Critical Futures of Aging in Society
Enabling Futures of Intergenerational Knowledge Creation
Knowledge Economy = Connecting Knowledge
In more traditional societies, the death of an elder is similar to the burning down of a library as “knowledge, skills, wisdom and mastery of local technology accumulate in later years of life [Helman, 2005, p.s56].
my grandmother when she was my age

me when I am my grandmother’s age
Global Median Age

Years
- 14 - 20
- 20 - 25
- 25 - 30
- 30 - 35
- 35 - 40
- 40+
- No Data

PRODUCTIVITY > REPRODUCTIVITY
CULTURAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL AMNESIA
Babyloid, Japan's latest therapeutic robot baby, is designed to help ease depression among older people by keeping them company.
A suit named AGNES, an acronym for the Age Gain Now Empathy System, is designed to help young engineers understand the physical limitations of older people.

THE HELMET: An anchor point for the harness points that attach to the hip.

GOGGLES: Minimize the lateral viewing of the eye lenses.

SHOULDER CORDS: Run from the neck to the hip, maintaining the head's position. The tension they create makes spinal movements difficult, causing discomfort to the spine. They also help to reduce the rotation of the head.

BELT: Used to anchor the harness straps and stabilize the subject's body weight.

ELASTIC RINGS: Runs from hip to wrist/rode or shoulder mobility and cause fatigue.

A double layer of rubber sleeves to reduce the tactile sensation through the fingers and restrict the movement of the hand.

SHOES: These are civilian shoes used in public, but in the lab, foam-padded shoes are used to prevent the subject's balance.


**Defining Intergenerational Relations**

A Professor of Gerontology and Social Policy at the University of Melbourne, Biggs describes how the development of generational relations is also at an early yet critical stage. In the past, mapping life-stage characteristics has been the concern of generational studies, however, changes to lifespan and lifestyle have blurred generational roles creating a need for alternative approaches to understanding aging [Biggs, 2007]. He proposes two dimensions of intergenerational relations:

**Private Sphere**
Based on kinship ties, one is commonly referred to in the private sphere of family relations and operates at the micro level [Biggs, 2007].

**Public Sphere**
Based on shared social and historical characteristics, it is commonly referred to in the public sphere of age-based cohorts “traveling through time together [Biggs, 2007 p. 696]” and operates at the macro level.

*Operating in and influenced through both private and public spheres, intergenerational relationships are a source of personal care and material security [Walker, 1996].*
Defining Intergenerational Relations

Connecting between both private and public spheres, the following research discusses two conceptual approaches in two academic domains where literature was gathered:

A Sociological Approach to Understanding Relations between Generations
Discusses processes of social change or how significant historical events shape the environment we age in. The Sociological tradition examines generations in society with a focus on social change in the public sphere of age based cohorts [Biggs, 2007].

A Gerontological Approach to Understanding Relations between Generations
Discusses processes of aging or how we grow up and grow old as we move through the life course. Social gerontology is multidisciplinary, linking between both private and public dimensions of intergenerational relations [Biggs, 2007].
Imagine what your life would be like if your generation lived on forever and none followed to replace it? - Karl Mannheim, 1927
A Sociological Approach to Understanding Relations between Generations

A German Sociologist, Karl Mannheim was among the first to investigate the phenomena of generations in the social sciences and has a significant effect on the empirical understanding of generations [Biggs, 2007].

Mannheim [1927] describes how new participants in the cultural process are continually emerging or entering while former participants are continually disappearing or exiting [Mannheim, 1927].

He introduces various layers of a generational bond, highlighting how as more “mental data” is shared between individuals in society this bond intensifies:

“Mental data are of sociological importance not only because of their actual content, but also because they cause the individuals sharing them to form one group—they have a socializing effect [Mannheim, 1927, p. 184].”

New generations are considered to be a source of cultural renewal as they adapt to contemporary needs [Biggs, 2007] and teach us “both to forget that which is no longer useful and to covet that which has yet to be won [Mannheim, 1927, p.173]”.
Generational Conflict
The notion of generational conflict is also seen as “a structural aspect of social struggles over limited resources [Turner, 1998 p. 299]” as discussed in the following quote:

Events such as the “Sixties Generation” are seen as an attempt to rebalance inequalities between generations, which, as that large cohort moves through time, itself comes to engage in exclusionary practices. These practices are intended to prevent succeeding generations from accessing the resources held by the dominant generational group through credentialism and by privileging “generationally marked experiences.” [Biggs, 2007, p.702].

Confucianism
In Asian societies Confucianism emphasizes cultural continuity and is a significant force that regulates hierarchy and power between generations, emphasizing obedience and care towards one’s elders [Hashimoto and Ikels, 2005].

Post-Generational Fields
Another more contemporary debate is the blurring of generational differences [Biggs, 2007]. Gilleard and Higgs [2005] suggests that we are now dealing with “post generational fields” that are no longer defined by kin, age cohorts, or a particular generation.
"Our world is speedy, and they’re old."

"Those who get the youth get the future."

FUTURE = YOUTH
In “Age and Structural Lag, Society's Failure to Provide Meaningful Opportunities in Work, Family, and Leisure”, Riley et al [1994] discusses how a “mismatch” or “lag” exists between the process of aging and opportunities made accessible through the life course.

Among the significant factors influencing why age defined roles are challenged to meet the needs of their age groups is longevity. For example, longevity has created more opportunities to take on alternative roles that challenge conventional retirement [Riley and Riley, 2000].

Other significant factors include a growth in age heterogeneity as well as in the number of older age strata.
As every decade passes, on average we add at least two years to the aging process. - Newcastle University

When the age of retirement was set at 65 in the 1900s, life expectancy was under 50. Today’s increased longevity has created a different reality. For more than a quarter-century, Mr. Dychtwald, 60 and thus himself a baby boomer, has been trying to rebrand aging as a positive phenomenon. He’s coined a word, “middlescence,” to convey later life as a transformative stage, like adolescence, in which people have free time and an increased interest in trying new experiences. He also came up with an antidote to retirement: “rehirement.”

A Gerontological Approach to Understanding Relations between Generations

In the domain of Social Gerontology, two social structures [Riley and Riley, 2000; Uhlenberg, 2000; Kohli, 2000] are discussed:

**Age Segregated**
An age segregated structure is one that uses age criteria to organize activities - education, work, family, leisure - across the life course while an age integrated structure does not [Riley and Riley, 2000; Uhlenberg, 2000] based on an industrial model of age specialization.

When compared to race and sex segregation, age segregation is not yet a visible problem as current convention holds age segregation as “natural” or based on “individual preferences” [Uhlenberg, 2000].

**Age integrated**
An age integrated structure which opens opportunities to pursue different roles across the life course, however, within the limits of biology [Riley and Riley, 2000].

Flexible Lives: Individuals have opportunities throughout their lives to diversify periods of education, work, family time and leisure as entry and exit in social roles and activities are not limited by age.

Cross Age Interaction: Individuals have opportunities to interact with diverse age groups. Interactions range in duration and intimacy, as well as in nature.
SILVER TSUNAMI = AGING AS A NATURAL DISASTER
Solidarity, Rivalry and Ambivalence

As an alternative to the “dualistic solidarity versus conflict debate”, Luscher and Pillemer [1997] propose a theory of intergenerational ambivalence. They claim that both positive and negative feelings are generated and that recognizing ambivalence is important for moving beyond conflicts and differences between generations. Therefore, fostering environments that acknowledge ambivalence, nurture empathy and negotiate solutions between generations is important moving forward.

As in life, an exclusive conceptual focus on rivalry or solidarity leads, paradoxically, to an inability to genuinely separate from another generation, as the first step to achieving reconnection. Placing oneself in the position of the generational other, it appears, may not be an easy business. It is necessary, however, if sustainable solutions are to be found to contemporary problems [Biggs, 2007; p.708].
How might we enable futures of intergenerational knowledge creation through rethinking aging narratives?
**Critical Futures [Methodology]**

Critical futures is part of an emerging field in Social Foresight and is a methodology that was originally developed by Richard A. Slaughter. Critical futures is not only a way to analyze the future, but also a basis for cultural renewal [Ramos, 2003]. An emerging discourse in social foresight is future generations studies which considers the needs of future generations as current unsustainable practices continue to disadvantage them [Slaughter, 1996].

**Causal Layered Analysis [Method]**

A post-structural approach attempts to question trends and events that appear at the surface. Building on Slaughter’s work, Inayatullah [2005] developed a tool called Causal Layered Analysis [CLA] that allows these deeper layers of cultural reality, world view and metaphor to emerge. Deconstruction, genealogy, distancing and re-ordering knowledge are among the elements introduced by Inayatullah [2005].
Projected Growth of Demographic Dependency

The Formula

Canada's Demographic Dependency Ratio

- Statistics Canada,
Age Segregated Structure based on an Industrial Model of Age Specialization
Monochronic time—measured by clocks and watches—is a form of external order that originates outside the individual, and which is imposed upon the chaotic lives of humanity. Thus ‘time is organization’, which is essential for the smooth functioning of a complex industrial society in which the actions of large groups of people need to be coordinated, so that factories, shops, businesses, offices, railways, airlines and traffic flow can all operate on an identical time schedule [Helman, 2005, p. s54].
The Assembly Line of Aging
The Assembly Line of Aging

The Meandering River of Aging
“Most models of cultural time usually imply a potential conflict between subjective and objective time (Fraser, 1966): between an individual’s own sense of time passing, called *kairos* by the ancient Greeks, and the external, standardized time frames imposed on them by society (*chronos*).”

-Helman, 2005
“In more traditional societies elders played an important role of caregiving and children were expected to work in the field or to care for their younger siblings as “time devoted to work was considered as intrinsic to childhood as it is to adulthood [Helman, 2005, p.s55]”
Projected Growth of Demographic Dependency

The Formula

Possible Transformation to Demographic Interdependency
Engaging Stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Key Actors</th>
<th>Enablers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Interdependency</td>
<td>New Media Industry Leaders</td>
<td>Celebrate Age Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Integration</td>
<td>Community Partnerships</td>
<td>Building Empathy through Place-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kairos Time</td>
<td>Policy Makers</td>
<td>Leverage aging as a resource “Qualify Aging”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meandering River</td>
<td>Artists &amp; Leaders</td>
<td>Collaborate Towards Sustainable Futures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Engaging Stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enablers</th>
<th>Policy Makers</th>
<th>Organizational Leaders</th>
<th>Community Leaders</th>
<th>Individuals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate Age Diversity</td>
<td>National events and activities that celebrate age diversity and build solidarity.</td>
<td>Challenge ageism in the workplace and stereotypes through celebrating achievements regardless of age.</td>
<td>Develop community events that celebrate intergenerational civic engagement.</td>
<td>Challenge and question personal assumptions and stereotypes about aging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurture Intergenerational Empathy</td>
<td>Reduce formal and regulatory barriers to entry and exit in activities based on chronological age.</td>
<td>Reduce bureaucracies in organizations to encourage face to face interaction and knowledge sharing.</td>
<td>Create partnerships between schools, senior homes and workplaces through “intergenerational place-making.”</td>
<td>Remember that we were all once younger and we will all one day become older.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate Towards Sustainable Futures</td>
<td>Utilize intergenerational innovation to address social policy challenges of mutual concern to age groups.</td>
<td>Create open spaces where diverse age groups can work on long term projects of mutual concern.</td>
<td>Utilize public spaces as a way for communities to come together and envision preferred futures.</td>
<td>Recognize what’s shared and not only what’s different between generations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Connecting Intergenerational Networks

- Public Spaces
- Retirement Communities
- Senior Homes
- Workplaces
- Universities
- Homes
- Day Cares
- Schools

Living
- WWII Gen
- Boomers
- Millennials
- Gen X
- Gen Z

Relaxing
- WWII Gen
- Boomers
- Millennials
- Gen X
- Gen Z

Working
- WWII Gen
- Boomers
- Millennials
- Gen X
- Gen Z

Learning
- WWII Gen
- Boomers
- Millennials
- Gen X
- Gen Z

Family & community
- Public Spaces
- Retirement Communities
- Senior Homes
- Workplaces
- Universities
- Homes
- Day Cares
- Schools

- Living
- Relaxing
- Working
- Learning

Connecting Intergenerational Networks
From Interdisciplinary to Intergenerational Design Futures...
Thank You.