

# The Possibility of Community Design Study through “Hidden Curriculum”

## Potentials lying in the place of actual living where multi-family living culture is nurtured

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### 1 Significance and purpose of study

Community designers “draw out of people their heroic insights and finds ways to implement them” (Richard L. Meier). \*<sub>1</sub> They also “work to reverse the trend toward professionalization of placemaking by encouraging citizens to express their environmental creativity.” (Randolph T. Hester, Jr.).\*<sub>2</sub>

A notable tendency in today’s society is that citizens are driven into an impasse where they are no longer able to have any insight into their own lives and how they should rear communities they live in, nor can they give expression to their ability to create environments around them. It is because of this that community designers as experts are needed and model methods for educating them required.

Changing our viewpoint, however, if citizens become willing to nurture their own dwellings and communities with their own hands and can continue to put this willingness into action within their own groups and communities, they may possibly become community designers themselves rather than relying on professional people. Acquiring, through practices in multi-family living, both capability of managing multi-family communities and senses as well as skills to give full swing to one’s ability to create environments: let us call this process community design study under the “hidden curriculum”\*<sub>3</sub>. This, at the same time, means passing on the culture of multi-family living in daily life from one generation to another. What is important is the formation of the culture which contains the “hidden curriculum” that enables everyone to become a matured adult with good sense as well as good understanding of environments, namely, to acquire informed citizenship.

The culture of multi-family living refers to a process in which friendly as well as conflictual relationships are generated over time between lives, space, management and orientation. In other words, it is a whole which integrates externally designed interactions of these elements ( the way residents relate with dwelling units, common spaces etc. and ways of living represented as external forms ), and internally designed ones ( positive and negative responses to multi-family living represented as internal forms ). The multi-family living culture, in which this external as well as internal designs are generated through the interrelations between people, materials, events and willingness, is not something to be completed in one generation but is influenced by the way it is passed on between generations. A particular multi-family living culture can bear fruit when the childhood experience of being nurtured by the culture can transform itself into the willingness to nurture it in turn as an adult. At such time, one gets engaged in the management of the community as well as its environments using community design senses acquired through the “hidden curriculum”. (Figure 1)

In this essay, I intend to examine the actual forms the plot mentioned above takes in a particular case of U-Court, a corporative housing unit of 48 dwelling units located in Rakusai, Kyoto city, twenty years after its completion. Through an analysis of childhood recollections of young citizens raised here, the essay is aimed at considering the possibility of community design study under the “hidden curriculum” which exists latently in the field of actual living where multi-family living culture is in cradle.

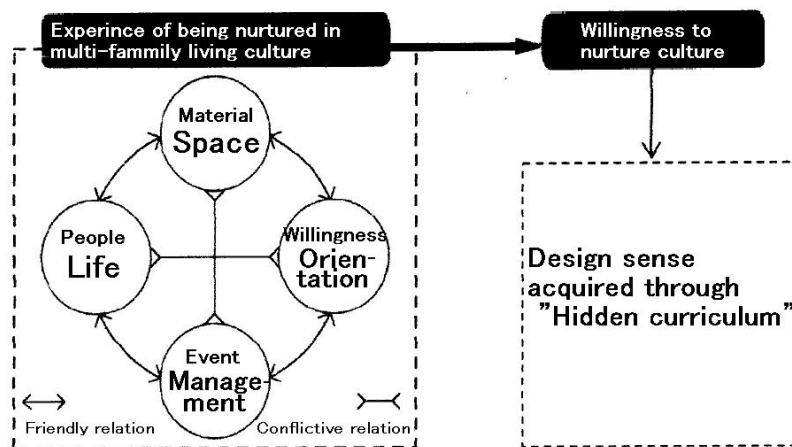


Fig. 1 Inheritance of multi-family living between generations and development of community design sense

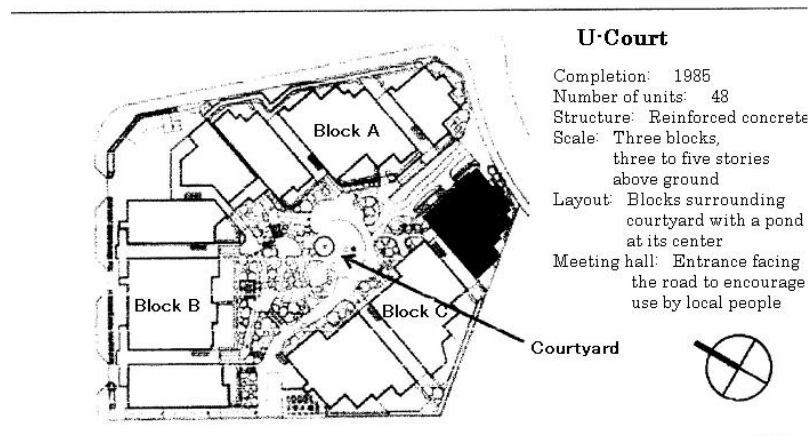


Fig.2 Plan of U-Court

## **2 Outline of survey and analysis**

### **(1) Outline of survey**

I discussed U-Court, a corporative housing unit, at the second and third Conference. \*4 . From 19th to 21st of August in 2005, we had hearings individually with 10 people belonging to the second generation of the U-Court residents. The contents of the hearings include:

- i ) Environmental evaluation of U-Court: its spaces, relations with residents, his/her values
- ii ) Past memories, memorable events and places
- iii ) Influences from living in U-Court
- iv ) Willingness to continue to live there

Picked out of approximately 90 people who were in the sixth grade of elementary schools or younger at the time of move-in in 1985, the 10 interviewees ranged from 29 to 18 years in age at the time of survey. Four were male and 6 female, and 2 were married and 8 unmarried. Five of them lived outside U-Court and five inside.

### **(2) Method of analysis**

Out of a bulk of documents of memories colored with joy, surprise and emotion felt amid interactions of people, materials and events, major episodes together with related events were selected, put into chronological order and categorized by subjects. Adopting an approach of participating observation, the interlocutors including the author interpreted their words as the issue of “way of being together”, and in our analysis attempted to discover meanings of multi-family living through the description of these episodes.

## **3. Contents of multi-family living culture and possibility of its inheritance**

The study and analysis show that, as to the contents of multi-family living culture and the possibility of its inheritance, some elements are commonly shared in the second generation and others are of individual nature. At the same time, these individual features are interrelated with each other and as a whole possess similar cultural features and common community design senses. Let me discuss these more specifically.

### **(1) Organically designed “one house” — A pregnant multi-family living body**

Multi-family housing is formed as an integration of individual dwelling units. While existing examples, often mere accumulations of homogeneous units, give an overall impression of non-organic and unfamiliar spaces, the forty-eight dwelling units of U-Court, according to children raised here, appear like “one house” when they come home from school. While diversity in lifestyle and individuality in unit

plan give each unit a unique look, at the same time, these forty-eight units as a whole are recognized as “one house”, an organic body. Their school friends share this feeling, they say. There is something about U-Court that makes the young people raised here say, “It’s amazing, though I have hardly recognized it until now. It’s amazing that such a cool building was built such a long time ago”, and this may well justify setting a goal of creating a pregnant, or profound, multi-family living body.

**(2) “I feel uneasy where there is no nature” — Formation of the awareness of environmental symbiosis**

Whether in condominiums or housing complexes, foliage, water and earth in close environments tend to be curtailed or even eliminated, the main reason being troubles in maintenance work. In U-Court, contrary to this, a wealthy environment of greenery, flowers, earth and water, which reflects outlooks on life and nature of residents, has been nurtured over time, filling up vacancies between man-made spaces. For children who grew up here, it was something taken for granted to place themselves in nature existing close to the built environment. A young resident, who was unable to conceal his sense of surprise to hear his friend say, “I do not need plants and flowers which cost too much to maintain”, feels importance in environmental symbiosis, namely living in the interaction between people and plants and animals. As expressed in his words “I feel uneasy where there is no nature”, a belief that “living in a symbiotic relation with nature is what living basically ought to be” is taking root.

**(3) “I have lived a high-density life full of memorable events ” — Preservation of good memories**

Growing up amid open relationships where absence of a parent is more than filled up by parents of other families, and living in a milieu where pleasant memories accumulate everyday as well as on special occasions, leads one to an evaluation, “With this wealth of happy memories, my life is the best one”. Happy memories alone are woven out of talks by the interviewees, for only favorable ones tend to be preserved during childhood. This is how the will is passed on to further improve the quality of multi-family living where delightful experiences are shared both within and outside dwelling units.

**(4) Pursuing “creating another kind of cooperative housing” from open and wild way of living**

Childhood spent in the common yard (courtyard) with a pond and rich greenery and dirt heightens a thirst for soft and muddy spaces beyond orderly and rigid ones that today’s society imposes. Redefinition of cooperative housing is included in one interviewee’s remark that a dwelling is “where children can play around and parents of other families all feel like one’s own”. Her comment “I am happy that we are on very close terms with neighbors. They often drop in whenever they see my kids home alone” suggests that a tendency is growing here to value open privacy beyond closed one.

**(5) Spatial collaborative acts nurture attitudes towards life**

Collaboration of people mediated by certain spaces, common or private, leads one to discover the value of living amid people, materials and events. This interaction between people, materials and events is spatial collaborative act. An interviewee who experienced a variety of plays in common spaces says, “I want to take a job that helps children to grow up healthily.” Here, spatial collaborative acts provide the next generation with directions in life.

#### **(6) Open spaces and diversities of spatial collaborative acts nurture ideas that loosely bridge conflicting values**

In one interviewee’s comments “I do not like to join a group very much”, but “I am fond of taking care of children of other families”, both her negative stance on multi-family living and a positive attitude towards relating herself with others can be observed. How has she formed this flexible way of thinking that allows her to make appropriate judgments on conflicting values depending on situations? This is thanks to a variety of interactions taking place between people, materials and events she used to experience in the courtyard, a common space, and this also is because both the plan of her dwelling unit and the lifestyle of her family, like those of all other families here, were oriented towards open, rather than closed, ones.

#### **(7) Play nurtures energy to live and common senses**

Through the experience of playing, children develop common senses including planning and negotiation abilities and imagination, and gradually learn the way they should keep psychological distance in relations with others. When adult residents and children share a world of play, adults can help self-confidence and energy heighten inside kids by praising them, saying “You did a good job. I am proud of you”, instead of facing them with an evaluative eye.

#### **(8) Ability of flexible communication that changes conflict into dialogue**

Adult residents of U-Court come in a pretty wide range of human characters thereby creating a world of collaboration where, unlike communities characterized by “all alike”, every different self respects ideas and acts of others and gets connected together, thus enabling one plus one to add up to more than two. With “an unusual uncle, a caring aunt and other characters around”, flexible communications among them, in which conflicts do not immediately lead to break up, win high regard of the younger generation. An environment where people can live with dogs, cats and other small animals which adult residents constructed encourages juniors to cultivate the idea of creating symbiotic relations, rather than cultural conflicts.

#### **(9) Longing for unique spaces and ambivalent responses to the space of encounter**

In U-Court, where individual dreams for unique way of living were materialized beyond stereotyped unit plans characterizing multi-family housing of today, young residents of the next generation also have a longing for such unique manner of living as well as for intimate spaces. At the same time, in one interviewee’s

comment on the courtyard “I hate to cross it when I do not feel fine” but “when I feel fine, I wait for someone passing by to call out, standing at the brink of the pond there ”, we recognize a complicated perception in which negative and positive feelings contest with each other. Here witnessed is an approach that loosely connects conflicting values.

#### **(10) Making human relations of mutual conveyance a mental resource**

Formation of relations of mutual conveyance through collaboration in various events, whether within one generation or between different ones, helps the self and others heighten each other, and a growing number of young people take pride in this process. This fact suggests that such mutual conveyance leads to inheritance and development of culture in the next generation.

### **4. Observations**

What has been made clear in this article so far provides some suggestions concerning what the culture of multi-family living should be like in the future, and also shows some very important aspects of community design senses.

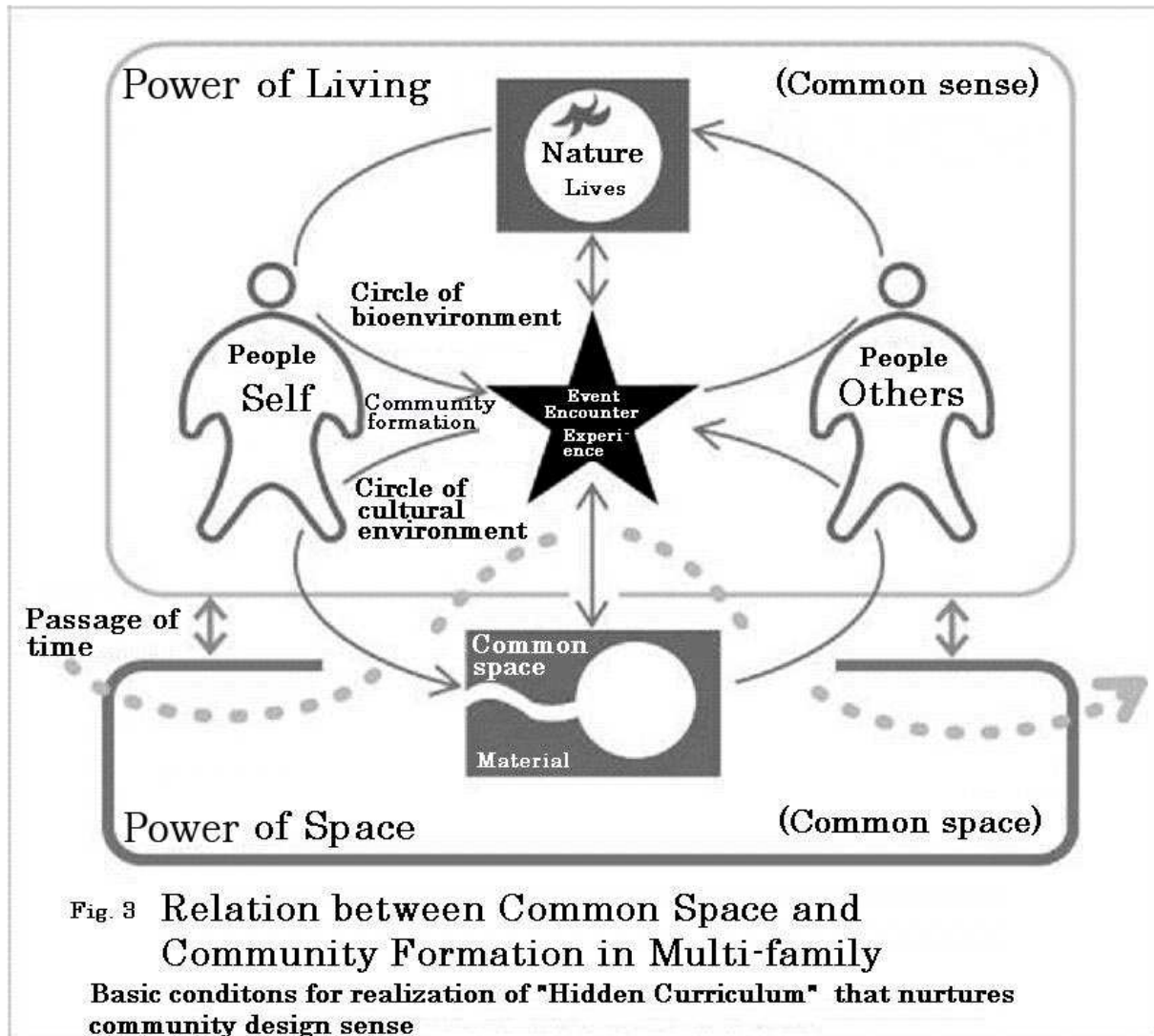
The childhood experience of being nurtured, including diversities of plays and participation in spatial collaborative acts in common spaces, generates within the next generation an orientation towards nurturing unique and autonomous communities using the below mentioned design senses they inherited, namely:

- i Orientation towards a loose connection between individual and whole
- ii Longing for unique lifestyles and spaces
- iii Orientation towards a symbiotic relation between nature and human beings
- iv Orientation towards flexible communication that changes conflict into dialogue and dilemma into energy

Finally, the way the U-Court residents could learn these design senses under the “hidden curriculum” can be described graphically as in Figure 3.

Common spaces in multi-family housing provide a basis for nurturing community design senses. A circle of cultural environment is formed there through encounters between people, materials and events. In addition, rearing of nature forms an important part of common spaces. When residents, adult or infant, place themselves in a circle of bioenvironment through getting in touch with plants and animals, an awareness of “human beings as part of nature” grows. In the course of enjoying a troublesome job of taking care of nature, they go further to study the viewpoint of Negative Capability which turns troubles into energy, negative into possible. Common spaces provide a basis for nurturing common senses. The way common senses are nurtured is influenced by the way common spaces are programmed and managed.

Community design senses are nurtured in the interpenetration between the power of space and the power of living. Methods of studying community design under the “hidden curriculum”, I may be allowed to say, lie latently in the process in which the power of space and power of living, both parts of the culture of multi-family living, nurture each other.



## Notes

- \* 1 Randolph T. Hester, JR :Community Design Primer, Ridge Times Press, 1990, p.2
- \* 2 *ibid*, p.9
- \* 3 Eileen Adams :Design in General Education, Design Council, 1978
- \* 4 1)Yasuhiro Endoh :Participatory Design that Materializes the Quality of the Exchange between Human Beings and Environment — Case Study :U-court, a Cooperative Housing, The Second Working Conference of Democratic Design in the Pacific Rim, Sept, 2000  
 2)Yasuhiro Endoh :Designing “Connected Together, Loosely “ — Where a Traditional Japan Has been Given a New Life, The Third Annual Pacific Rim Participatory Community Design Conference, Nov. 2001