Integrating urban design into mental health

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7.11.2019
UNSW Sydney
How mental health affects the city?

Globally, 1 in 4 people will experience mental health problems

Many mental health problems are more common in cities: Depression (39% more), Anxiety (21% more), Schizophrenia (double)

The global burden of disease attributable to mental and substance use disorders increased by more than a third between 1990 and 2010

By 2050, more than two thirds of the world’s population will live in cities

Source: The Centre for Urban Design and Mental Health
How mental health costs to the city?

1. **Direct costs:**
   health care, social care, and long term care costs, disability costs
How mental health costs to the city?

Indirect costs to the city: personal costs

people with mental health problems are more likely to experience distress, discrimination, marginalization, and problems with their employment, their finances, their relationships with family and friends, their physical health, and their ability to live a productive and satisfying life,

engaged and participating fully in the multiple facets of the thriving urban community.

Source: The Centre for Urban Design and Mental Health
Minister for loneliness appointed to continue Jo Cox's work

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A minister for loneliness, a project first started by the late MP Jo Cox, has been announced by Downing Street.

Tracey Crouch said she was proud to take on the "generational challenge" to tackle an issue affecting about nine million UK people, young and old.

The 42-year-old said she would work across political parties in the role.

The Commission on Loneliness was first set up by Ms Cox, who was killed before the EU referendum.
The OECD states that the direct and indirect costs of mental illness amount to over 4% of GDP.

Healthcare cost in Japan, 10.9% of GDP.

*OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*

Source: The Centre for Urban Design and Mental Health
How the city affects mental health?

1. Pre-existing risk factors
2. Social factors
3. Environmental factors

**Increasing stimuli:**
density, crowding, noise, smells, sights, disarray, pollution and intensity of other inputs.

Every part of the urban environment is deliberately designed to assert meanings and messages.

*Tokyo, Shinjuku district by night*

*Tokyo, commuting time*
3. Environmental factors

**Stripping away of protective factors:** less access to the factors that are protective for good mental health than those in rural areas. Diminished access to nature and exercise as part of their daily routines, reduced leisure time as increased time is spent at work and commuting around the city.
protection

stimulation and density
extreme intimacy

stimulation and density

protection

Source image: Alice Covatta
{Extreme intimate space, Tokyo 2019}

Source image: Alice Covatta

{Tokyo, infrastructure and parks}
Extreme intimate space, Tokyo 2019
individual space

Source image: Alice Covatta
A case study of Jimbocho: Tokyo’s book town
The word *bibliotherapy* appeared for the first time in the 1930s, coined by Karl and William Menninger. The two psychiatrists used the practice of bibliotherapy in their Menninger Clinic in the US where they ‘promoted the use of books for patients with mild neuroses or alcohol problems, or as support for relatives of patients and for parents of children.’

Reading started to be considered as a therapeutic tool since the beginning of the 20th century when the *American Library Association* started the first planned integration between books and medical professions by promoting libraries in hospitals and other therapeutic centers.

“I go back to the reading room, where I sink down in the sofa and into the world of The Arabian Nights. Slowly, like a movie fadeout, the real world evaporates. I’m alone, inside the world of the story. My favorite feeling in the world”

Haruki Murakami

Reading is a typical human behavior which has been linked to psychological and physical wellness.

(Wilson et al, 2013, Billington et al, 2010)
Fieldwork in Jimbocho
operative tools

1. observation of behaviors of both visitors and of architectural and urban elements

2. interviews with a selection of Jimbocho’s visitors

Intervista 1: Lo scrittore

How often do you come to Jimbocho?
1 time every 3 months.
How long do you stay in Jimbocho?
1/2 hours.
Why do you like this place?
Because in Jimbocho there are a lot of different libraries. Each library has its own category and character. There are different sections as Chinese, cinema, arts... It is trim, orderly!
Even if I’m not interested in something specifically, maybe I can find suddenly something interesting.
Which is the most different place from Jimbocho in Tokyo? Why?
Parks. People go to Jimbocho looking for things whereas in the park they are looking for the emptiness.
How do you see Jimbocho in 10 years?
Jimbocho will not change because people love it. They come here to see this particular landscape but at the some times it is difficult to keep this kind of business. Maybe people decrease and Jimbocho loses its charm.
The quality of Jimbocho is the smallness and quantity. I can find this feeling only in the izakaya!
Design for intimacy in reading: lodge

interior/exterior
outside/inside

Source image: Alice Covatta
Design for intimacy in reading: mobile items

**VERTICAL**
- thin-film
- protective

**HORIZONTAL**
- flexible
- movable
Design for intimacy in reading: minimal space

How big is the bubble?

Looks interesting... but maybe too many people!

at the peak 3/4 people

Source image: Alice Covatta
Design for intimacy in reading: unique essence and taste
Belongingness/Community:
{co+labo pavilion Tokyo 2015}
shifting to a mix of density and intimacy

vis-à-vis landscape: Shibuya station vs back landscape: Jimbocho station

Source image: Alice Covatta