Session 2: Age-Friendly Neighbourhood

Summary by Adithi Moogoor, Research Assistant, LKYCIC

Speakers in the second session spoke on the broad theme of developing inclusive neighbourhoods for older people by examining the elements of built environment and social determinants. Their presentations were framed by the question: how can planning and design strategies help create inclusive neighbourhoods to foster opportunities for active ageing?

Dr. Chanam Lee identified interdisciplinary action through policy, environmental and social supports to promote active ageing. The eight different domains identified by WHO in which action is required to create age-friendly cities were highlighted by Dr Chanam with concurrent case studies from USA and included examples like restoring public spaces, providing city benches and bus shelters, and sociable streets. A balanced inclusion of 'hardware' and 'software' elements such as built environment and social structure is essential to foster intergenerational communities. The promotion of intergenerational initiatives include identifying places of interaction, providing housing for multigenerational families, younger adults assisting older residents to use public transport, shared spaces for gardening and cooking, education and employment opportunities for all ages, and social integration across different age groups.

Dr. Elena Glinskaya presented on the concept of 'social transformation', and identified this concept, which involves a transformation to a more integrated and inclusive city, as one of three strategies to make Shanghai a global city. These include providing education, housing, social and medical services to all, including marginalised or vulnerable groups such as domestic migrants and older people. The achievements of Shanghai in promoting ageing in place and active ageing have been assisted by constituent hardware and software elements of city. The hardware elements include the integration of transportation and land use, age-friendly urban design principles and the provision of housing for older adults. The software elements comprise medical care, aged care facilities, policies and programmes for social participation, employment, communication and information. The role of government and private sectors in medical care and long term care need to be defined to provide an environment where the public can equally benefit.

Dr. Gillian Lin emphasized that an inclusive neighbourhood should promote ideals of diversity and equity. The physical environment in an inclusive neighbourhood is one of the wider determinants of active ageing. Thus, the urban structure with tangible and intangible aspects contribute as either an enabler or disabler for older adults to enjoy an active lifestyle. Planning and designing of the finer grains of urban fabric require the need to introduce legible, permeable, well connected and accessible neighbourhood layouts.

Ms. Julienne Chen and Ms. Hoa Nguyen focused on the segmentation of design principles that caters to the varied physical, social and mental needs of older cohorts by examining their daily living experiences. Their on-going research project explores active design elements that support the unique needs, preferences and physiological requirements of the older population. They found that more than 80% of older adults do not require assistance while walking; however health remains a limiting factor for more than 70% of older adults to walk more. Physical infrastructure such as greenery and sheltered walkways also seem to encourage older adults to walk more. Through interviews with residents, they also found that providing choice of routes enables individuals to find a suitable pathway to their destinations. Further, analysis on demographics and level of activity was used to identify and class people into different segments such as people with active or inactive lifestyles. Developing design goals for each segment plays an important role in promoting active ageing.

Dr. Anna Lane highlighted that the ultimate goal of an age-friendly city is to enhance or maintain quality of life for older residents. She reported on findings from a study of neighbourhood-based on social capital and life satisfaction among older Singaporeans. She found that trust is a defining element of neighbourhood social capital and an essential element of life satisfaction. Therefore, she concluded that community and urban design could create more opportunity and places for spontaneous interactions among residents should be promoted locally as a mechanism to build trust and thus enable older residents to live meaningful and satisfied lives.