

# Age-Friendly Cities: Lessons from Singapore, Seoul and New Taipei City



Source: People's Association (left) and the Seoul Institute (right)

WRITTEN BY  
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Some 17 years ago, when Dr. Eric Chu was then-Mayor of Taoyuan, he was creating jobs for young Taiwanese. Today, as Mayor of New Taipei City, Dr. Eric Chu is encouraging companies to reemploy the elderly instead.

The pace of ageing and the need to meaningfully engage seniors are just some challenges of an ageing society shared by the mayor during a recent Centre for Liveable Cities (CLC) lecture. Organised as part of the CLC- Seoul Institute (SI) joint-research project on age-friendly cities, the lecture invited distinguished panellists – Dr. Eric Chu, Mayor of New Taipei City; Dr. Miree Byun, Director, Seoul Institute; Dr. Belinda Yuen, Director, Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities and Dr. Emi Kiyota, the President of Ibasho – to share insights on planning for age-friendly cities. In addition, CLC and SI also shared briefly on the ageing policies in Singapore and Seoul as well as case studies of housing and community-based care and support for seniors in the two cities.

The panel saw a lively discussion on planning for age-friendly cities and the many innovative initiatives in the high-dense cities of Singapore, Seoul, Tokyo and New Taipei City. Panellists underscored the importance of empowering seniors as they too can play a part in making their city friendly for themselves and their peers.

Just as important is helping the public understand how ageing is not a disease but a biological process.



A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Centre for Liveable Cities and the Seoul Institute was signed at the event to formalise a joint-research project on age-friendly cities.  
Source: Centre for Liveable Cities

For example, Mayor Chu has ensured that there are ways for seniors in New Taipei City to continue contributing to society. New Taipei City started a time banking scheme which lets seniors and citizens volunteer their services to others in the neighbourhood, in exchange for time-credits that can be drawn in the future for their own needs and services. Volunteers are trained by professionals for 40 hours. The time-banking scheme has seen 2,500 volunteers and over 272,304 hours deposited. Other initiatives include collaborations between the public and private sectors to provide free fitness classes, reading glasses and meals — all of which help seniors continue to age-in-place, build relationships and be socially supported.

But infrastructure and services alone are not enough. Just as important is helping the public understand how ageing is not a disease but a biological process, said Dr. Kiyota who heads an organisation advocating for communities that value their elders. The environmental gerontologist added that ageing becomes a problem when the physical and social environment cannot accommodate the developmental needs of elders in our society. She highlighted some key challenges in cities for seniors such as urban hazards, social isolation or the lack of adequate housing. While noting that there are no easy solutions, meaningful support is important, especially when a huge proportion of seniors are taking care of their older parents too. "Sometimes we make old people feel invisible and talk about it like it is not our problem, but aging is all our problem and we could all get there."





The dialogue moderated by Dr Emi Kiyota (left) also featured Dr Eric Chu, Dr Belinda Yuen and Dr Miree Byun. Source: Centre for Liveable Cities



A good crowd showed up for the lecture held in conjunction with this year's World Cities Summit. Source: Centre for Liveable Cities

The need for cities to better cater to seniors in their planning was also emphasised by Dr Yuen when she explained how the built environment affects the elderly's quality of life in terms of physical connectivity, cognitive and social health.

Dr. Byun raised a similar issue when she shared that Seoul's most important policies for seniors target their loneliness, sickness and employment. However, a survey also found that younger people are more apathetic about taking care of the aged.

During the discussion, the impact of technology in creating an age-friendly city was a hot topic amongst the panelists. Mayor Chu called for private companies to step up, experiment and use technology to solve existing issues especially in the healthcare sector. However, Dr Kiyota noted that



Panelists and organisers at the end of the lecture. Source: Centre for Liveable Cities

while technology is helpful, the key should be about utilizing technology to create and sustain meaningful relationships that can support seniors.

Even as cities redesigned themselves to become more age-friendly, it may cause unintended consequences such as segregation and stigma, reminded Dr. Kiyota. The key is to build a community which realises that ageing concerns everyone.

# About the Speakers



## PANELLIST

### Dr Eric Chu

Mayor of New Taipei City

Dr. Eric Liluan Chu serves as the first and the incumbent Mayor of New Taipei City since the city was upgraded and reorganized from its former entity Taipei County in 2010. Mayor Chu and his administration have put forward transformative innovative policies to build a city to cope with urban challenges of the modern age, including energy, demography, economic development and urban revitalization, among others. These reform programs have yielded successful results, and were recognized nationally and internationally.



## PANELLIST

### Dr Miree Byun

Senior Research Fellow,  
Department of Urban Social Policy Research,  
The Seoul Institute

Dr Miree Byun is a demographer, whose research areas lies in social changes and urban monitoring for enhancing the quality of citizens' lives. Her work focuses on an international comparative study on government policy for urban competitiveness. Her publications include Framework of the Inclusive City Indicators and the Inclusiveness of Seoul (2017), The Quality of Life in Megacity and Seoul-Specific Happiness Indicator (2015), and Building the Neighborhood and Social Integration in Seoul (2011).



## PANELLIST

### Dr Belinda Yuen

Director, Research Director,  
Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities,  
Singapore University of Technology and Design

Dr Belinda Yuen is the Research Director and Professorial Fellow at the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities. She is a qualified urban planner and has published extensively on spatial planning, urban policy analysis, and most recently, on planning livable, sustainable cities. She has been elected as the President of Singapore Institute of Planners and the Vice-President of the Commonwealth Association of Planners. She has also served on numerous local and international urban planning committees including the International Advisory Board of United Nations State of World's Cities Report.

# About the Speakers



## **MODERATOR**

### **Dr Emi Kiyota**

President, Ibasho

As an environmental gerontologist, Dr Emi Kiyota focuses on improving both the built environment and the organizational culture of long term care for elders. Inspired by living in a nursing home during her graduate studies, Kiyota has become an expert on age-friendly housing, hospitals, and clinical care centers and frequently speaks on these issues at international gatherings. In 2010, she founded Ibasho, a non-profit organization dedicated to creating socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable communities that value their elders.



# About the Writer



## Tan Yu Ying Kristal

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Kristal is a research intern in the social cluster of the Centre for Liveable Cities (CLC). She is currently pursuing a Master of Urban Planning at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) School of Architecture. Prior to graduate studies, she majored in Bachelor of Science in Real Estate also in NUS.

## About the CLC

The Centre for Liveable Cities was set up in 2008 by the Ministry of National Development and the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, based on a strategic blueprint developed by Singapore's Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development. Guided by its mission to distil, create and share knowledge on liveable and sustainable cities, the Centre's work spans four main areas - Research, Capability Development, Knowledge Platforms and Advisory. The CLC Lecture Series is a platform for urban experts to share their knowledge with other practitioners. For more information, please visit us at <http://www.clc.gov.sg>