) Grantmakers in Aging for development of "learning circles and key strategic resources" on promising practices to catalyze systemic change in livability.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Given that a review of the literature was one of the outputs of our participation in age-friendly promotion efforts, we defer presentation of most of the specific content until the findings section but offer a couple of preliminary observations here. First, the sheer volume of available information about age-friendly missions and the best practices derived from them is overwhelming (John T. Gorman Foundation 2013). A brief overview of the types of resources includes:

1. an array of toolkits of stipulated indicators to measure age friendliness, furnished by the WHO (2007), AARP, the Metlife Mature Market Institute (2013), the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n. d.) and other organizations;

2. case studies of individual communities tracking their progress towards age-friendly goals; there are both unpublished reports on government (cf. Johnson, Eisenstein, and Boyken 2015) or dedicated age-friendly websites and academic publications; notable among the latter were a special issue of the *Journal of Aging and Social Policy* in 2014 devoted to "age-friendly cities and communities around the world" and an edited volume (Fitzgerald and Cato 2016) of contributions on "international perspectives on age-friendly cities;"
3. a meta-analysis of age-friendly initiatives by Scharlach and Lehning (2015) in which the initiatives were classified into a taxonomy of "community wide planning," "cross-sector change" and "consumer driven support" projects and a framework of characteristics and stages of an aging-friendly community approach was constructed; and
4. a set of educational tools, often in a webinar format, available at the Grantmakers in Aging website (cf. 2015 a, b, c, d) on gathering baseline evidence, planning, partnerships, funding, and sustainability of age-friendly work.

Second, despite the plethora of information, "... there is limited evidence regarding the actual effectiveness of current ...initiatives..., including what does and does not work, on behalf of what goals, and under what conditions" (Scharlach and Lehning 2015: 209). Much of the available literature is prescriptive (praising the value of age friendliness) or descriptive (chronicling the evolution of age friendliness in a specific locale) rather than evaluative. Because age-friendly work is usually conducted by unpaid volunteers in loosely organized collaborations tracing multiple facets of livability across the fluid environment of an entire community, it is not surprising that this is the case. Age-friendly initiatives are natural experiments in which it would not be feasible to control all the potentially intervening factors affecting their success or failure; it would be difficult, if not implausible, to adhere to rigorous scientific methods in their investigation. The exceptions would be research (assisted with funding) that addresses narrowly defined elements within age-friendly initiatives, such as best practices for particular interventions within a particular domain. Strategies lending themselves to assessment would be more likely aimed at modifying the behaviors of individuals (for example, evidence based programs

<sup>1</sup>The report was made available through the General Assembly's website and the Office of the Lieutenant Governor's website. The Lieutenant Governor presides over the state's Long Term Care Coordinating Council, which works to coordinate long term care policies and programs within Rhode Island.

for improved self-care) than introducing wholesale reinvention of the community.

### Funding and Research Methods

Funding was received from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation in early 2016 to assist with providing a comprehensive review of Rhode Island's aging services and programs and policies, develop a Strategic Plan for Aging in Community, and build an advocacy consortium to promote the recommended policy changes and assist with Plan implementation. In terms of research approaches, this meant we were tasked to collect data from secondary sources that would supplement the findings presented to the committee by local experts; to gather original data through focus groups of older adults; and to conduct interviews with professionals across the state. In doing so, we were replicating the initial steps in planning for community change—needs assessment—that has typified age-friendly efforts around the world. Ultimately, we considered it vital to investigate age-friendly initiatives—the nuts and bolts of implementation, best practice models, challenges—found outside our state borders. The secondary sources we consulted consisted of those listed in the Literature Review section. In addition, we examined government agency-sponsored statistical reports (e.g. state profiles from the aging integrated database of the Administration for Community Living), studies of models for service provision within each of the age friendliness domains (e.g. New York City Department of Transportation), and conference presentations on age friendliness at gerontology professional meetings including our own half-day campus event on the topic. With respect to original data collection, we conducted focus groups at ten senior centers with support from the state's unit on aging, which was simultaneously seeking assistance from older adults in preparing its state plan on aging. We interviewed key informant service providers as well as enlisted undergraduate students to survey older adults and perform observational environmental audits of census tracts. The sampling cannot be considered to be representative; however, we were careful to select participants and neighborhoods that varied in how urban, minority, and/or poor they were.

Extracted from the mass of data compiled on age friendliness were recurrent questions central to decisions made in age-friendly projects that usually

were not overtly addressed in the subcommittee's discussions, not because of neglect but because such concerns were latent to the process. These recurrent questions are the following:

1. Is the goal of age friendliness intended to accommodate older adults or individuals of all ages?
2. Is the age-friendly agenda depicting older adults as a burden or a benefit?
3. Are we deriving ideals of age friendliness from those they are meant to serve or imposing those crafted by a professional elite?
4. Is age friendliness deliverable without a massive infusion of funding and radical metamorphoses of systems at the national, state, and local level?
5. Should age-friendly communities seek to offer benefits that apply universally to older adults or can they target their efforts on the needs of the most vulnerable older adults?
6. Are we trying to change people or places?

In our findings, we organized the discussion of these six questions around two themes:

**Theme A:** What are the internal contradictions of age friendliness that can hinder success and how can they be reconciled?

**Theme B:** What are the structural constraints that inhibit implementation of age friendliness and how can these constraints be overcome?

## FINDINGS

### Theme A. Internal Contradictions

We discuss the first three questions under the heading of "internal contradictions." These questions correspond with three areas where the premises of age friendliness are in conflict or, at the very least, ambiguous, rendering translation into practice difficult. Utilizing the empirical evidence reviewed, we consider whether some of the premises take precedence over others in projects that have achieved their age-friendly objectives.

Question 1. Age friendliness for whom?

The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n. d.) asserts that “livable communities,” “age/ing friendly communities,” “communities for all ages,” “lifelong communities,” and other terms can be used interchangeably because all share the ultimate goal of making communities great places to grow up and grow old. Indeed, the WHO age-friendly communities were originated with the aim of creating vibrant communities for residents of all ages. Yet the case studies of age-friendly initiatives and our own experience suggest that the focus is on the aged, not on those of all ages. Baseline data are collected from and about older adults, agencies that serve older adults are the partners in coalitions to augment age friendliness, and findings are presented at gerontology conferences.<sup>2</sup> The concerns voiced by older adults in our focus groups revolved around age discrimination and bias, the importance of senior centers, and the physical, psychological and social changes that have occurred with age. These are matters that would probably not resonate with the non-aged. At the same time, mostly absent in their feedback—a likely artifact of the focus groups’ original purpose being for feedback in preparation of the state plan on aging — was mention of the challenges that younger residents encounter, although some interest in learning more from the younger population and in intergenerational programs was expressed.

The assumption that age-friendly community is predominantly about older adults becomes evident in those case studies that deviate from this pattern, where there is explicit mention of the incorporation of other constituencies. The supporters for age friendliness in San Francisco, for example, highlight that their endeavor advocates for both the aged and the disabled populations. Pittsburgh’s age-friendly initiative underscores the intergenerational foundation of its “assets based neighborhood collaboratives” (Angelelli 2016).

Although most age-friendly initiatives appear to be geared mainly to accommodating the older population, some of the most viable ones have intriguingly credited the age inclusiveness of their approach for the favorable outcome. Glicksman et al. (2014), for example, in their discussion of the experience of Age-Friendly Philadelphia, emphasize the benefits of alliances that

<sup>2</sup> In fact, “age friendly environments” is one of six thematic tracks in the 2017 annual meeting of the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education.

incorporate organizations aiding populations other than older adults. Applying the Environmental Protection Agency framework for building age friendliness, the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging linked 150 organizations dealing with environmental, neighborhood, food access, transportation, and even animal welfare issues with the aging services network (Glicksman and Ring 2016). Their goal was not to introduce new programs or services for older adults but rather facilitate liaisons which would pursue common purposes, fusing “smart growth” with “active aging” (Glicksman et al. 2014). Paradoxically, their success arose from giving primacy to livability for ALL ages over age friendliness that benefits exclusively older adults. In contrast, a singular focus on the issues affecting older adults can trigger rivalry from other groups in the community who also have unmet needs. To illustrate, DeLaTorre and Neal (2016) describe the hurdle to age-friendly political action in Portland, Oregon engendered by competing (and meritorious) proposals that focused on improvement in education and the situations of minority and disabled residents.

During data collection in Rhode Island, it became apparent that the interests of the older and the generation population merge, for example, in the domain of transportation. Unreliable transportation leaves older adults stranded at doctor’s offices, late for medical appointments, or alone in unsafe situations or inclement weather conditions. Without transportation, older adults cannot access health care, buy groceries, attend religious services, or visit with friends. However, transportation was acknowledged to be not solely a service for seniors but also enables unemployed individuals to attend trainings to become “employable”, college students to get to school, disabled individuals to seek meaningful engagement or low income individuals to hold down a job. Improved transportation clearly would a hallmark of an age-friendly community as well as a “livable community. Nevertheless, age friendliness took priority over livability once we reached the stage of strategic planning.

At its conclusion, the Aging in Community Subcommittee in Rhode Island agreed on the following mission and vision statements: The **mission** is to provide coordinated services and programs that meet the needs and preferences of older Rhode Islanders and support their lifestyle, enhance the quality of life for older adults by providing opportunities for community engagement, and empower older adults to live life to its



fullest; the **vision** is to build a community that enables Rhode Islanders to live independently with the care, support and resources needed to foster health, well-being, social connectedness and a meaningful life as they age. Encapsulated in these statements is a manifestly age-friendly slant more than an age neutral livability orientation. The evidence indicates that livability and age-friendly models are not equivalent and the livability approach may have advantages over the age-friendly counterpart.

### Question 2. Older adults as a burden or a benefit?

An implicit assumption in age-friendly work is that older adults are prevented from remaining in the community by deficiencies in services and a lack of accommodation for the needs that arise with growing old. It is standard for communities interested in age-friendly objectives to utilize toolkits of indicators to pinpoint exactly where these deficits within the community lie. The logical solution for enhancing age friendliness is therefore to recommend changes in the quantity or quality of services to fill the gaps identified by the toolkits. The unintended consequence of these procedures is that older adults come to be viewed primarily as clients and beneficiaries monopolizing the resources of the community.

An alternative strategy is to convince communities to embrace the positive possibilities of an aging society, supplanting a hegemonic perception of the old as consistently a burden to bear. Neal, DeLaTorre, and Lottes (2015) have embarked on this fresh approach to make the case that investments in older adults are an investment for the community at large. In the same vein, a guidebook for “lifespan” friendly homes, neighborhoods and communities in Virginia encompasses in its very title the philosophy that advancing the prospects for older adults to age in place also furthers the interests of the community at large (New River Valley Livability Initiative et al. [n. d.]). The argument is put forth that adaptations to homes to accommodate the elderly dually benefit older adults who can remain in them longer and other generations--because younger homeowners underestimate how long they will remain in their home, housing preferences by the Millennial generation are parallel those of older adults, public funds that would otherwise be spent on long-term care are saved, and non-institutionalized

retirees generate financial surpluses.

In Rhode Island, we adopted the “investment” approach, one that was echoed by the view expressed in focus groups that additional supports would enable them to reciprocally give back to their community. In particular, they sought better access to volunteer opportunities in which they could mentor younger generations. Adoption of the “investment” approach produced additional and more complicated research tasks. It was not enough to demonstrate inadequacies in environments that handicap older adults should be rectified. One of our team members prepared a report on the contributions older Rhode Islanders made to the cultural, civic, and social fabric of the state in terms of employment, volunteer, care giving and other activities. The report calculated some of the economic contributions of older adults to the state to verify that the presence of older adults adds (monetary) value to the community.

### Question 3. Age friendliness by or for older adults?

Older adults are chiefly participants in the needs assessment phase of building age-friendly community, through the information they provide in focus groups and on surveys. In Rhode Island, for instance, the Aging in Community report included a *Voices of Seniors* section detailing their input and recommendations gathered from the focus groups. Moreover, participants in focus groups requested feedback on the results of the assessment process and involvement in future implementation of age-friendly strategies. Because self-determination is a cornerstone of the age-friendly movement, its champions have stressed that it is critical for older-adult involvement to persist beyond this initial data collection period. In shared governance of age-friendly work, older adults can offer an authentic perspective on what constitutes age friendliness. An example of effective mobilization of older adults occurred in Bowling Green, Kentucky, where older adults underwent training by a Gerontology center to become “citizen experts,” facilitated conversations in 35 neighborhoods about livability, formed the Community Calendar Committee to increase awareness of existing age-friendly resources, and conducted walkability assessments (Grantmakers in Aging 2014). By their ownership of these tasks, older participants conveyed that they were producers of age-friendly work, not only

consumers.

Few age-friendly initiatives have achieved substantial integration of older adults into the process beyond needs assessment. Our Rhode Island endeavor has not yet evolved to a stage where older adults are central players, though interested older consumers and representatives of advocacy organizations for older adults are participants. Political leaders supporting the initiative have repeatedly affirmed the tenet that what matters most to the aged should drive its future directions; however, there are reasons inherent to the process that may stand in the way of older adults themselves taking the lead. In Rhode Island, as in other states (e.g. Connecticut's Legislative Commission on Aging 2015), legislative, top-down--not indigenous--call for action, was the impetus for the Aging in Community Subcommittee, albeit galvanized by a local senior advocacy organization concerned about state budget cuts for aging services. Moreover, the literature has noted that age-friendly partnerships that try to maximize their inclusiveness risk becoming unwieldy. To offset this, age-friendly projects have been encouraged to seek leadership from regional councils, Area Agencies on Aging, universities, and nonprofit agencies (Grantmakers in Aging 2015b) because of these organizations' connections to local governments and other partners, research and fund-raising capabilities, and neutrality. Under such circumstances of the professionalization of age-friendly ventures, consumers may end up feeling relatively disempowered.

Those in the vanguard of the movement have noted that some vital components of livability may not even be on the radar for older adults. Transportation, educational and social concerns, and household supports tend to be the issues that are highlighted in focus groups and interviews with older adults (White 2016), while the built environment and public spaces are domains that are ignored. Our experience corroborates that preferences of older adults may, in some instances, not align with the conventional age-friendly community model. A few of our focus groups, for example, expressed their fear of problems with theft, rowdy and noisy parties, and alcohol/drug use among the younger residents of their housing complexes and a consequent desire for age segregated (subsidized) housing. They also remarked on the many benefits of senior centers, which by definition cater largely to older adults. These comments do not reflect hostility to intergenerational relationships per se, but they suggest that livability from

a senior's point of view might feature segregation from (or at least protection from) the younger cohorts within the community.

## **Theme B. Structural Constraints**

The remaining three questions -- 4, 5, and 6, are grouped under a general heading of "structural constraints." These questions concern how age-friendly initiatives deal with the inevitable limitations in resources and their capacity to enlarge them. Under conditions of resource scarcity, possible options are to target the most-needy elderly rather than all older adults and to motivate individuals within communities to change rather than overhauling entire service delivery systems.

### Question 4. How to pay for age friendliness?

Documentation by a community of its level of age-friendliness almost invariably becomes an account of the inadequate resources of its residents and of the community itself. In Rhode Island's self-study, shortcomings in services combined with exorbitant costs for consumers were reported across the myriad indicators of age-friendliness. We learned that funding for information and referral services, senior centers, caregiver support programs, transportation, and the workforce serving older adults was inadequate (even dwindling) while the costs of housing, home and community based services, medicine, and health care were more than consumers could afford. To remedy these gaps would require major revamping of government programs at the federal (e.g. Social Security, Medicare, Older Americans Act), state (e.g. Medicaid) and local levels along with interventions in the private sector (e.g. the profit margins on pharmaceuticals).

The ability to either compensate for resource deficits or tackle an extensive retooling of the aging network of benefits and services is well beyond the capacity of most age-friendly initiatives, which typically operate on a shoestring budget. While a wide variety of funding sources such as philanthropic foundations or advocacy organizations may jumpstart age-friendly initiatives, ultimately their continuation has relied predominantly on support from the government or private sectors, the very mega-structures they are trying to transform. The lack of resources and the inadequate capacity of

partners devising age-friendly solutions to bring them to fruition are the most frequently cited obstacles in case studies of age-friendly initiatives (cf. Menec et al. 2014; Ozanne, Biggs and Kurowski 2014).

Faced with a paucity of resources and the unlikelihood of obtaining additional revenue, age-friendly initiatives have developed strategic plans centered on incremental modifications to existing projects, insertions of age-friendly elements into ventures not yet initiated and relatively low cost actions that may rely on volunteers. The incrementalist strategy acknowledges that significant enlargement of programs and services is not realistic; instead, existing resources must be leveraged to accomplish more through better coordination across sectors and payment streams. Illustrative of the incrementalist strategy is the most recent strategic plan for the Atlanta regional Commission (2015), which emphasizes improvements in quality over quantity of service by increasing flexibility and accountability, reducing administrative expenses, and harnessing the power of technology.

The strategy of capitalizing on opportunities to inject an age-friendly orientation during enactment of formalized community changes—such as those in zoning, the design of public infrastructure, or budget proposals-- was embodied in Portland's age-friendly work. DeLaTorre (2014), the researcher spearheading this seminal age-friendly initiative, describes how proponents for age friendliness hitched their agenda to policy decisions on issues that were not age-specific, such as the need for sustainable and affordable housing, resulting in successful age friendly outcomes. Age-Friendly Philadelphia similarly utilized the intersection of interests between aging advocates and other community activists, supporting, for example, zoning changes that could accomplish the duals goals of economic development (that pleased urban or regional planners) and increases in Accessory Dwelling Units and “visitable” homes that satisfied older adults wanting to age in place (Glicksman and Ring 2016). Policies regarding public parks, community gardens and food deserts were also infused with age-friendly elements.

The third strategy minimizes the costs of age-friendly innovation by activities that function largely through unpaid volunteers. In Virginia, for instance, one of the six recommended actions for promoting aging in place involved a Time Bank, which would be a registry of documented reciprocal services exchanged among

neighbors (Aging in Place Leadership Team 2015). A Time Bank has also been introduced in New York along with other relatively inexpensive innovations (Age Friendly NYC 2013) such as the Success Mentor Initiative in which older adults mentor chronically absent students. Maine (John T. Gorman Foundation 2013) has a variety of volunteer-based projects in which volunteers grow food for seniors, run senior centers or provide companionship for isolated elders. Some of the recommendations of our focus groups similarly involved volunteers or repurposing existing resources, such as using school buses during off hours to transport seniors.

*Question 5. Targeting the aged overall or the needy aged in particular?*

An offshoot of the dilemma of scarce resources is determining whether interventions should be geared to the “Fortunate Majority” or the “Frail Fraction.” On the one hand, innovations that are needs-blind can invest larger constituencies of older adults in their implementation. On the other hand, since neither the level of need nor access to services is evenly distributed across age, race, social class, and gender, targeting innovations to those most in need can help reduce inequalities in growing old. A downside of focusing on the most vulnerable old adults is that it conveys a homogenized image of older adults as dependent, passive users of services and benefits (cf. Oudshoorn, Neven, and Stienstra 2016).

The scholarship on age friendliness is not very informative on this quandary except to suggest that the older adult participants should steer the decision, assuming that the fortunate and frail are equally represented on age-friendly task forces. The Aging in Community Subcommittee in Rhode Island did not formally address the issue of whether to concentrate its efforts on the most at-risk older adults facing the greatest challenges or not. Arguably it may have inadvertently done so in its recommendations to pursue increases of state funding for public programs that serve the elderly.

*Question 6. Changing people or places?*

Age friendliness has its roots in the ecological theories of aging which posit that optimal “person-environment fit” depends on both customizing environments to

accommodate older adults and the agency of older adults themselves to better adapt to their environments. The corollary of these theories is that ameliorative changes in the environment are insufficient without simultaneously bolstering the physical, psychological, cognitive and social health of older adults with low levels of competency on these dimensions and motivating them as individuals to proactively overcome the challenges of their environment, including their own negative attitudes towards it (Wahl, Iwarsson and Oswald 2012). Strategies to accomplish the latter coincide with the “active aging” philosophy (cf. Teater 2016) advanced by international organizations like the WHO, a stance which views older adults as autonomous actors controlling their own lifestyles. Critics of the “active aging” imperative (cf. Mendes 2013) claim that it coerces older adults to feel compelled to correct their unhealthy lifestyles and narrows their individual choices to those of greatest utility for the environment. As Calasanti (2016: 1099) argues “Emphasis on individual control justifies ageism. If one can avoid disease, maintain physical and mental function and stay socially engaged, and yet is not doing so, then exclusion is justified.” In its most benign form, active aging encourages older adults to engage in activities, such as completion of smoking cessation programs, to improve their own well-being and comply with the prohibitions of smoking in their environment. In its most destructive form, according to Mendes (2013), active aging legitimizes communities and governments to abdicate their obligations to the older population, who are then held accountable by their individual actions for the quality of their later lives.

The bulk of recommendations from our strategic plan in Rhode Island were devoted to changes within the community and by the government which would permit maximum individual lifestyle choices, not circumscribe them. Simultaneously in the city of Providence, a broad coalition of stakeholders had begun consideration of the design of interconnected community hubs to advance age-friendly mobility systems, access to healthy food, and intergenerational activities. However, in the interim since the strategic plan was drafted, we have realized that more resources are potentially available to encourage older adults to adjust their behavior than to radically transform the setting in which the behavior occurs. The Healthy Living Center of Excellence in Massachusetts, also funded by a 2016 grant from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation, exemplifies endorsement

by a funding agency for age friendliness accomplished via change at the level of the individual. The Center supports evidence-based educational programs that promote healthy aging by older adults learning how and why to adopt more healthful behaviors. Several of these programs are currently offered at Rhode Island senior centers in collaboration with the Department of Health and the Subcommittee report recommends they be expanded. Likewise, prompted by the prospects of funding, the Rhode Island team sought funding for integration of behavioral health services for older adults within senior housing or a senior center for older adult experiencing difficulties such as depression, anxiety, unresolved conflicts with other residents or family members, substance use disorder problems, issues related to the death of relatives and friends and difficulties caused by frailty and immobility.<sup>3</sup> Thus, we anticipate that piecemeal efforts to nurture the adjustment of older adults to their environment may prove easier to accomplish than metamorphoses to accommodate the environment to older adults.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this paper, we have asserted that choices made in age-friendly projects commonly invoke unintentional decision-making more than mindful adherence to a set of beliefs and priorities. In our presentation of six sets of binary choices on which initiatives are grounded, albeit inadvertently, we have culled, from the extensive literature and reflections on our own experiences, the following conclusions:

1. Framed as improving lives across the lifespan, “livability” initiatives might more effectively garner the broader community’s attention than “age-friendly” ones would, with benefits perceived to be reaped across generations. The desired environmental transformations may need to be demonstrated to overlap substantially, or at least be compatible with those that are valued by the community at large, in order for age friendliness to flourish.
2. The paradigm shift of justification for age friendliness from “need” to “investment” can

<sup>3</sup>Older adults in focus groups seemed committed to changing their behavior in order to maintain their health; they credited senior centers with helping them achieve their goal of a healthy lifestyle through the exercise classes, yoga, meditation, Tai Chi, nutrition education and other health promotion programs they offered.

moderate the negative depiction of older adults as an inconvenient drain on community resources. Support of the investment position involves both assembling the facts and figures which confirm that older adults are assets to a community and calculating the predicted savings accruing from retention of older adults within its borders. Communities must be persuaded that older adults credibly are a crucial part of their future, not remnants of their past. This shift in perspective could, in turn, spur seismic changes in attitudes towards the old.

3. There is more consensus that the interests of older adults should guide age-friendly work than agreement on how this can be achieved so that the work proceeds efficiently and effectively. Furthermore, the salient concerns of older adults—the changes in their environment they would prioritize—may diverge from mainstream age-friendly principles. Those engaged in age-friendly work need to eventually decide if the preferences of older adults should take precedence over those of others.
4. The limitations in resources to accomplish age friendliness can be overcome by a focus on incremental modifications to existing projects, insertions of age-friendly elements into ventures not yet initiated, and relatively low cost actions that rely on volunteers. Executing projects that bring immediate, tangible impacts can help build public will and attract funding.
5. Age-friendly efforts have to consciously grapple with the diversity of the aged population, recognizing that improvements for older adults will not automatically counteract the disadvantage stemming from other social categorizations, such as race, class, and gender.
6. Building age friendliness hinges on a two-pronged strategy of a) individual older adults taking steps to increase their well-being and b) communities addressing social and environmental factors that promote healthy aging. In theory the two parts should operate in concert, but in practice, influencing the behavior of individual older adults may be the more attainable outcome.
7. Although deliberate consideration of these issues in the development of future age-friendly efforts

will not reduce the complexity of the process, it may lead to clarification of the values and goals underpinning the proposed plans that are created. Moreover, their examination can form the foundation of lessons learned from initiatives that have successfully built age-friendly community.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Recommended Strategies to Promote Aging in Community (Aging in Community Legislative Subcommittee 2016b)**

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

1. Create an interactive web site for THE POINT.
2. Enact a specific ADRC enabling statute with a state appropriation.
3. Co-locate staff from the Department of Human Services long term care eligibility offices in THE POINT programs.
4. Provide Options Counseling staff with permissions to access to Medicaid client information (with client approval).

TRANSPORTATION

1. Retain free bus fare program or alternate way to provide no-cost rides through vouchers or other means for low-income elders and persons with disabilities.
2. Conduct a comprehensive senior transportation/mobility study including review of options such as Uber for seniors and use of school buses when not in use.
3. Seek consumer input and satisfaction data on LogistiCare performance.
4. Promote volunteer transportation services.
5. Create transportation locator website.

ECONOMIC SECURITY

1. Improve benefits counseling.
2. Expand Medicare Premium Savings Program.
3. Standardize Medicaid eligibility.
4. Index the state Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.
5. Support new research on Rhode Island Elder Income Security.
6. Promote financial planning and services programs for seniors.
7. Promote retirement savings accounts.

COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

1. Restore senior center funding to FY2006 levels.
2. Create formula-based funding program for local senior services based on population of older persons in a community.
3. Encourage senior centers that receive state grants to offer, or to coordinate with, the Health Department to offer, health promotion activities.
4. Identify ways for more persons without transportation to access senior center services. Promote inter-generational programming at senior centers and in community recreation programs.
5. Use community-level data to plan programs and senior services.
6. Support SERVE RI Volunteer Plan.

FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

1. Analyze strategies for transporting more seniors to the state's meal sites.
2. Target SNAP outreach to areas with greatest number of low-income seniors.
3. Continue efforts to bring more fresh foods to homebound seniors via mobile food vans and to access food pantries.
4. Continue to improve participant satisfaction with food served in nutrition programs.

HOUSING

1. Improve access to affordable housing opportunities through centralized housing locator.
2. Increase awareness of available municipal property tax credits for seniors, veterans and persons with disabilities and the state Property Tax Relief Circuit Breaker program.
3. Develop innovative models of community care and supportive housing including universal design that fit the needs of aging adults.
4. Provide funding and training to support the role of resident services coordinators.



5. Encourage development of alternative housing options such as co-housing and accessory dwellings.
6. Promote “Village” type community programs.
7. Create or identify funds to offer low-interest loans or tax credits for costs of home modifications.
8. Require 24-hour security/surveillance staff in elderly housing.
9. Consider policy change to allow subsidized housing just for older adults.

#### SUPPORTS TO STAY AT HOME

1. Increase home care provider rates in state supported programs.
2. Expand Co-Pay program hours for home care and days of adult day service.
3. Expedite eligibility for home and community-based services.
4. Explore ways to offer affordable homemaker and home repair/maintenance services.
5. Promote in-home medical visits for frail elders with complex needs.
6. Promote telehealth technology.
7. Increase funding for Elder Respite.
8. Develop and offer hands-on caregiver training programs including for those caring for persons with behavioral health issues.
9. Expand Temporary Caregiver Insurance law from four to six weeks.
10. Promote telephone reassurance services.

#### HEALTHCARE ACCESS

1. Promote continuing education for primary care practitioners in geriatric-competent care.
2. Support development of a state strategic plan for Elder Behavioral Health underway by the Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals’ work group.
3. Develop plan to better address oral health needs of low-income older population

#### OPEN/PUBLIC SPACES AND PUBLIC BUILDINGS

1. Continue the implementation of Complete Streets by Rhode Island Department of Transportation
2. Encourage municipalities to create local Age-friendly volunteer committees
3. Encourage municipal Land Trusts and Conservation Commissions to create maps of places appropriate for older adults to walk, exercise and enjoy recreation and leisure

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# Community: Eclipsed or Resurgent?

By  
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## Abstract

The locus of community has been identified with the small town. With urbanization and industrialization, a shift occurred to spatially unbounded networks which are relationally defined and can be found in multiple contexts. The importance of community has long been recognized for both the individual and the society. Intentional communities represent attempts to create it. Examples include communes in the past, cohousing, gated communities, ecovillages and neighbornets. New Urbanist design attempts to create community through architecture and land use patterns, increasing the potential for people to come into contact with one another. The success of these efforts remains ambiguous. The Internet offers digital communities especially on social media sites. They represent a type of hybrid community today, a new structure. In the future, two demographic trends favor compact living arrangements and the potential for locality based community: the preferences of millennials who seem to want to abandon sprawling suburbs, and aging boomers who could benefit from the assistance of a supportive community. Environmental concerns and the need for action will also be locality based. Both the Internet and compact locality based communities offer the promise of social attachments, resurgent community. The limitation is in the homogeneity of the attachments. Bridging capital and coalitions of people who are different will be essential. Community, however, exists in a national and global context; acts of terrorism, the economy and national leadership make the future uncertain.

**Keywords:** community, social networks, intentional community, New Urbanism, hybrid communities, social capital, bridging capital, locality based community, resurgent community

## INTRODUCTION

The recent presidential election in the United States, the Brexit vote in the UK and various other controversies and political movements in Europe have led to concerns about a growing polarization of citizens in these economically developed societies. There is a breakdown into 'us' and 'the other,' a desire on the part of some to strengthen national identities, to close and fortify borders, and to return to some sort of pre-globalized world where, in a nostalgic haze, the social and economic order appears more predictable and financially opportune. This stands in contrast to those who accept or even embrace more fluid borders, the economic and technological changes wrought by

globalization, and in general, see their ideological opponents as reactionary, scapegoating specific groups, and evidencing bias. In this context, the need for community would appear to be more pressing than ever. How can citizens come together to understand diverse points of view and personal circumstances in order to craft, support, and implement policies that address the needs of all citizens?

The concept of community has been central to the work of sociologists since the earliest theorists. There has been broad agreement that community is the locus

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of social interaction where people share common interests, have a sense of belonging, experience solidarity and offer mutual assistance. Communities are recognized as essential for societal survival because they mediate between the individual and the larger society, are the arena for institutional participation, and thereby linked to democracy, and provide the context for social attachments and interdependencies. Community based social capital sustains individuals emotionally, contributes to their longevity and decreased morbidity, and also creates access to basic resources and information.

The locus of community has shifted from territory, rural and small town places, to social networks which may or may not be locality based. This shift came with urbanization and the seeming anonymity of city life. Community became identified as the *Gemeinschaft* of the small town in contrast to the urban *Gesellschaft* (Toennies 1887 [1957]). Eventually, however, city dwellers were found to be as socially connected as their small town counterparts. Their social connections, however, were much less likely to include neighbors. Networks, which fulfill the traditional functions of community, may be workplace based, centered in religious institutions or in self help groups, to note a few possibilities (Wellman and Leighton 1979; Chua, Madej and Wellman 2014). These networks may be long term or temporary, what Wuthnow calls 'loose connections' (Wuthnow 1998). Even while there are these spatially unbounded network systems, there are still traditional locality groups in city neighborhoods and small towns. Today the researcher must investigate whether the relationships we identify with 'community' exist in any number of social contexts.

More recently attention has shifted to digital networks, online communities which may be based on common interests such as self help or video gaming, or social media websites where people maintain contacts with a variety of other people. Much has been written about whether these kinds of contacts in a virtual world can be a replacement for face-to-face interaction. Networks, which can be deleted by a simple click, do not seem to have the same binding or shaming power as a territorially based community. Research, however, is generally positive. People use online networks to supplement face-to-face interaction and they may encourage institutional participation as well, such as political engagement (Chua, Madej and Wellman 2014). The shift has been from spatially bounded

communities to those that are relationally defined, personal communities with specialized ties.

So when we consider the construction of the concept of community by theorists and reflect on the changes in it over the past two centuries, clearly community is multiple in nature. It assumes a variety of forms and it would be a misrepresentation to try to impose a singular locus for it. Community reflects the fragmentation of postmodern times; it is a slippery concept, a variable to be investigated.

The predominant bias has been to assume that communities must be territorially based. There has also been a tendency to define the true community as one where there is diverse membership, whether by culture, race or social class. Groups of like minded individuals who share common interests such as seniors in a retirement development built around a golf course are not true communities. They are instead what Bellah labeled 'life style enclaves' (Bellah et al.1985). People relish their similarities with others and they have minimal contact with people who are different from themselves. In the recent polarizing election, reflective of political party demographic profiles, the data showed that Democrats and Republicans tend to be spatially separated. Most people live in bubbles amidst like minded others (Pew Research 2014). Technology further enables the separation as people construct their own online networks which can be even more exclusive than brick and mortar neighborhoods. The media today is plural enough that people can select news programs that reinforce their own political predilections with little exposure to differing opinions. Communities today are plural in form but there are only limited examples of their meeting some ideal of diverse membership. Diversity becomes a variable which may or may not characterize a community, and more often than not, it is only minimally present or restricted to age differences.

The connectedness of community has long been recognized as important and there have been many attempts to deliberately form settlements which embody the ideal of collective life. These loosely can be placed under the category of intentional communities (Fellowship for Intentional Community 2016). Examples from the past include the Oneida commune and various Shaker villages. These were deliberate attempts to realize a vision of interdependent living which was spatially grounded. More contemporary examples of planned communities include gated

communities which have been very popular in the US especially in California and Florida, and today are also a residence of choice by an increasing number of middle and upper middle class people in the developing world. In this latter case, they offer the opportunity for separation from the poor, and because of strict regulations, they promise predictability in an ordered environment. Planned communities, for the most part, are not economically diverse although there are some notable exceptions such as Reston, Virginia and Columbia, Maryland. With their own private services and recreational facilities, they are criticized for turning their backs upon the larger town or city of which they are a part. Gated communities are marketed to people offering a secure environment and vibrant community life. The former is not necessarily true; crime rates may not be any lower than outside the gates; likewise, walling people off does not necessarily guarantee community involvement or enduring social bonds (Wilson-Doenges 2000). People are often content to have a homeowners association and elected officers handle their affairs and opt for the same level of interaction with neighbors as in traditional neighborhoods. In this regard, community is a construction of the marketing agent, a tool used for selling purposes only. Gated communities may be physically demarcated but may not be an intentional community after all on an interactional level (Blakely and Snyder 1997).

Another type of intentional community is that of cohousing which began in Denmark and was brought to the US largely through the efforts of Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett (McCamant and Durrett 1994). One estimate puts the number of cohousing developments in the US at 160 in 25 states with another 120 under construction (Cohousing Association of the US April 2016). With cohousing, people usually own their housing unit but share public spaces and community buildings like a recreational hall or dining area. Here are staging areas for collective events like shared meals, games, and a variety of leisure activities. A mix of old and young people may address the needs of different groups like ready-made babysitters and neighbors to look out for elders. Cohousing allows people to select a point on the individualism/collectivism spectrum which is physically facilitated by the arrangement: they may both enjoy private home ownership and an array of public spaces for collective life. Unlike a condominium complex with a homeowners' association, cohousing does signify some commitment to a communal ideal that

goes beyond shared recreational facilities. Cohousing requires enough acreage for a sufficient number of housing units to be built as well as for shared, public spaces. Front end costs are high. There are current developments and proposed developments in both rural and urban areas.

A striking example of an intentional community today is the Treehouse Community in East Hampton, MA. <http://refca.net/community/treehouse-easthampton/multi-generational-community>. It consists of 12 single family homes with three, four or five bedrooms and forty eight one bedroom cottages designed for senior citizens. There is a community center as a central gathering space. It was designed to support families who are fostering or adopting children from the public foster care system in recognition of the failure of that system for children who bounce from one placement to another. The seniors who are attracted to Treehouse want to contribute to the well being of the young and they donate countless hours in transportation, cooking and painting lessons, bike riding and generally are like supportive grandparents. Currently there are over 100 people ages three to ninety, living at the Treehouse community. Both children's and adults' lives are enriched by vibrant, engaged community where people celebrate life together. Teahouse can be contrasted with the large numbers of retirement communities across the country which are intentional but which are age segregated, often restricted to those over 55. Research on those kinds of retirement villages usually does find that most people in fact prefer the segregation. They enjoy having children visit but appreciate that when they leave, they take their noisiness and disruptive behaviors with them.

Although residents of cohousing developments are generally concerned about the environment, there is another kind of intentional community, ecovillages, where people with a commitment to sustainable living try to limit their footprint on the earth. Building materials are carefully selected, energy sources are renewable, and land use designs preserve as much open space as possible. Consumerism is minimized; recycling and composting are emphasized. We find ecovillages in the developing world as well.

In these examples of intentional communities, it is essential to note the efforts of the New Urbanists. The term, 'New Urbanism,' covers urban planning and design principles which attempt to create a sense of community through architecture and land use patterns. Essentially

the vision is neo-traditional, trying to restore the feel of a small town of the past with compact neighborhoods, smaller homes, walkability, town centers, front porches and a deemphasized automobile. Design principles are employed to bring people into contact with one another as opposed to sprawling, anonymous suburbs where people are mostly inside their homes or in their backyards rather than in the public spaces meeting one another. Well known examples are Seaside and Celebration in Florida. Whether or not the New Urbanism achieves its goals is still an ongoing research question: while there sometimes seems to be more interaction in these places, there is uncertainty over whether it is because of social homogeneity or is the result of the design process (Alzaidan 2012).

Finally, when considering intentional communities, there are the examples of “neighbornets.” Here we have established local areas where a few individuals deliberately try to develop and strengthen social ties such as through communal projects. Neighbornets can be an effective tool for building a sense of neighborliness and involvement in an area. Many neighborhoods and apartment buildings today have their own websites and the research about their impact is positive (NeighborNets Network 1999).

It seems likely that given the individualization of the society, people will continue to choose a community reflective of their values and priorities, and that what we will see is an expansion of the possible variations and differentiations. For example, rather than simply communities of LGBTQ people, there are communities of aging LGBTQ members, or retired academics who choose to live around universities; communities of people who want to share in some agricultural pursuits (agrihoods), (Scher 2016) communities of young families looking for a child friendly environment, or communities of women.

## The Future

The future of community in the US, on the one hand, is a hopeful one. People are more connected today to a greater number of people. They have multiple networks of connections. This is most evident on social media sites. Usually the digital exchange supplements face-to-face interaction. What would have been dormant ties, such as those to high school classmates, may remain active across any distance and over time. People can

alert others to problems they are facing and reach out for help and resources. These media sites are also the source for news and narratives about the political, economic and social worlds. Opinions are shaped and reinforced in the exchanges and links; actors may be mobilized to vote, join a demonstration, send emails or contributions. The result is people who are connected to others and institutions which may be infused by their participation.

On the other hand, some argue that digital communities may be more fragile and easily deleted or ignored, that the information conveyed on social media sites may even be fake; that digital communities are intentionally constructed by the individual as socially exclusive; anyone who is annoying or too oppositional may be dropped (e.g., de-friended) unlike a conventional neighborhood where one has to learn to live with the obnoxious neighbor. There is the opportunity, of course, for anti social behavior such as bullying and the promotion of violent crowd behavior. In general, however, the very high percentage of Americans using social media today is an indicator of connections rather than anomie or isolation.

On the other hand, even as people may be more socially connected today through technology, two concerns remain:

1. the problem of place and the degree of locality involvement;
2. the question of diversity. Must community be diverse in its membership? Most people in the United States live in areas segregated by class, race, and ethnicity. With regard for the first concern, our institutions have local outlets for national systems whether it is schools, churches, political parties, health care, etc. The vitality of our societal system depends on the participation of people locally. We need the active PTA's, church groups, voting, medical personnel providing care, recreational activities provided by local budgets, and of course, the innumerable businesses which offer good and services to people on a territorial basis. Robert Putnam's book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000) highlighted what he saw as a decline in social capital. In local areas people know fewer neighbors, interact less frequently and are more disengaged politically. There is a decline in the membership of traditional civic organizations. We do see some weakening of functioning localities; people

shopping online may mean fewer trips to local stores and even groceries may be delivered by Amazon today. Other institutions, however, especially elementary and secondary schools and our political process are locally grounded.

The local area is essential to our democracy and for the raising of our children. Place matters even as the Internet tears down the notion of spatial boundaries. If a natural disaster strikes, local towns people will be there to help before the National Guard. In the future, place or locality is likely to become even more prominent as the arena where concerns about the environment and climate change are played out. Concerns about climate change and sustainability are best addressed in our own backyard and the urgent nature of these issues may foreshadow more local involvement. So here is a possible impetus for strengthening place based ties. The Internet will be central for organizing people around these issues.

With more focus on the environment, the potential is there for better use of resources, compact urban planning rather than sprawl which is inefficient and wasteful of land and automobile dependent. Planned communities, whether gated or not, retirement villages, ecovillages or cohousing, are all responsive to more compact settlements. People accustomed to choices in housing will expand the market for many possible variations along the individualism/collectivism spectrum. A recent trend that is noteworthy is that millennials (people ages 18-34) who number 7.7 million, the same number as the boomer generation, prefer to live in urban areas over the suburbs or rural areas (Nielson 2014). They desire the proximity to shops, restaurants, and workplaces, and are currently living in the higher density areas at a higher rate than any generation. Forty percent would like to live in an urban area in the future. The Nielson report depicted the trend as the transition from the white picket fence of the suburbs to the brownstone stoop in the city. Along with convenience, they seek an exciting art and music scene. Millennials are also less likely to own cars. Vehicle ownership rates declined from 73% in 2007 to 66% in 2011 among those under 25. Here is a market ripe for new urbanist design. As they become parents, millennials will have more need for communal supports especially when family members may live in distant places.

At the same time as the millennials put down roots, the boomer generation is aging with the first cohort

having reached age 70. As they downsize and make housing choices, here too is a population potentially receptive to more collectivized living with retirement villages or apartment buildings of seniors. Like millennials with children who need social supports and who benefit from the proximity of other families, so too will aging boomers need their own networks of care and assistance. Both groups presage the potential for more compact locality based housing arrangements.

### **Diversity**

Numerous studies have documented the high levels of residential segregation in the United States. Even theorists like Robert Putnam who cherishes the diversity ideal, had to acknowledge, based on the Social Capital Benchmark Survey (2000), that in ethnically diverse neighborhoods, people of all races tend to withdraw more from collective life, distrust neighbors, expect the worse from their community and vote less (Putnam 2006). Even with economic control variables introduced, the more we 'are brought into physical proximity with people of another race or ethnicity, the more we stick to our own and the less we trust the other.' Diversity in community remains an ideal as people choose to live near people who are like them. PEW Research did find an ideological divide on this with liberals more likely to embrace diversity than conservatives.

### **CONCLUSION**

When we reflect upon the trends today, the demographics of boomers and millennials and both their needs and preferences, may encourage compact settlements which theoretically, enable more physical contacts among people. It is not a guarantee for social bonding but sets up the potential. In all likelihood more dense settlements will consist of people who are socially and economically similar. Those that might be diverse are more likely to attract liberals. One could be optimistic, however, that just as the 'us' versus 'them' categories of 1900 eventually disappeared, immigrant differences which are so prominent today will also fade.

Environmental issues like climate change, fracking, energy projects and water quality are likely to bring together people united around particular controversies which will create social capital. Community forms in opposition. Broader coalitions are possible which

may afford linkages with people who are dissimilar. A recent example would be that of the Standing Rock Sioux who were joined by other Native groups, by environmentalists, and ultimately by Veterans of many racial and ethnic backgrounds in their fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline. People come together when they realize it adds to their strength and resources.

Demographic trends favoring compact settlements and environmental concerns which will need to be addressed, favor local areas as the staging arena. Place still matters and territorial community will not be eclipsed. The challenge will be for bridging capital so that people in homogenous areas are linked with those who are different. Coalition building will be the key.

The counterforce is the digital world which eradicates spatial constraints and boundaries. Here we find millions of people connected especially on social media. A new form of community has emerged, a resurgent hybrid (Hampton 2016). Even as there are networks of spatially unbounded ties, there is a persistent-pervasive community structure like that of preindustrial times. People know what others are eating or where they are going on a daily basis. People watch one another and gossip over a digital fence. We have to recognize this as a hybrid community structure, emergent from current technology, and not simply try to compare it to our small town models of the past. Like everything postmodern, community is multiple and must be studied and understood in all these variations, Digital connections are full of potential for community bonds and action but they have the same shortfalls as territorial community in that they are likely to be homogenous. The technology must be harnessed in pursuit of community and not used as a tool for cyber attacks on outsider groups.

Even with a modicum of optimism about the future of communities, however, there is the recognition that they are set in a national and global context. Global terrorist acts may lead people to withdraw into what they perceive as their familiar safe communities or their families. Leadership on the national level, however, can help promote communal association. In the late 1960's there was Federal legislation to support 'new communities,' planned communities with social, spatial, and economic goals. Under George Bush funds were channeled through faith based local groups to assist in meeting the challenges of several different social problems. National leadership may also unwittingly encourage community by creating oppositional

networks of people which if broadly based, may give rise to diverse coalitions of people who organize to protest Federal or state policies. Unfortunately national leadership can also contribute to 'us versus they' divisions especially in immigration policies. So even as the demographics, environmental concerns and the technology of social media point in the direction of resilient and resurgent communities, the larger global, political and economic context remains uncertain.

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# The Intern: A Film Review

By

Emily Stier Adler

*The Intern* (2015) from writer/director Nancy Myers stars Robert DeNiro as 70 year old Ben Whittaker and Anne Hathaway as 30-something Jules Ostin. In a rare choice, the film is told mostly from the perspective of the 70 year old rather than the 30-something.

A basic premise of the film is that retired and widowed Ben has tried many things to fill his time in his upper-middle class Brooklyn neighborhood but misses being in the labor force. We learn that Ben, an older Baby Boomer, has lived a full life: was married, had a successful career as an executive working for 40 years for the same company – one that compiled and printed telephone directories, is a father and grandfather. He pursues many hobbies, such as learning Mandarin and practicing group Tai Chi in the park. But like some retirees, he misses the daily interaction that takes place at the office and the sense of being useful. He wants to “get back in the game.” As he says in the initial voice over, “I’m not unhappy, I just know there’s a hole in my life, and I need to fill it.”

Ben applies for and is chosen to be a “senior intern,” in a new corporate program for senior citizens, at a company named *About the Fit*. The company, an online retail fashion site, now very successful, was started by the dynamic and driven Jules about 18 months before. Assigned to be Jules’ intern, Ben becomes both a mentor and a friend to her and to many of the Millennial employees at the company.

Initially reluctant to include Ben in her world (as she says, “I’m not good with old people”) Jules comes to rely on Ben’s wisdom and experience for advice both about her company and her personal life. One of the central messages of the film is that the young can learn from the old. Calling himself a “chivalrous gent,” Ben has a respectful manner, shaves every day (even on Sundays), dresses in a suit and tie, carries an attaché case (circa 1973) and stays at work until the boss leaves. Despite being seemingly outdated, Ben is presented as having a great deal to offer to the young. Some of what he teaches is simple and gender stereotyped like the virtue of carrying a handkerchief to be able to offer it to a woman who is crying. But other things -- like the importance of communicating face to face with others rather than by text or email, are significant. It’s no surprise that this grown up says that his favorite quote is by Mark Twain: “You are never wrong to do the right thing.” Generational reciprocity is shown in this film as younger workers teach Ben things like how to turn on his computer, how to get on **Facebook** and how to do fist-bumps.

There are jokes about the elderly. For example, the depiction of the pleasant but somewhat “ditsy” older woman intern as a terrible driver can be interpreted as both sexist and ageist. Jokes about Ben are mostly about the dated technology he uses; but they tend to be gentle ones. For example, Ben sets two alarm clocks for his wake up call and on his first day at work opens his attaché case and sets up his desk with a flip phone (from

the 1990s?), a calculator, pens, a battery operated clock and several pairs of glasses.

The story line focuses more on Jules' life than it does on Ben's becoming "employed" again. Jules struggles with work-life balance. Her concerns include a difficult relationship with her mother, having enough time for her adorable young daughter, and worries about her stay-at-home husband who is caring for their daughter but is also having an affair. Jules feels that it's her job to make sure her husband doesn't feel neglected. She is also conflicted about investors who are pressuring her to bring in a CEO over her to help her run her company. In a twist on conventional story lines, Ben wants Jules to have it all and not to give up any of her roles, including running her company, saying things like "I hate to be the feminist here, but you should be able to have a huge career and be who you are" and "You should feel great about what you've done and I'd hate to let you see anyone take that away from you."

This film applauds Jules' success rather than making her the villain the way the stay-at-home moms of her daughter's peers attempt to do. Yes, Jules is quirky and overworked, but her company's productive and upbeat atmosphere of mutual respect is, in large part, her doing.

*The Intern* portrays some aspects of the life of a person in the early stage of old age accurately. With longer, healthier lives it is now possible for individuals to grow older in new ways. Ben illustrates how the "third age" can be a time of opportunity and activity (Angel and Settersten Jr. 2013). Like many Baby Boomer men, he is a mature adult with good health and financial resources, but with few family responsibilities. Like many of his real-life peers, he takes a daily medication (in his case, for high blood pressure), attends funerals of those in his age cohort, and lives alone. When Ben offers places at his table at Starbucks to younger working men, they nod, accept and then ignore Ben while they sit at the table. And when Ben starts to think romantically again, it is in a traditional "younger woman/older man" relationship. Seventy year old Ben begins to date a beautiful work colleague played by 61 year old Renee Russo, rather than the older woman in his neighborhood played by 79 year old Linda Lavin.

Other aspects of Ben's life are not depicted as realistically. Aside from the funerals, a message or two on his answering machine and the neighborhood woman who is pursuing him romantically, Ben's pre-intern life

is depicted as fairly devoid of friends. He doesn't seem connected to anyone from his previous career or have a group of men with whom he hangs around. The new friends he makes at *About the Fit* are not the few other senior interns but are the young workers in their 20s and 30s. Most 70 year olds live fairly age-segregated lives aside from interaction in their extended families but Ben does not once he starts working again. His new friends and his new housemate are in their 20s and 30s.

Although Ben becomes a sort of surrogate grandfather to Jules' preschool daughter, not much is made of his relationship with his own son and grandchildren who live in California. His relationship with his son and his son's family is depicted very briefly in the film's introduction but then no additional interaction between them and Ben is included. Unfortunately, *The Intern* misses the opportunity to explore the importance of grandparenthood and its ability to provide emotional connections and meaning for the majority of grandparents (Hoffnung and Adler forthcoming). The almost exclusively white workplace and neighborhood are also not realistic.

However, this gentle film does cover a lot of ground: ageism and sexism in the workplace and other social settings, intergenerational relationships, marital pressures, dating again at 70, the way technology can both help and hurt relationships, and the important search for a balance between work and love/family. Although neither profound nor ground breaking, *The Intern* is worth two hours of one's time. Writer/director Nancy Meyers leaves us with a sense that relationships between people of very different ages can be mutually satisfying and a subtle message about life and aging. As Jules joins Ben for Tai Chi in the park at the end of the film, he tells her and us to "Breathe deeply."

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# On Being Mortal, Medicine and What Matters in the End: A Book Review

by

Natalie Hannon

Atul Gawande's *On Being Mortal, Medicine and What Matters in the End* (New York: Metropolitan Books 2014) is truly an extraordinary book about our care of the aged, and our care of the dying. In this book Gawande, MD, MPH, a surgeon and public health researcher as well as a writer, deals with major issues facing the elderly and dying: safety vs. independence, control vs. autonomy, and living a meaningful life. For the elderly, their salient status is their age. It does not matter if they are male or female, short or tall, rich or poor – what matters is that they are old. Attached to being old are stereotypes: They are frail; they can't reason properly; and they should not make their own decisions. (For example, if you take an elderly friend or relative to the doctor, who does the doctor address, you or the patient?)

We tend to define the elderly in terms of their frailties, e.g. poor eyesight and hearing, muscle loss, arthritis, loss of balance, memory loss. Care revolves around taking care of these various ailments rather than seeing the whole person. An emphasis is placed on safety and survival rather than autonomy and independence. Yet, independence is very important to the elderly. In their research with focus groups of elderly persons, Spitz and Gallant (2004) found that, although older persons want to remain connected with their adult children, they also want to remain independent. They appreciate their children's concern, but do not like their children's over protectiveness. Gawande gives numerous examples of this. He tells of Harry Truman who at age eighty had

been shoveling snow off his roof, and fell off and broke his leg. The doctor called him a fool. Truman's reply: I am eighty years old and I have the right to make up my mind and do what I want to do (p. 66). Or as the manager of a subsidized apartment building for low-income elderly people put it: "They (the tenants) live like they would live in their neighborhood. They still get to make poor choices for themselves if they choose." (p. 135)

The major threat to the elderly's independence is falling. According to the Centers for Disease Control (2016) in 2014 over one quarter of Americans aged 65 or older fell; that is forty-seven million people. Seven million required medical attention and/or restricted activity; and seventy-four older adults died every day because of falls. Yet, most doctors look at the elderly's specific illnesses, not the potential cause for their loss of autonomy. Gawande tells about one special geriatrician who was examining an eighty-five-year-old woman who had arthritis, glaucoma, high blood pressure and possibly metastasis from colon cancer. Rather than focus on these issues, the doctor spent a great deal of time watching her walk, speaking with her, and examining her feet. Why? This way he could assess her mental abilities, her nutrition, and most importantly the risk of her falling. As the doctor told Gawande: "The single most serious threat she faced was not the lung nodule or back pain. It was falling." (p. 40) The doctor was more concerned with the woman maintaining her

independence, than treating all her various maladies. As a result, a year later, the patient was still living on her own and doing very well. She had not fallen.

The majority of the aged want to remain in their own homes. According to a 2011 AARP study, 90 percent of seniors want to stay in their own homes as they age and 80 percent believe their current residence is where they will always live. The want to “age in place,” which is “the ability to live in one’s own home and community safely, independently, and comfortably, regardless of age, income, or ability level.”(p. 1). A survey by Gallup and Robinson (2012) for Pfizer found that only 25 percent of those over 65 would want to live with a younger relative if they could no longer care for themselves. But, as Gawande points out: “Our reverence for independence takes no account of the reality of what happens in life: sooner or later, independence will become impossible. Serious illness or infirmity will strike. It is as inevitable as sunset. And then a new question arises: If independence is what we strive for, what do we do when it can no longer be maintained?” (pp. 23-24). Parents may move in with children. However, with adult children working, it becomes difficult to care for their parents adequately. Thus, there are assisted living housing and nursing homes.

Gawande discusses the different types of living arrangements available for the elderly who can no longer maintain their independence. Assisted living housing was started so that elderly people could maintain control of their lives while receiving the help they needed. It was an attempt to solve “a deceptively simple puzzle: what makes life worth living when we are old and frail and unable to care for ourselves?” (p. 92) However, as he points out, concerns for safety have limited the control the elderly have over their lives even in assisted living.

Nursing homes are by and large “total institutions”. Residents must wake when they are told, eat when they are told, sleep when they are told. One nursing home medical director referred to the Three Plagues of nursing homes which must be attacked: boredom, loneliness and helplessness. (p. 116) There have been some nursing homes which have done this. Gawande discusses nursing homes which have changed the way in which they care for their patients to combat the Three Plagues. One nursing home allowed pets on the floors, canaries in the rooms, vegetable gardening outside. They also had the staff bring in their children. By

bringing life to the nursing home, the inhabitants had a more meaningful life themselves. There are also nursing homes where the elderly make their own schedule. They can eat when they want, sleep when they want, be alone or with others when they want. They are given some control over their own lives. In these nursing homes, the residents are livelier and express greater satisfaction than those in “normal” nursing homes.

In the section of the book on dying, Gawande also talks about people wanting to make their own choices and having control over their treatment options. Yet, it is very difficult to do so since many doctors have a difficult time discussing poor prognoses with their patients. They may tell the patient the diagnosis, but cannot discuss the patient’s dying. Gawande points to a study which showed that sixty-three percent of the physicians of terminally ill patients overestimated the amount of time a patient would survive (p. 167). Many oncologists offer treatments which they do not believe will work. Physicians must overcome their reluctance to talk about dying in order to help the patient make decisions about care.

Historically, physicians were paternalistic. They made the decisions for their patients and often did not tell the patient about an incurable diagnosis. Today doctors believe they are doing their duty by just giving patients information and allowing them to make the decision on their own. Gawande points out from his own experience that this is just information dumping and is not helping the patient make a decision the patient is ultimately comfortable with. Instead, doctors need to participate in what is called shared decision making. Shared decision making is where the physician discusses the various treatment options and their risks and benefits; while the patient discusses his values and goals. Together they come to a treatment decision.

This is an important section because people must begin to have conversations with their loved ones and their physicians about what they would want if they were terminally ill. They must tell the physician what they expect to be told and how they will need to come to treatment decisions together.

Overall, whether a person is dying or elderly, there is a desire to maintain autonomy and control over their lives. There is a desire to have a life that continues to be meaningful. Gawande makes the case for this objective beautifully and tells us how we in society can make that

happen, although it will take a great deal of work.

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# Reinforcing the Values of the Village in Urban Settings

By

Helmut E. Reinhardt

## INTRODUCTION

A significant demographic change observed in developed societies over a number of decades is the aging of the population-- that is, people in these societies are living longer on average. About 14.1 percent, or one in every seven of the U. S. population, is an older American. On January 1, 2016, the oldest baby boomers born in the U. S. reached 70 years old. Statistics also indicate that Americans who reach age 65 have an average additional life expectancy of 19.3 years, with the average life expectancy for women of 20.5 years (or a total life expectancy of 85.5 years) being 2.6 years higher than the average additional life expectancy for men (17.9 years or a total life expectancy of 82.9 years). (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, [http://www.aoa.acl.gov/aging\\_statistics/Profile/2014/2.aspx](http://www.aoa.acl.gov/aging_statistics/Profile/2014/2.aspx)). Reaching the age of 100 is no longer a rare event. Although they make up less than one percent of the population, in 2013, just over 67 thousand people in the U. S. had reached 100 years old or more (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, [http://www.aoa.acl.gov/aging\\_statistics/Profile/2014/2.aspx](http://www.aoa.acl.gov/aging_statistics/Profile/2014/2.aspx)).

Many older people continue to remain in the workforce, either on a full-time or a part-time basis even after they reach retirement age. There are many positive reasons why people continue to work after

reaching age 66. One major reason is financial need: many are still employed because they have not saved enough to sustain a comfortable standard of living at their current ages. Ideally, older people get to stay in their own home in the community where they have lived, although, perhaps, in a smaller home or as a tenant in an apartment. Increasing numbers of older people suffer from illnesses that make them unable to live completely or even partially independently. Those with income reserves are entering assisted-living or independent living facilities which are money draining and very expensive for those who pay out of pocket. The ill elderly with no reserves enter nursing homes.

A second important demographic trend occurred in 2008, when, for the first time, a larger percentage of the global population lived in cities than in rural areas (Totty 2016: R1). By 2050, the United Nations projects that nearly two thirds of the world's population will live in cities (Totty 2016: R1).

## MY POINT OF VIEW

There should be better and different ways to spend one's "golden" years. An idea which is not entirely new, but one which is worth investigating, is reinforcing the values of the village in contemporary urban settings. My inspiration for this article came from my visits to



my parents' hometown of Eutingen (now Pforzheim-Eutingen) in the German state of Baden-Wuerttemberg. On my first visit as a child in 1960, Eutingen was still a small village outside Pforzheim and had basically one main street (Hauptstrasse) and some connecting streets to the north and to the east. There was a wooded area to the south which was for the most part orchards and parkland. Most of the residents lived on the Hauptstrasse in row houses with small backyards.

To the north side of the Hauptstrasse lay the main Bundesbahn (state railroad) line from Karlsruhe to Muehlacker, which ran in the backyards of those houses on the Hauptstrasse.

The streets were cobblestone with high sidewalks. There were no telephone poles or utility wires. Bakeries, a butcher shop, several clothing stores, and a flower shop lined the street. A village pharmacy, a photo shop, and a hair salon share some buildings with each other. The Realschule (elementary school), where my parents went to school, loomed over the Hauptstrasse across from the main hotel/inn Hotel Stadt Pforzheim. There was a walking path to a neighboring village of Niefern, passing under the Autobahn Number 10 (Karlsruhe to Muenchen). Many residents would take that path to visit friends and relatives in Niefern. To the north, there was also a road that passed under the Autobahn to the overlooking hill called the Enzbuehle, filled with garden plots owned by the townspeople in Enzberg and Niefern. The people in all these villages knew each other, primarily because they were all related to each other. For many years Eutingen was anchored by one church, the Evangelische Kirche on the Hauptstrasse.

When I first visited in 1960, I did not know that Eutingen was founded by my mother's ancestors in 1450, and that her family, on the whole, had lived since then. Since 1450, generations of brothers migrated to surrounding villages and settled those villages. The old cemetery (now a playground) had a plaque on the entrance commemorating the falling veterans of both world wars. Many were distant relatives of my mother's family. In 1960, as a 9 year old, I did not fully understand the significance of that plaque, but with each subsequent visit (1973, 1981, 1983, and 2001), I began to feel the connectivity of the community. The family home at Hauptstrasse 151 felt like a home away from home. In 1960, my maternal grandmother and two of my dear aunts lived in the house, which was built after

my mother's birth in 1911. There, my mother and her nine siblings ran the household, despite my maternal grandfather being stationed as a naval officer in northern Germany in the early part of the 20th century. After the first world war, my Opa (grandfather) became the tax collector for the city of Pforzheim and later, after World War II, he became the militia commander for the village. Even though Opa never was the Buergermeister (mayor) of Eutingen, he was well known throughout the town until he passed five years before my first visit.

Most of those in Eutingen attended the church for social and religious reasons. Also, for those who were fortunate, some townspeople had a garden plot along the Enz river, where they could plant their own vegetables and flowers. My grandparents had a sizeable plot, which was passed down to the children over the years. For entertainment, there was a Kleine Tiere Halle ("small animal" social club) and a Turn-Halle (a gymnastics hall), which were also built along the Enz. Many of my mother's family were involved with these groups.

In 1960, Eutingen, had a deep sense of community, known as *Gemeinschaft*, the term used in the title of the original publication of Ferdinand Toennies book first when he published it in 1887 as *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*). As sociologists point out, in communal societies relationships among members are defined and regulated by traditional social rules. People in communal societies have direct face-to-face interactions and relationships with one another. Ideally, these interactions involve knowing a lot about the total person. In contrast, *Gesellschaft* is best illustrated by modern, urban-based, socially-diverse societies in which governments and other formal organizations can be described as bureaucracies. In bureaucracies, people play roles in a division of labor and interact mainly on the basis of the behavior their role performance entails in that status. In *Gesellschaft*, rational self-interest and means-to-end interaction serve to weaken the traditional bonds of family, kinship, and religion that characterize the *Gemeinschaft's* structure. In the *Gesellschaft*, human relations are more impersonal and indirect, being rationally constructed in the interest of efficiency or of other economic and/or political considerations. Toennies intended the contrasting social structures of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* to be viewed as ideal types. Therefore, real communities could be located anywhere along the continuum between the two extremes.

Today, Pforzheim-Eutingen has been transformed from a social structure which was more like a *Gemeinschaft* to one more like a *Gesellschaft*. Eutingen is now part of the municipality of Pforzheim and the train and commercial traffic starts very early in the morning. There are “big-box” stores on the outskirts of town and all the small stores and shops along the Hauptstrasse are struggling to survive. Pforzheim, also, is not the same place as it was before the fire-bombing of 23 February 1945. Altstadt (“old city”) Pforzheim, before the bombing, was a bustling city dedicated to the gold industry and watch making. Pforzheim had a deep sense of community. Gold workers all knew each other. Watchmakers knew each other. Jewish and Christian families before the war lived in harmony and many cases, inter-married. Pforzheim had a number of small villages, such as Broetzingen and Wuerm, which retained the sense of *Gemuetlichkeit* (defined as comfortableness, kindness, and good naturedness). Pforzheim, after the Second War and the destruction of the old city, became very modern and somewhat impersonal. Many non-Germans migrated from southern countries to Germany and to Pforzheim, in particular. Many immigrants came after the war and stayed on and became part of the “Bundesrepublik” (federal republic). Gone were the old familiar families and eventually the old trades, such as watch making and gold jewelry manufacturing. Gone, too, was the close-knit community along with traditional customs and values.

In 1960, many residents in both Pforzheim and Eutingen had no automobiles, more had motorcycles, however. Many people used either the local trains or local bus service. Now, fewer residents use buses or trains for transportation. Most residents have automobiles.

Last, most residents in Pforzheim or Eutingen in 1960 went to some kind of house of worship (Christian churches, Jewish synagogues, even a Muslim mosque). Today, fewer residents in Pforzheim (and Eutingen) attend religious services. Europe, in general, and Germany, in particular, has become very secular.

Communities in the United States have also changed from the small towns and mill villages of the Industrial Age in New England, for example, to the sprawling megalopolis of Boston-Providence-New York-Washington to northern Virginia. Many towns and villages in Rhode Island still have remnants of the mill row houses connected to the loom mills, which

operated on the banks of rivers. These row houses were maintained and owned by the owners of the mills and housed the workers of those mills. With the advent of modern equipment and new modes of transportation and exportation of jobs, mills stopped making their trade. Gone, too, is the close-knit villages and enclaves. People moved either to the city (such as Providence or Boston) or to the suburbs. Gone, too, is the personal feeling of knowing your neighbor well. Rhode Island, once a predominantly Catholic state, is now a state with many religions and far fewer Catholics.

As the U.S.’s population ages, the lives of more older people are hindered by a number of issues and concerns. One major issue centers around isolation. Family size has decreased among middle-class, white ethnics. More people are staying single. Therefore, fewer older people have family on whom to count. With younger family members moving elsewhere to find jobs, seniors who do have adult children are downsizing to a smaller apartment or condo or relocating to move in with a daughter or son and her/his family. A second major concern for seniors is losing one’s sense of independence. A third is the reversal of roles that follow when senior “parents” become more dependent on their “children” for their day-to-day activities and their wellbeing. Sometimes dire consequences follow these changes.

What is a liveable solution to this dilemma? One type of community I am envisioning is not just for seniors, but would involve people across generations and ages. This type of liveable community would exist in urban and sub-urban settings on blocks being renovated in cities or sizeable tracts of land being built in suburbs. This model would require smaller houses or townhouses. Existing large, empty large structures, like former factories and mills, could be rehabilitated into units with a sliding range of month rent based on residents’ incomes. After laying empty for decades, new life is being breathed into the old mills in Rhode Island in the form of varying size apartments, offices, and sites for community services.

Streets would be lined with sidewalks to encourage walking. Ideally, in newly-built areas, streets would have no utility wires obstructing the view and would be well-lit with fashionable light poles. Bus transportation and/or trolley, trains, or subways will be available within walking distance of these communities. Bike paths

would be built and auto traffic lessened or re-routed.

Houses would be joined closely together on small lots. In the center of the community, there would be a common-area for gatherings like a gazebo or a band stand. Local businesses, such as bakeries, butcher shops, grocery stores (once called convenience stores), hair salons, shoe stores and cobblers, clothing stores along with weavers and seamstresses, and hardware stores, along with restaurants and cafes, would be nearby and within walking distance from the houses. Small buildings could house a post office annex and a police substation. Hospitals could be regional, but doctors' offices would be nearby. Parks and recreation facilities would also be nearby for residents to use and enjoy. One would only need auto transportation to travel outside the immediate area.

Housing units could be occupied by a full-range of people: young, middle-age, older, relatives and non-relatives. Many roles would be available to residents. For example, older residents could be available for storytelling, babysitting, helping students with homework, and mentoring in work ethic. Younger people could be helpful to older people for socializing, providing instructions in getting up to speed with changing media, and for tasks involved with maintenance of houses and yards. Diverse ethnic and religious affiliations may present some issues but not necessarily. A lot depends on the willingness of neighbors to develop bridges to people different from themselves as well as bonds with people similar to themselves. Based on the *Gemeinschaft* model, I think that a homogenous religious and ethnic community would likely work best at the beginning.

Each community would have an appointed leader, such a town manager along with roving lawyers and judges. Members in the community would also have access to small garden plots and small business opportunities. Communities will be connected, not isolated. Places of worship and social gathering places, such as the Lion's Club, Mason's, Kiwanis Club, Rotary Club, along with various ethnic clubs will be the common thread linking communities together. A multi-purpose community center would be a meeting place, just like the churches of old. Specialized senior centers would no longer be necessary because the community center would provide services and resources for all ages. These are the places for everyone to share their ideas and new

concepts along with entertainment and socializing.

Public transportation would link these mini-communities to each other and to the larger cities. Walking and bicycle paths would also link the communities. There would be a de-emphasis on the automobile, which would only be used for long-distance travel and on rare occasion. Before there was an automobile, there were "tighter" communities. But life was simpler and not as hectic and stressful as today.

Security of these mini-communities would be the responsibility of both the local police and the residents themselves. Many communities in this country now have local neighborhood watches, manned by neighborhood volunteers. These crime watches can be expanded to assist the local police force.

Schools would have to be re-structured. Because of the re-introduction of various trades, such as bakeries, butcher shops, shoemakers, garden and flower shops, children would be offered the opportunity to learn these trades during their elementary school years. Students who wish to advance to a higher level of education or skills can go on to specialized high schools and some continue through college. As adults, these residents would become the leaders of the mini-communities as well as in the cities.

## CONCLUSION

Liveable communities of the future can be re-imagined from the old village concept of the past and re-purposed to cities and towns in the United States and elsewhere. Conceived in the early 1970s, Columbia, Maryland was an example of this new village-type concept. New liveable communities, similar to Columbia, MD would require a complete change in town planning and a complete change in lifestyle for families and individuals. Furthermore, they would bring back the old village *Gemeinschaft* concept.

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- Toennies, Ferdinand. 2001. Ed.: Jose Harris. *Community and Civil Society*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Community Living, Administration on Aging (AoA) Highlights [http://www.aoa.acl.gov/aging\\_statistics/Profile/2014/2.aspx](http://www.aoa.acl.gov/aging_statistics/Profile/2014/2.aspx), p.1.

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**About the Author:** Helmut E. Reinhardt is a first generation German-American who grew up in continual contact with his relatives in Germany. He is an educator with an M.A. in Counselor Education, a B.A. in Geology, and an A.S. in Business Management. For the last 12 years, the author has been a volunteer instructor for AARP in the Smart Driver Program.

# Etcetera

This section aims to supplement the articles and other work published in this volume of *Sociology Between the Gaps*. Individuals, groups, and organizations all over the world are working to improve the lives of others in the communities in which they live and elsewhere. In the Etcetera section readers will find examples and brief descriptions of innovative communities, social activism, research findings, and books which will get them to think further about the theme of civil engagement of the future and ways to improve the diverse social, cultural, and ecological environments which humans share.

## **Arcosanti: An Innovative City Rises in the Desert**

Arcosanti is a sustainable, experimental city envisioned by Italian-American architect Paolo Soleri who was trained by Frank Lloyd Wright. This city, located north of Phoenix, AZ, is a fascinating example of a livable community that exists in harmony with its environment while providing an opportunity for its residents to live and work with each other in a sustainable way.

Soleri realized that modern suburbs require both too much land to accommodate individual houses and costly transportation from the suburbs to the cities where people work, shop, etc., making the suburbs unsustainable for the long-term. Suburbs also isolate people by having them live far away from their places of employment and also from each other.

This architect envisioned a different type of living model, “arcology”: “architecture and ecology as one integral process” that would require far less land for dwellings, would be in sync with the environment, and would enable residents to live and work closely together. The Arcosanti community opened in the early 1970s as a prototype of Soleri’s vision of a sustainable city and an alternative to urban sprawl.

Living quarters in Arcosanti are interspersed throughout the community. All residents perform work in the community instead of paying rent. Work includes production of the famous Cosanti ceramic and bronze wind bells, gardening, working in the café, etc. Currently, there are only about 100 residents living in Arcosanti, much fewer than Soleri’s vision of

5,000. Residents must successfully complete a 5-week workshop program before being given the opportunity to live at Arcosanti.

To learn more about Paolo Soleri, arcology, and Arcosanti visit the following websites:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paolo\\_Soleri](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paolo_Soleri)

<https://arcosanti.org/Arcology>

<https://arcosanti.org/>

<https://arcosanti.org/workshops>

Pictures: <https://flic.kr/s/aHskCEQJhu>

There is also a video about Arcosanti called, *The City of the Future Is Already Here*, from *The Atlantic* online magazine: <http://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/502823/arcosanti-city-of-the-future/>

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This piece was written by Janice G. Schuster, Associate Professor and Commons Librarian for Research, Education, and Collections, at Providence College’s Phillips Memorial Library. Janice and her husband took a fascinating guided tour of Arcosanti in June, 2016.

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## **Book Spotlight: *Poverty as My Teacher***

Poverty is a global, social problem not easily solved. However, in *Poverty as My Teacher: Learning to Create Sustainable Family Communities* (2014) Robert E. Miller, M. S. takes on the challenge of

creating a comprehensive plan to build Sustainable Family Communities (SFCs). His interest in creating Sustainable Family Communities (SFCs) began in Mexico in combination with his desire to find families for children orphaned by poverty and violence.

This book describes the birth of the initiative Leading the Way Out of Global Poverty® with Sustainable Family Communities® (SFC) which are designed with the economic and social/cultural factors necessary to be repeatable, scalable and sustainable.

This initiative can truly eradicate poverty beginning with one community; and with each new community contributing to the development of another community. With each new community contributing to yet another community the initiative continues to “scale.” Each new community is built with the infrastructure that addresses all the typical deficiencies found in poverty-stricken communities – ex. lack of clean water, sanitation, jobs, education, ... Historically, efforts to address poverty have taken on only one, possibly two such deficiencies. Many of these efforts are very often effective in alleviating one or two conditions of poverty - but poverty continues to define the overall living conditions of the community with ongoing deficiencies in education, jobs, housing, food sufficiency, and more.

The first piece of infrastructure built for each new community is an agriculturally based commercial business. This community owned business serves as the economic foundation for each community of residents. The commercial business serves as an economic engine for each community and as such establishes a path out of the extreme poverty of urban slums to a higher quality of life for the workers and residents. This economic engine creates new jobs, wages, training and benefits for over 100 workers within each community, by way of commercial scale production of organic food. For each community 100% of its annual profits are reinvested within the community to enable three critical sustaining practices:

1. Delivery of training opportunities for community residents - adults and children alike.
2. Maintaining and operating the poverty-free community so as to perpetuate living conditions where residents can live with dignity pride and a healthy sense of self-worth.
3. Replicating itself by funding the start-up of another

new community, every year with each new community creating an additional 100 jobs, housing, sanitation, clean water, educational opportunities, continuation of cultural practices and traditions, and so much more.

All of the above are designed to be accomplished without ongoing government subsidies and without ongoing donations from individuals, institutions or foundations.

Leveraging expertise of over 800 individuals, organizations and universities, the nonprofit Our Family Orphan Communities, Inc. (O.F.O.C.) has completed the design and framework for building, implementing and managing each Sustainable Family Community. Beyond the design and development of the Master Plan, the role of O.F.O.C. will be to provide a governance function that focuses on preserving the underlying values and objectives that make up the design of SFC. O.F.O.C. will guide and assist in the implementation, operation and expansion of SFC's and ensure that each community remains poverty free with a sustainable economy, environment and food-supply for generations to come. All benefits of the network of Communities expanding within a country accrue to the people, economy and society of the country.

Successful SFCs can be built in any host country under the conditions Miller identifies. The end goal of SFCs is to replace poverty with prosperity in the long run. On page 15 of the Introduction to his book, Miller states that his objective in writing it is “to share a way to consciously create entire new communities without poverty that endure for generations.” The key words are the last three words—endure for generations.

Miller poses the essential question: “How can people from urban slums be helped to create their own islands of prosperity in spite of what turmoil may be happening in their society?” (p. 49). He learned about what works and what does not from research and from his personal observations of failed projects of varying sizes. He discusses some of these projects and identifies the unanticipated consequences they had. As he points out, none of these projects was successful in eliminating poverty in the long run.

This book offers a detailed blueprint for creating successful Sustainable Family Communities in any host country. His model is comprehensive, specific, and practical. A very important and special benefit to all is a reduction of the number of orphans - as poverty is the

primary cause of children ending up in orphanages.

For additional insights into the Sustainable Family Communities initiative, the reader is encouraged to examine *Poverty as my Teacher: Learning to Create Sustainable Family Communities*, by Robert E. Miller. Available through Amazon in paperback and as a Kindle e-book.

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This piece was submitted by Michael Lanier, Founder & Chief Executive, Business Integration Advisors, LLC, 25587 Conifer Road, Suite 510/415, Conifer, CO 80433, Phone: 303-809-0048. Lanier is a member of the Board of SFC and has been involved with the O. F. O. C. initiative for about five years.

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### Treehouse Easthampton

Treehouse Easthampton, in western Massachusetts, is an innovative, planned community founded by Judy Cockerton to help solve the problem of children in western Massachusetts aging out of foster care without being adopted. Children who age out of foster care without a family in place are at higher risk for becoming homeless, being incarcerated, living in poverty, and suicide. At the core of the Treehouse community are adoptive families, kids, and senior citizens who provide foster care, or in some other way, support the positive milestones of children from the public foster care system.

Cockerton has gone on to do much more than link former foster kids with loving individuals. For example, she has added a program to help siblings separated in foster care to reconnect (*Sibling Connections*) and another to improve these kids' opportunities for an education (*Birdsong Farm*) and improved future life chances.

To learn more about Judy Cockerton and Treehouse Foundation, see the following:

Shelley Emling. 2013. "Judy Cockerton, Former Toy Store Owner, Reinvisions Foster Care Across America." *The Huffington Post*. (March 8).

Diane Lederman. 2012. "Treehouse Founder Judy Cockerton Receives AARP \$100,000 Purpose Prize." (December 5). [http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2016/06/easthamptons\\_treehouse\\_foundat.html](http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2016/06/easthamptons_treehouse_foundat.html)

MassHousing. 2015. "Innovative, Multi-Generational Housing for Seniors and Families Adopting Children from Foster Care in Easthampton Completed and Occupied." (March 9). [www.masshousing.com](http://www.masshousing.com)

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### Piano's Courtyard

Architect Renzo Piano's solution for suburban sprawl in a Milan, Italy suburb of 6,000 people is the creation of a new courtyard where people can gather for as variety of communal activities including watching movies, community gardening, and participating in multi-ethnic family-style dinners. The courtyard is a place where people of different backgrounds and ages can get together to share and to learn. For example, immigrant parents and their children can get lessons in speaking Italian from a woman who teaches at 4:00 PM everyday in the courtyard. Piano states: "When you have people coming together, problems of diversity disappear and instead diversity becomes a great opportunity of exchange."

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Source: "Renzo Piano Reimagines the Suburbs." June, 2016. *The Future of Everything, A Look Ahead from The Wall Street Journal*: p. 96.

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### Hollwich on New Aging

The name of German-born architect, Matthias Hollwich, has become associated with the terms "new aging," Geropolis (defined as "the new old city which consists of a dense complex of sleek, angular units designed for multi-generational living"), and BOOM (the concept of liveable communities he has planned for LGBT retirees in various cities and countries).

Through UPenn, Hollwich secured a grant which enabled him to study aging and architecture in an innovative, re-imagined way. For this architect, age 60 is the "new 40." His innovative designs for liveable communities invite both gay and straight people over 40 to "take charge of their lives and live the latter part of their lives" in a beautiful, safe, vibrant fashion." His work has started a movement which challenges stereotypes and current living options for retirees and shows us ways to live smarter and better in a new-age social context. Hollwich's notion of treating aging like

starting a company is very compelling.

See *NEW AGING: Live Smarter Now to Live Better Forever* (Penguin Books Original; March 29, 2016; ISBN: 9780143128106; \$17.00) with Jennifer Krichels and illustrations by Robert Samuel Hanson of Bruce Mau Designs. <http://hwkn.com/projects/new-aging/> and in the following sources:

Lisa Selin Davis. (2016). "Planning the Future of Retirement." *AARP Bulletin* (March): 36-38.

Tim Halbur. (2011). "Designing a Retirement Community for LGBT Seniors." <http://www.planetizen.com/node/52868>

Jenn Kennedy. (2011, 2016). "Matthias Hollwich's BOOM: A Gay Architect's Forthcoming Oasis for LGBT Retirees." *The Huffington Post*. (12/05/11; updated 2/02/16). [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jenn-kennedy/matthias-hollwich-boom-lgbt-retirement\\_b\\_1119541.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jenn-kennedy/matthias-hollwich-boom-lgbt-retirement_b_1119541.html)

<http://seniorplanet.org/meet-the-new-old-age-matthias-hollwichs-contrary-vision/>

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### **Longoria on Affordable Housing**

Along with the many other social causes she supports through the Longoria Foundation, Actress Eva Longoria has gotten involved in advocating for affordable housing for blue-collar workers in the Latino community. The actress recently became an investor in a Turner Impact Housing Fund whose objective is "to preserve blue-collar apartment units across the country to ease an affordability crisis that has hit minority communities especially hard." Longoria is well aware that paying high rents make it impossible for blue-collar workers to afford the necessities of daily life like health care, nutritious food and education for themselves and their children.

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Source: Andrew Khouri. 2016. "Dash of Hollywood Giltz for Blue-Collar Crisis." *The Providence Journal* (June 5).

### **Safe Homes for Older Residents**

For people thinking about retiring in the near future and wondering if they can remain in their current home, Glenn Ruffenach (2016) identifies resources that can help them make those decisions in an informed way. These resources include:

1) a study from Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University. "Housing America's Older Adults: Meeting the Needs of an Aging Population." (Go to [jchs.harvard.edu](http://jchs.harvard.edu) and highlight "Research" to find this study's results.)

This study focuses on five important features that make homes accessible and safe for older residents: single-floor living; entries with no steps; hallways and doors that are extra wide; outlets and switches that are able to be reached at any height; and lever-style door and faucet handles. The majority (almost 90%) of homes have at least one of these features already. However, less than six in 10 existing homes have more than one of these features.

2) a reference to an Aging-in Place Remodeling Checklist from the National Association of Home Builders. (Go to [nahb.org](http://nahb.org) and search for aging in place.); and

3) a reference to an AARP checklist of more than 100 suggestions to help older homeowners "age in place" in an environment that is both safe and comfortable. The AARP also has a free detailed "Home Fit Guide" which contains diagrams explaining how to create a 'lifelong home' suitable for occupants of any age and physical condition. (Go to [aarp.org](http://aarp.org) and search for HomeFit.)

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Source: Glenn Ruffenach. "Ask Encore." 2016. "What Features a Home Needs So That You Can 'Age in Place.'" (June 6), R4. *The Wall Street Journal*.

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### **Boston's NPR News Station Hosts Program on Designing Communities for Aging Americans**

On 8/2/16, WBUR (90.9), Boston's NPR News Station, hosted an "On Point" program entitled, **Designing Communities For An Aging America**. The program was hosted by **Sacha Pfeiffer**. Guests included:



**Paul Irving**, chairman of the Center for the Future of Aging at the Milken Institute. Distinguished scholar in residence at the University of Southern California's Davis School of Gerontology. Author of *The Upside of Aging: How Long Life is Changing the World Of Health, Work, Innovation, Policy and Purpose*.

**Ruth Finkelstein**, professor of health policy and management at the Columbia University Aging Center. Former director of the Age-Friendly New York City Initiative; and

**Kathryn Lawler**, director of the Aging and Health Resources Division and director of the Area Agency on Aging in Atlanta.

A reading list citing several popular sources on the theme is also provided on WBUR's website. Interested readers are directed to: <http://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2016/08/02/senior-living-urban-design>. To stream the full episode (46 mins.) click on the red play button next to the episode title. Click on the download icon to save the file to your local machine.

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### **The Oldest Social Housing Project in the World: Fuggerei, Augsburg, Germany**

Germany has always been known as a very progressive country for social welfare. Currently, Germany has over one million migrants and immigrants seeking asylum within its borders from the various war-torn countries in the Middle East. These refugees need to be housed, educated in the German language, provided with jobs and training. Many challenges lay before contemporary Germany regarding how all these objectives will be accomplished in the coming years. A large part of the challenge will be to convince ordinary German citizens to accept these newcomers into their communities and into their lives on a primary-group level. True assimilation is the only way the challenges presented by diversity can succeed. During the process, the perceived costs of change will be experienced on many levels--financial, social, cultural, and religious.

Long before the modern Bundesrepublik was created, the country already had social welfare housing. For example, in 1520, Augsburg, part of the principality of Bavaria in the Holy Roman Empire, had a unique housing arrangement, called the Fuggerei. The Fuggerei is a separate medieval community within Augsburg

with gates, which are still opened and closed every day. This oldest social settlement in the world was created by Jakob Fugger the Rich. Jakob was a very wealthy merchant and owner of mines and weaving concerns with little wants of his own. He created the Fuggerei for his impoverished servants and fellow Augsburg citizens. The Fuggerei still exists today, despite being heavily damaged by the bombing of Augsburg during the Second World War. The community was rebuilt after the war.

The Fuggerei has 52 houses along with a Catholic church and several town squares. Each house has a separate entrance to small apartments with the ground level apartment serving as a museum. Currently, there are city tours through the settlement for a nominal fee. Each tenant of these apartments pays .88 euro (about \$1.00 U. S. dollar) rent each month and must be of the Catholic faith and say the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary and the Nicene Creed every day.

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This entry was submitted by Helmut E. Reinhardt, author of an article on Eutingen, Pforzheim, Germany which appears in this volume. His cousin by marriage, Nadine Kaelber, born in Bavaria Germany, sent him the website, I Like Germany, where the Fuggerei was described. To read more about the medieval community of Fuggerei and see pictures, go to the original source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fuggerei>

To learn more about the Fugger family, go to: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fugger>.

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### **Serenbe, a Series of Planned "New Urbanist" Communities in Chattahoochee, GA**

Serenbe is a "new urbanist" concept, developed and co-founded by retired restaurateur, Steve Nygren, who retired early, downsized from his large urban home to live on a farm on the outskirts of Atlanta. He decided to open a Bed & Breakfast, and was motivated by a closer connection to nature. In the mid- 1990s, Nygren said that this change in lifestyle was a transformative experience for him. When the opportunity to buy a 1,000 acre tract of undeveloped land from multiple owners outside of Atlanta, GA came to his attention, he jumped at the chance to build not one but several planned sustainable, "soulful" communities where residents could "age in place gracefully." His plan was to

protect the distinctive character of the surrounding area and to build communities around the village or hamlet concept.

Before he could do that, however, changes in zoning laws were required to allow Nygren to build a clustered community of houses and commercial buildings on smaller-than-usual sized lots. The zoning changes allowed for roads to be consolidated and 70% of the surrounding land to be preserved as farms, fields, and woods.

Currently, Serenbe (a name coined by Nygren's wife, Marie, to reflect a combination of "serenity" and "being") has two themed hamlets, *Selbourne* and *Grange*. Each village in Serenbe has a walkable community center and the following special features: Village 1: *Selbourne*, a arts-focused community of 265 residents, has a downtown centered by an outdoor Serenbe Playhouse with art galleries and concerts. Village 2: *Grange*, a healthy food focused community, has a 25-acre organic farm, a farmer's market, a "locavore" restaurant, and coffeehouses. The third village, *Mado*, which is in the process of being constructed, is planned around the theme of health and wellness. When Mado is completed, it will have 380 housing units, including townhouses, cottages, larger homes, and around 50 loft-style rental apartments which, Nygren hopes, will appeal to millennials. Unlike Selbourne and Grange, Mado is being planned as a multi-generational community which will have a range of amenities designed for residents of all ages. For example, Mado's planned amenities include a Montessori School for children from ages 3-14 years, a community pool and fitness center, and opportunities for yoga and Pilates classes.

Houses and townhouses in all three villages will have features geared to easy living for older residents, such as wider doors, staircases, and halls; no step entrances into single floor homes; and multiple-height work stations in kitchens. Homes are clustered together along with commercial buildings with no backyards and closer than standard zoning allowances with consolidated roads to prevent sprawl. Thus, preserving land for green space, farms, woods, and parks.

**Submitters' Commentary:** The concept of sustainable communities is an exciting one and the models which Nygren has conceived so far are compelling beginnings that may be tweaked and enhanced over time through trial and error to fit the needs and finances of community

members. These communities may also be replicated in other parts of the U.S. where very large tracts of woods and farmland are available to developers. Bluestein (2016) asks the key question: "Is This Sustainable Village The Future Of Retirement?" The answer is a qualified yes -- for some people. As Mr. Bluestein states, currently, houses in Serenbe are priced from \$300,000 to over \$1,000,000. This price range means that residences in this "new urbanist" community are affordable only to purchasers who are financially very secure. To attract working - and lower middle-class senior citizens and other-generation residents, houses would have to be affordable as well as attractive to buyers. Perhaps Mr. Nygren and other developers will be encouraged to expand the concept of sustainable communities to include homes starting at \$200,000 which lower-income people can afford to purchase through state and federal (HUD) grants and/or loans. In Mado, there may also be opportunities to build rental units which would appeal to millennials. But the same issue, affordability, applies to rental units also.

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Submitted by Helmut E. Reinhardt and Josephine A. Ruggiero. This submission is based, in part, on the article by Adam Bluestein. 2016. (August 31). "Is This Sustainable Village The Future Of Retirement?" <https://www.fastcoexist.com/3063268/is-this-sustainable-village-the-future-of-retirement>

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### A Generation Gives Back

The October 2016 *AARP Bulletin* article on volunteerism is particularly personal to me. Throughout my youth and adult life, I have been fortunate to volunteer for many causes. Regardless of where I volunteered -- for churches, hospitals, schools, or elsewhere in the community, I was always motivated by the idea of "paying it forward". As part of the AARP family of volunteers, I am involved in its advocacy program at the Rhode Island State House, its Driver Safety Program, and its Fraud Watch program. In his article "A Generation Gives Back", Paul Taylor (October, 2016 *AARP Bulletin*: 40-43) talks about many of the ways in which older volunteers, today's *Boomers*, can "pay it forward" by volunteering in ways that connect them with America's youth, today's *Millennials*.

Among the notable programs that Taylor (2016)

discusses is Marc Freedman's national non-profit group, Encore.org. Encore.org plans to start a new program called "Generation to Generation". This program will place older Americans in youth-serving organizations across the country. These senior volunteers will be either part-timers or will receive a small stipend. Seniors will be helping and mentoring young people in a variety of ways.

The generation-to-generation concept is not new. In the 1990's, Freedman and the late John W. Gardner, a civil activist, started "AARP Experience Corps", a volunteer program for seniors to tutor at-risk inner city public school students. Today, AARP Experience Corps thrives along with many other "inter-generational" programs. "Jump Start" is another example. This program engages college students who receive a small stipend to work as teacher's aides in preschools in disadvantaged areas. Jump Start is now recruiting older people, notably retired seniors. The oldest of these generation-to-generation programs, "Foster Grandparents", was created 50 years ago by US government's Senior Corps program. "Foster Grandparents" pairs senior citizens with at-risk children in schools, hospitals and juvenile detention centers.

Volunteer programs are also helping children overseas. For example, Floyd and Kathy Hammer of Union, Iowa came out of retirement in 2003, to start up an outreach mission in Tanzania (East Africa). Their objective was to help children dying of malnutrition. Kathy bartered for 12,000 baskets and sold them for money to build a school. And Kathy and Floyd **did** build that school. The Iowan couple went on to found "The Outreach Program", which for the past 12 years has established pediatric medical missions and children's centers in Tanzania. This program has also distributed 350 million free meals to children in more than 15 countries. In October, 2016, the AARP Foundation held a "meal-packaging" event on the National Mall in Washington, DC using the ingredients provided by the "Outreach Program". 1.5 Million meals were prepared at that event alone.

"Inter-generational" programs have been started around food, mentoring and other initiatives. Regarding the latter, the Rev. Belle Mickelson founded a traveling music program for children in remote Alaskan villages. Jamal Joseph, a former Black Panther, created a theater program for youth in Harlem in New York. He founded the IMPACT Repertory Theater which teaches youth leadership skills and the creative arts.

Unfortunately, volunteerism is on the decline in the U.S., due both to the scaling back of public investment in the younger generations and to the decline of affiliation with religious and service organizations. However, a large segment of the public is optimistic about intergenerational relations. In a nationwide survey conducted for Encore.org, two thirds of Americans say "that as long as Americans remember that we all have obligations to each other and to future generations, the growing diversity of the population will be a source of national strength" (Taylor 2016: 43). Activists hope that this source of national strength can turn into a national movement and a "antidote to the divisiveness of modern politics". As Doris Williams, 68, a teacher's aide in the Jumpstart program in Los Angeles, said, "You are giving them something for a lifetime...planting a seed that can go on forever. And they are giving you a reason to get up and go in the morning" (Taylor 2016: 43).

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This synopsis of Paul Taylor's article, "A Generation Gives Back", (*AARP Bulletin*, October 2016: 40-43), was written by Helmut E. Reinhardt, who is a veteran of five decades as a volunteer.

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### AARP and a Life Reimagined

Over the past two decades, AARP's mission has expanded to serve Americans 50 years of age and older. No longer an association of retired people, the organization is positioned to help create a better path to aging. It's no longer about "helping old people" as it is empowering people to make the most of their lives as they age and to discover, as AARP says, life's "real possibilities." Doing that requires some re-thinking about how we perceive age.

How old is "old?" What constitutes being "middle-aged?" AARP CEO Jo Ann Jenkins (2016) points out that a generation ago someone who was in his or her early 40s was considered by most people to be middle-aged, but you won't find many who think that now. Surveys conducted over the last couple of years shows a majority of people now believe middle age starts around 55.

Jenkins (2016) has launched a conversation intended to transcend the old cliché that "You're As Young As You Feel." True as it may sound, the adage fails to address

the changes we're experiencing. She recently challenged folks in their 50s and 60s to think about it. "How do you compare to your parents when they were your age, or your grandparents? While some similarities are a given, for lots of us the contrasts are fairly stark."

And yet, Jenkins (2016) writes, "It's odd that so many negative attitudes about people over a certain age, whether directed from the outside or, worse, self-inflicted, are alive and well." Ageism has not gone away. But attitudes will change partly as a result of sheer numbers. U.S. Census Bureau Statistics show 10,000 people in the U.S. turn 65 every day and that will continue to happen — every day — for the next 14 years.

Jenkins (2016) says society has some catching up to do. "We need to dispel negative beliefs around and about aging even quicker than might normally happen — not because our world needs more political correctness, but because there's a growing body of evidence that ageism has quantifiable negative health effects on aging people, in addition to distracting them from more vital considerations. In the abstract, a long life is a fine thing, but this demographic shift brings with it new questions to ponder (and act on). If you've got another 35-40 years, how can you make them all you want them to be and what do you need to do to make it a reality?"

Jenkins (2016) is leading the charge around a movement she says will lead to changes that will benefit everyone. She calls it "Disrupt Aging," and it is the title of her new book. "Disrupt Aging is about engaging on the big questions — around health, wealth and self — and, overall, living the best future you can. As with so many things in life, either you choose a path for yourself, or circumstances conspire to choose one for you."

Disrupt Aging begins, she says, with "owning" one's age. Why, she asks, do we spout platitudes such as "age is only a number" or "you're as young as you feel" only when talking about people in their late 50s, 60s, 70s or older? Isn't life also often what you make of it in your 20s, 30s and 40s?

So, Disrupt Aging is not about denying aging, or defying aging, it's about owning your age — and embracing the opportunities to live your best life at every age. Some adaptations we choose. Some are thrust upon us, often painfully. What's new is that many life changes come at people who, in the new world order, realize they have a lot of living left to do. And they need to take control -- whether it is the loss of a job, the death

of a spouse or reaching that point when it feels right to pursue a life-long dream. Age need no longer restrict choices or otherwise determine one's fate.

With this new attitude in mind, AARP created Life Reimagined. This interactive program/workshop, offered by trained AARP "guides," provides participants with an opportunity to assess where they are in their lives, and provides a framework that stimulates their thinking about what could be next. In about 90 minutes, this workshop helps millions of Americans explore, dream and plan for what's next in life. The Life Reimagined workshop provides a place where people can go to discover what is meaningful to them, navigate life's crossroads and find new possibilities in life.

The Life Reimagined workshop provides a personalized approach to help people facing a multitude of issues create actionable and meaningful game plans for navigating through. Life Reimagined was created by its own Thought Leadership Institute and a coalition of experts — including Richard Leider and other prominent visionaries across a range of relevant fields ranging from personal development, to aging, finances and relationships. Life Reimagined is able to connect to users via multiple touch points, including an interactive portal ([www.lifereimagined.org](http://www.lifereimagined.org)) with step-by-step online resources for different situations. At the local level, small-group sessions (8-20 participants) called Life Reimagined Check Ups, keep people constantly inspired along their path.

In a 2014 *Huffington Post* Blog, career consultant John Tarnoff assessed what AARP calls Life Reimagined's "online/offline" dynamic. "The website provides ideas and tools from a wide range of sources, hence the wide variety of thought leaders working with the Life Reimagined Institute," he wrote. "Each side of the project feeds the other, with the power of digital and social media helping to feed user experiences and opinions back to the thought leaders - and vice versa. But what goes on with the website...will only work if the learning and its application can be translated into action and relationships built in the real world (offline) community. That is the area where (AARP) feels the project will be most influential and provide the most value - and where the organization is reaching out by creating local events to bring people together to engage with these ideas.

"AARP has always been focused on the concept of

transition — traditionally in the transition from work to retirement,” Tarnoff added (2014). “Life Reimagined is extending this core competency to the new transition that many Boomers are experiencing in mid-life.”

Online, work and career guidance ranges from *Get an Edge in Your Job Search*, *Improve Your Networking Skills* to *Prep for a Career Change* and *Becoming a Freelancer*.

The Web site also provides paths to better health & wellbeing under sections such as, *Find Balance*, *Change Your Eating Habits*, *Eat Well to Live Well* and *Improve Your Memory*. *Relationship guidance includes Set Goals with Your Young Adults* and *Reawaken Desire*.

The free (and confidential) Check-ups, facilitated by certified volunteers, offer those taking part a fresh, personalized, authentic and thought provoking approach that helps them navigate the next phase of their lives and allows them to share that experience with others who may be dealing with similar issues and experiences.

A workbook creates a means to identify where individuals find themselves on their “life cycle” and to specify goals. A graphic roadmap highlights milestones and checkpoints designed to keep people moving forward, rather than remain stuck in one mode. Group discussions are open, with the caveat that “What happens in a Check Up stays in a Check Up.” The take-home workbooks provide space to record progress and write down next steps. “In this process, we have found that attendees are inspired by one another, as together they reimagine their lives in extraordinary ways,” said AARP-RI State President Alan Neville. “We have been delighted by the positive comments we have received from Life Reimagined participants.”

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Interested readers can learn more about Life Reimagined in Rhode Island at <http://www.aarp.org/RILife>.

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