

Appendix to the Academy January 2010 Call

Finnish-Japanese call in 2010 to support collaborative research within the field of future of living

Japan Society for the promotion of Science (JSPS) and the Academy of Finland (AF) invite researchers to submit proposals for collaborative research projects within the field of future of living. This research field is described below.

Background

Living is often studied from a very limited perspective, mainly from the point of view of the construction industry. The object of research has been dwellings rather than dwelling – physical and technological rather than social and environmental aspects of living. The perspective on living needs to be expanded to include the social and natural environment in which we live.

Research data concerning living is generated in many fields of science. Examples include economics, architecture, art history, design and construction research, family research, population and migration research, physical activity and health and land-use and urban planning research. Research into urban ecology has studied how different kinds of species survive in an urban environment. In a pleasant urban environment, humans are not the only species that can adapt and live.

Objectives and themes

Changes in living

As a consequence of a change in economic structures, fundamental changes in living and social structures have taken place in the latter half of the twentieth century in Finland as well as in Japan. The significance of the built environment as a human habitat has become prevalent and, at the same time, people's relationship to the natural environment has changed.

There are no longer any simple standard solutions for living, or if there are, they only meet the needs of a minority. Price increases, diversification of life styles, changes in family structures and phenomena such as telecommuting and the proliferation of leisure time and second homes have changed the way people live. Natural and environmental values have often had to take second place in both the design and construction of dwellings and communities.

Living is not just a question of a dwelling, but also concerns concepts of a good life, consumption and changing forms of social interaction. A dwelling is, on the one hand, an investment object, but at the same time it is a tool for building identity.

Consumption and our relationship to material possessions are evident in our culture in many ways. Interior decoration, recycling and design are all current trends, which are extensively covered in the press and about which there is a wealth of common knowledge.

Environmental awareness is changing from being the culture of a small group of pioneers to being part of prevailing general culture. At the same time, the pressures for ecologically sustainable design and construction in both community structure and dwellings have increased. Political pressure to influence matters has been increased by the high profile of the impact of climate change on people's everyday lives, and the realisation of problems in the availability and use of fossil fuels.

Health, sustainable development and the social aspects of living

Living is not restricted only to the home. People travel daily to and from work. They obtain services and consumer goods in their environment. The home, the workplace, and shops and services form a triangle around which life revolves. In recent times, we have learned to see this triangle from different points of view: logistics, accessibility, everyday exercise, and the geography of fear. People of different ages have different needs and interests. In the near future, we are facing an increase in the number of elderly people. The population is ageing, and as a consequence, the needs of ageing people must be taken into account in planning the living environment.

All these expressions emerged at the end of the last millennium, and they offer different perspectives on living and the living environment. In addition, climate change, the energy question and efforts towards sustainable development are strongly connected with the planning of housing and, more broadly, with urban and environmental planning.

Improved conditions for walking and cycling, community structures that favour short journeys to work, and vibrant green belts as part of a natural urban structure are examples of the opportunities offered by sustainable urban development.

Factors for social change, such as urbanisation and the expansion of growth centres (metropolitan areas), migration and immigration, ageing and changes in working life, have brought new kinds of challenges to living and social development. There are specialised needs and requirements regarding living as well as a new kind of focus on health and the environment.

All these developments require multidisciplinary research that takes into account emerging aspects of living – technological, environmental and social – from many different disciplinary perspectives.

Further information

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