

LEE LI MING  
PROGRAMME IN AGEING  
URBANISM

# Engagement with Older People

## Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods<sup>1</sup>

Hoa Nguyen

Age friendly civic participation and employment is a key domain in the World Health Organisation (WHO) framework for age friendly cities. Civic participation is also a fundamental principle of Dementia-Friendly communities. Civic participation concerns the involvement of public citizens in collective decision-making processes. Forms of public engagement can range from people engaging with the public can range from the passive (e.g. sharing of information) to the more active (e.g. public consultation and community ideation). Older people are important community resources and have the potential to make significant contributions to society, through citizenship roles. They are thought to contribute wisdom,

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<sup>1</sup> This is an evolving database. We will be adding more examples and cases over time.

acquired through a lifetime of experiences, to community development decision-making processes.

### *Benefits of civic participation*

Civic participation can promote mental wellbeing. Research shows that older people who contribute to and participate actively in the community tend to feel more invested and valued in the community. This in turn fosters in people a sense of belonging and meaning in life. Also, mechanisms used to engage older people in community decisions involve a social component, as it necessitates interaction with other people, and thus it can facilitate the formation of new social ties and strengthen neighbourhood social capital.

### *Barriers to engagement*

Ageism represents a key barrier to including older people in civic decision making. Discrimination on the basis of age can manifest in many ways, such as exclusion of older adults from community planning processes, or negative attitudes and stereotypes about older people and the value of their contributions.

Age-related declines and impairments in physical and mental functioning also pose challenges to urban planners seeking to engage with older people. Problems with mobility may make it difficult for older adults to travel to places where decision-

making takes place. Cognitive and sensory impairments may make it harder for older people than younger people, to process voluminous and complex information and to participate fully in discussions. Barriers such as these can lead to superficial rather than meaningful engagement with older persons.

### *Approaches to engagement*

AgeUK, an organisation that works on improving the lives of older people in the UK, summarised civic engagement as involving a hierarchy of four stages:

- informing - provide information to the community;
- consulting - takes engagement one step further and request for feedback from the public;
- partnership - involve the public to participate in the decision-making process; and
- complete ownership - allow the community to take charge and spearhead the agenda.

Due to the above mentioned challenges, engagement with older adults can sometimes be limited to informing and consulting. To move to a deeper stage of engagement, the National Development Team for Inclusion in Bath, United Kingdom has identified eight guidelines for engaging with older members of the community. The guidelines include the involvement of older people throughout

the entire planning process, from beginning to end, having transparent decision-making processes, as well as accessible resources and platforms for engagement. Importantly, the initial stages of ideation and program development should involve older adults and this engagement should be sustained throughout to ensure the full participation of older people and the full consideration of their inputs. This is thought to elicit feelings of empowerment and investment in the development that eventuates. In addition, resources should be channelled to community allies that are willing to partner and work with older adults, so as to mobilise all members of the neighbourhood to work towards a more age-friendly environment (See Box 1).

**Box 1: National Development Team for Inclusion, United Kingdom**

A product of the engagement work that the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) does is the Community Led Support program (CLS) to better develop health and social care programme for the older population within communities. The programme connects communities and older adults directly with health and social care practitioners to utilise the existing strengths and support of the community they live in.

Through the CLS programme, communities and practitioners coproduce healthcare programs that are more attentive of the everyday needs of older adults. The programme capitalises on the assets of the community and produces effective healthcare practices and service provision through the input and ideas of the community. The CLS programme is implemented across England, Wales and Scotland.

Source: National Development Team for Inclusion Official Website

In the dementia friendly community of Kiama, Australia, a variety of engagement methods are being utilised to include people with dementia in decisions about the town (see Box 2).

**Box 2: Kiama, Australia**

The town of Kiama in Australia is a pioneer in novel engagement strategies with older adults. Initiated by the University of Wollongong and the Kiama township, the various programs implemented have brought together local stakeholders, including local businesses, community groups, local residents, both younger and older, to rethink the way Kiama includes people with dementia in society.

There are various platforms for people with dementia to share about their experiences, such as local newspapers and websites, making it easier to raise the public's awareness of the challenges that people with dementia face in daily life. Most recently, the town is looking into implementing the Kiama Dementia Action Plan, which includes local educational events for the public at large, a directory of community services for people with dementia. Kiama has put in place toolkits to help authorities and businesses to better engage and interact with people with dementia. For example, the Dementia-friendly Cafe Toolkit can be used to help create environments that are friendlier for people with dementia

Source: Dementia Friendly Kiama Pilot Project Evaluation 2016

positive self-perceptions of aging. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(2), 261; Martinson, M., & Minkler, M. (2006). Civic engagement and older adults: A critical perspective. *The Gerontologist*, 46(3), 318-324; World Health Organization. (2007). *Global age-friendly cities: a guide*. Geneva: World Health Organisation.

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