

URBAN LIVEABILITY FORUM

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"MY RESOURCE. MY RESPONSIBILITY"

A knowledge series from the experts on effective management of resources to enhance urban Liveability during and post pandemic.

INTERGENERATIONAL LIVING FOR A POST-PANDEMIC CITY

by Victoria Lee,
Executive board member at Oxford Urbanists

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Intergenerational Living for a post pandemic city - by Victoria Lee, Executive board member at Oxford Urbanists

Urban planners of today should consider the role of Intergenerational living for cities of tomorrow.

Intergenerational living can help to address some of the challenges we face in cities. These can include, but are not limited to,

- Affordability
- Mental health and loneliness, and
- Social mobility and cohesion.

Positive by-products of intergenerational living can also include efficient resource management, from heating to food, and therefore help in reducing carbon emissions. Given this range of benefits (and more), why hasn't intergenerational living built up more momentum in urban planning?

**UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIETAL NORMS OF
INTERGENERATIONAL LIVING (JOINT FAMILY)**

Intergenerational living has existed for centuries and across many countries and cultures. Based on UN data, intergenerational living still seems prominent across Asia and Africa.

For instance, in 2017, over 30% of households in some African countries were occupied by older persons. In the same report, conversely, North American, European and Australian households generally contained fewer than three family members, suggesting nuclear family households were more popular.



Intergenerational living or joint family living has been the norm for Indian families, owing to cultural values and cost considerations (cost of housing and living). However, in urban areas, the pre-Covid trends have indicated an increasingly nuclear family system. This is also attributed to immigration from rural and semi-urban areas to urban areas for economic prospects. But there is growing evidence to suggest that societal norms in intergenerational living are also changing. For instance in India, some older people are choosing to live separately from their families in later life.

ROLE OF URBAN PLANNERS IN CREATING INTERGENERATIONAL LIVING MODELS

At both ends of the spectrum, societal norms seem to play a key role in determining the uptake of intergenerational living. In that case, what can urban planners do to promote intergenerational living in a post pandemic city? Urban planning practice in the UK offers some ideas and options. This year, for instance, the London Borough of Enfield launched a design competition for intergenerational housing. Also, intergenerational living is explored through urban planning journals and built environment magazines. For example, 'intergenerational masterplanning' was promoted by a leading UK architecture firm in a recent RIBA Journal article. Co-living – shared housing that can extend beyond family members – and also newer rental models are also being tested and gaining momentum in design, planning and development.

Urban planners, developers, investors, architects and consultants in global cities should take heed. In the context of a pandemic, flexibility, affordability and socialisation have become increasingly sought-after commodities. Therefore, intergenerational living and other models of shared housing can gain further traction. Below are some thoughts on how urban planners and built environment professionals can explore and integrate intergenerational living:

KEY POINTS BY URBAN DEVELOPERS

1). **Design** – Intergenerational living will require flexible conversion and/or compartmentalisation over time. Can new, larger homes with more and different types of rooms and shared spaces, both internally and externally, be prototyped? This will mean that space in cities can continue to be used efficiently, but more agency (and potentially profit) is passed from the developers to the occupiers.



2). **Retrofitting** – Not all buildings for intergenerational living need to be new. Existing homes and spaces can be retrofitted to support this model. Information and support on these initiatives, particularly for hard-to-reach groups such as older people seeking to downsize, could mean that existing homes and space are more effectively used.

3). **Property development models** – Business models and financial cases for intergenerational living have been explored and developed. More research and testing can be done to ensure these models are feasible and sustainable, particularly in terms of the ownership and management of these buildings over time.



4). **Urban planning and policy** – Housing design, typologies and tenure are guided by national and local policies. Flexible housing models for intergenerational living and other shared housing models can be promoted through plans and guidance. Cooperation between local authorities and the private sector on projects could also underpin these initiatives.

ABOUT OXFORD URBANIST

The Oxford Urbanists is an organisation of global thinkers and practitioners seeking to create solid partnerships towards sustainable development, as addressed in the UN's New Urban Agenda (NUA). We generate, voice and disseminate knowledge to the communities around us, local to global, ensuring that the best practices are highlighted to students, researchers and practitioners alike. Our team is involved in numerous projects, from urban transit to public spaces to fostering creativity in cities, which in many ways address the aims of the NUA for more engaged and robust communities. The aim of the Oxford Urbanists is to frankly engage with the all-important and often contentious debates surrounding these issues, finding more inclusive and sustainable ways forward.

ABOUT THE WRITER



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Victoria is an Urban Development Strategist leading on sustainable and inclusive design for cities of today and the future. She has over 12 years of experience working across three core disciplines – urban planning, urban design and architecture. Victoria has lent strategic design advice and support to central government, local authorities, developers and investors, architects and consultants for a wide portfolio of nationally and internationally significant development projects. This work includes the design of a new city for 100,000+ people in Oman, strategic design advice for the International Finance Quarter and Waterfront Masterplan in Jersey (Channel Islands), public engagement for the Elephant and Castle Regeneration in London and reviews of rail and airport infrastructure. Victoria holds an MSc in Sustainable Urban Development from the University of Oxford, an MA in City Placemaking, and a BArch in Architecture Honours. In addition to the above, Victoria sits on the Executive Board of the Oxford Urbanists and is a Trustee of Futures for Women (a UK Charity) and a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts.

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