

LEE LI MING  
PROGRAMME IN  
AGEING URBANISM

# Intergenerational Space for Healthy Ageing in Asia

Hong Kong & Singapore <sup>1</sup>

Md Rashed Bhuyan

Like other parts of the world, the number and proportion of older adults are rising rapidly in Asia. Age-discrimination and social isolation of both older adults and children are growing concerns in Asian cities, where nuclear family units are replacing traditional three-generation households (Thang, 2015). Scholars argue that intergenerational approach in policies, programmes, planning and design can be one of the ways to move towards an age-friendly city (Wong et al. 2018).

Although policies and programmes to foster kinship and intergenerational relationship are emerging in some Asian cities, intergenerational space (IGS) – a contact zone where multiple generations can potentially come together in a number of ways - has received little scholarly attention. This article explores intergenerational space initiatives in two Asian cities, Hong Kong and Singapore<sup>2</sup>.

---

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

<sup>2</sup> See IGS initiatives in the UK and US at <https://lkycic.sutd.edu.sg/research/resources/>

Hong Kong and Singapore are different in their geographic and socio-political context. However, they are both characterised with high-density and high-rise housing development and have a high and growing percentage of people aged 65 and above -- 17.3% in Hong Kong in mid-2013<sup>3</sup> and 13.7% in Singapore in mid-2018<sup>4</sup>.

## IGS in Hong Kong

For nearly a decade, the government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region (HK SAR) has been devising policies and programmes to support intergenerational relationship as part of its strategy to address ageing-related challenges. These policies are evolving in a context where the traditions of filial piety are challenged by social and environmental changes. They are primarily focused on volunteerism and learning through co-education (Chong, 2010; Chui, 2012).

### *Opportunities for Older Adults*

In 1998, the Social Welfare Department of HK SAR launched the Opportunities for the Elderly Project (OEP) to promote self-worth among seniors. The programme sponsors social service agencies, district organisations, schools, community groups and residents' associations to organise activities that promote volunteerism and lifelong learning among different age groups. Since 2012, OEP activities are conducted with reference to a biennial theme. The theme for 2018-20 is

*'Neighbourhood-support warms the heart; Generational ties please the soul'.*

#### **Box 1: One-two-three Generations of Love**

The Ruifeng Volunteer Group and the Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association (Children's Club), one of the winners of Opportunities for the Elderly Programme, organised an event in 2018 to enable older adults to regain the memories of the former tea house. Older adults and young people made and enjoyed traditional tea and snacks (carrot cake, siew mai, sausage roll, etc.) together. The organisers reported that while older adults enjoyed the company of young people and food, children learned the methods of making snacks, importance of division of labour and cooperation with older adults.



Source: Yong, R. D. (2018).  
<http://rfdy.hk/responsibility/100233.html>.  
 Accessed 11 May 2019.

<sup>3</sup> See, <https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp150.jsp?tableID=002&ID=0&productType=8>. Accessed 11 May 2019.

<sup>4</sup> See, <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/find-data/search-by-theme/population/elderly-youth-and-gender-profile/latest-data>. Accessed 11 May 2019.

## *Neighbourhood Active Ageing Project*

The Neighbourhood Active Ageing Project (NAAP) was launched in 2008 by the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Elderly Commission. NAAP intends to promote the concept of active ageing and enhance neighbourhood support for a harmonious society<sup>5</sup>. The project encourages people of different age groups to serve as volunteers to care for older people. The two-year project reached out to private residential estates, public housing estates, old tenement buildings and rural areas, covering about 25,000 older people.

## *Elder Academy Scheme*

Government of HK SAR and the Elderly Commission jointly launched the Elder Academy Scheme (EAS) in 2007. As part of the EAS, local primary and secondary schools and welfare organisations serve as sponsoring bodies to run elder academies for promoting intergenerational harmony and cross-sectoral collaboration. Older adults have the opportunity to work and interact with young students in more than 100 elder academies set up by 2010 (Chui, 2012). In 2019, the government has allocated over HK\$20 million to set up 11 new elder academies and run an Enriched Information and Communications Technology Training Programme and an ICT Outreach Programme for the Elderly.

<sup>5</sup> See, <https://www.lwb.gov.hk/eng/press/26012008.htm>. Accessed 11 May 2019.

<sup>6</sup> See, <https://www.ura.gov.sg/Corporate/Resources/Ideas-and-Trends/Designing-an-intergenerational-city>. Accessed 11 May 2019.

## **IGS in Singapore**

In the process of its modernisation in the past four decades, Singapore has been developing housing policies, plans and schemes that promote familial relationship between parents and children (Fernandez, 2011). In residential spaces, public spaces within the public housing estates, such as void decks, children's playgrounds, fitness facilities etc., act as spontaneous intergenerational contact zones. These facilities are often located in close proximity to each other to enable intergenerational interactions.<sup>6</sup>

## *Proximity Housing Grant*

One of the incentive schemes at housing level is the Proximity Housing Grant introduced in 2015. The grant, revised in 2018, allows families and singles buying a resale Housing and Development Board (HDB) flat, to live with or close to (within 4 km) their parents (S\$30,000) or married child (S\$15,000).<sup>7</sup>

## *Integration of childcare and eldercare facilities*

A growing area of development is to integrate childcare and eldercare programmes. The Kampung Admiralty<sup>8</sup> at Woodlands is the first of those integrated projects by the Ministry of Health and the Early Childhood Development Agency that co-locates

<sup>7</sup> See, <https://www.hdb.gov.sg/cs/infoweb/residential/buying-a-flat/resale/living-with-near-parents-or-married-child>. Accessed 11 May 2019.

<sup>8</sup> See Kampung Admiralty as a model for senior public housing at <https://lkytic.sutd.edu.sg/research/resources/>

childcare and eldercare facilities in public housing development.

### Box 2: Kampung Admiralty

Kampung Admiralty, completed in 2017, is a public residential project comprising of two 11-storey blocks with 104 units of Studio Apartments. The internationally acclaimed project integrates childcare, senior centres and community plazas within a public residential complex. Intergenerational amenities are placed in the mid-levels, i.e. in-between commercial and leisure amenities on lower floors and residential facilities on upper floors. Let's Play @ Kampung Admiralty is a series of events for residents of all ages to engage in exciting fun and play activities.



Source:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/children-bring-smiles-to-elderly-faces>. Accessed 11 May 2019.

Against changing perceptions of mutual respect between older adults and younger generation in the communities, the government of Singapore plans to include ageing awareness in national school curriculum to instil the importance of intergenerational care and respect. Besides awareness programmes, some nursing homes, such as St Joseph's Home, have been implementing intergenerational programmes by combining eldercare and childcare programmes.

### Box 3: St Joseph's Home

St Joseph's Home at Jurong West is the first nursing home in Singapore that implemented an inter-generational playground, infant and childcare centre in 2017. The nursing home runs various intergenerational programmes by partnering with schools, corporates, religious organisations and grassroots to give children opportunity to interact daily with senior residents and to spark ideas on how different generations could better support one another. The intergenerational programmes use creative arts, music, digital media, hands-on workshops, meals and games to start dialogue among participants.



Source: <https://www.stjh.org.sg/services/>. Accessed 11 May 2019.

## Intergenerational Learning Programme by C3A

The Council for Third Age (C3A) was set up in May 2007 to promote active ageing in Singapore through public education, outreach, and partnerships. In partnership with legal, health, finance, education, and community service organisations, C3A works in three focus areas: Lifelong Learning, Empowering Senior Volunteerism, and Positive Ageing. C3A has been organising the Intergenerational Learning Programme from 2013 to improve public perceptions and attitudes between generations, enhance social cohesion, and promote a vibrant lifelong learning landscape<sup>9</sup>.

## Summary

The various intergenerational space programmes in Hong Kong and Singapore suggest that existing initiatives focus mostly on promoting kinship relationship, volunteerism, and intergenerational awareness. In contrast to Hong Kong, intergenerational approaches in Singapore are wide ranging and there is a growing attempt to integrate policy, programmes, spatial planning, and design.

However, there appears to be a general lack of attention on the qualities of neighbourhood environments that support both programmed and unprogrammed intergenerational relationship in Asian cities. While co-location of facilities is considered a widely accepted neighbourhood design principle for IGS (Thang, 2015), and the Kampung

Admiralty project is a wonderful application of this principle, how such principle could be applied in existing high-density neighbourhoods remains a challenge.

In the future, we need to look at how planning and design of neighbourhood spaces can foster both programmed and unprogrammed intergenerational bonding and facilitate healthy ageing-in-place. Research in intergenerational and gerontology fields show that enhanced intergenerational relationships are associated with increased quality of life, reduced social isolation, and a renewed sense of worth among older adults (Wong et al. 2018). In this regard, post-implementation evaluation and cost-benefit analysis of existing programmes are important for providing more evidence for preparing plans and designs for intergenerational spaces.

Sources:

Chong AM-I. (2010). Promoting volunteerism in later life in Hong Kong. *China Journal of Social Work*, 3: 313-322.

Chui E. (2012). Elderly Learning in Chinese Communities: China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. In: Boulton-Lewis G and Tam M (eds) *Active Ageing, Active Learning: Issues and Challenges*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 141-161.

Fernandez, W. (2011). *Our Homes: 50 Years of Housing a Nation*. Singapore: Straits Times Press.

Government of HK SAR. (2019). Opportunities for the Elderly Project. Hong Kong: Social Welfare Department. Retrieved from [https://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site\\_pubsvc/page\\_elderly/sub\\_csselderly/id\\_opportunit/](https://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site_pubsvc/page_elderly/sub_csselderly/id_opportunit/).

<sup>9</sup> See, [https://www.family-central.sg/learning\\_programme.html](https://www.family-central.sg/learning_programme.html). Accessed 11 May 2019.

Thang, L. L. (2015). Creating intergenerational contact zone: encounters in public spaces within Singapore's public housing neighbourhoods, in Vanderbeck, R. M. and N. Worth, Eds. (2015). *Intergenerational Space*. London, Routledge.

Wong, E. L. Y., Lau J. Y. C., and Yeoh E. K. (2018). Thinking intergenerationally: Intergenerational solidarity, health and active aging in Hong Kong. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 16(4): 478-492.