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Developing Age-Friendly Cities: The Challenges of Local Governance in the 21ST Century

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บทคัดย่อ

แนวคิดของเมืองที่เป็นมิตรต่อผู้สูงอายุกำลังได้รับแรงผลักดันในศตวรรษที่ 21 เนื่องจากมีการคาดการณ์ว่าประชากรผู้สูงอายุทั่วโลกจะเพิ่มขนาดเป็นสองเท่าภายในปี ค.ศ. 2050 (United Nations Development Programme, 2023) อย่างไรก็ตาม การพัฒนาเมืองเหล่านี้ต้องเผชิญกับอุปสรรคหลายประการในการปกครองท้องถิ่น ไม่ว่าจะเป็นข้อจำกัดของเงินทุน การไม่ยอมรับการเปลี่ยนแปลงของภาคส่วนต่าง ๆ ความไม่เพียงพอของข้อมูลและงานวิจัยที่เกี่ยวข้องกับความต้องการของผู้สูงอายุ ข้อจำกัดด้านการมีส่วนร่วมของผู้สูงอายุ และการขาดความร่วมมือระหว่างรุ่น เพื่อการพัฒนาเมืองที่มองเห็นความต้องการของผู้สูงอายุ รัฐบาลท้องถิ่นต้องเอาชนะความท้าทายเหล่านี้โดยการจัดลำดับความสำคัญของปัญหาและให้ความสำคัญกับการพัฒนารายได้ท้องถิ่น การมีส่วนร่วมของผู้สูงอายุ การส่งเสริมการวิจัยและพัฒนาองค์ความรู้ด้านผู้สูงอายุ และส่งเสริมความร่วมมือระหว่างรุ่น บทความวิชาการนี้นำเสนอข้อมูลภายใต้ฐานของการศึกษาวิจัย เพื่อสำรวจความท้าทายในการพัฒนาเมืองที่เป็นมิตรต่อผู้สูงอายุในศตวรรษที่ 21 ตลอดจนนำเสนอความสำคัญของการจัดการปัญหาเหล่านี้ผ่านการบริหารจัดการท้องถิ่นเพื่อเพิ่มประสิทธิภาพในการพัฒนาเมืองหรือท้องถิ่นให้สร้างความเป็นอยู่ที่ดีให้แก่ประชากรผู้สูงอายุ

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Abstract

The concept of age-friendly cities is gaining momentum in the 21st century as it is predicted that the global population of individuals and older residents will increase doubling in size by 2050 (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). However, the development of these cities is faced with various obstacles in local governance, including limited funding, resistance to change, inadequate data and research, limited participation and engagement from older adults, and lack of inter-generational cooperation. In order to create inclusive and supportive communities for older adults, local governments must overcome these challenges by prioritizing funding, engaging older adults, conducting research, and fostering inter-generational cooperation. This article highlights the challenges of developing age-friendly cities in the 21st century and the importance of addressing them for the well-being of older residents.

Keywords: Older resident, Age-friendly cities, Local governance

Introduction

The world is fundamentally undergoing significant changes. The key trends, that are already underway in most countries and shaping the 21st century, are notable growth of older population and urbanization. As cities continue to expand, the proportion of their senior population is also increasing. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2023), it is predicted that the number of individuals aged 65 years or above projected to increase doubling in size from 761 million in 2021 to 1.6 billion in 2050. The rate of growth is even higher for those aged 80 years or above. While in 2020, over 55% of the world's population lived in urban areas, and this number is expected to increase to 68% by 2050 (United Nations, 2020). This demographic shift poses significant challenges for local governments, as they must adapt their policies and infrastructure to meet the needs of older residents (Kokpol, 2016).

By the year 2050, there will be a change in the geography of the countries with the largest senior population, from Europe towards Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (UNDP, 2023). According to Steels (2015), the proportion of older adults living in cities in developed countries is around 80%, which matches that of younger age groups, while the number of older people living in urban areas in developing countries will increase dramatically from 56 million in 1998 to over 908 million by 2050. This makes up 25 percent of the total urban population in less developed countries. The combination of population aging and urbanization presents both opportunities and challenges for societies.

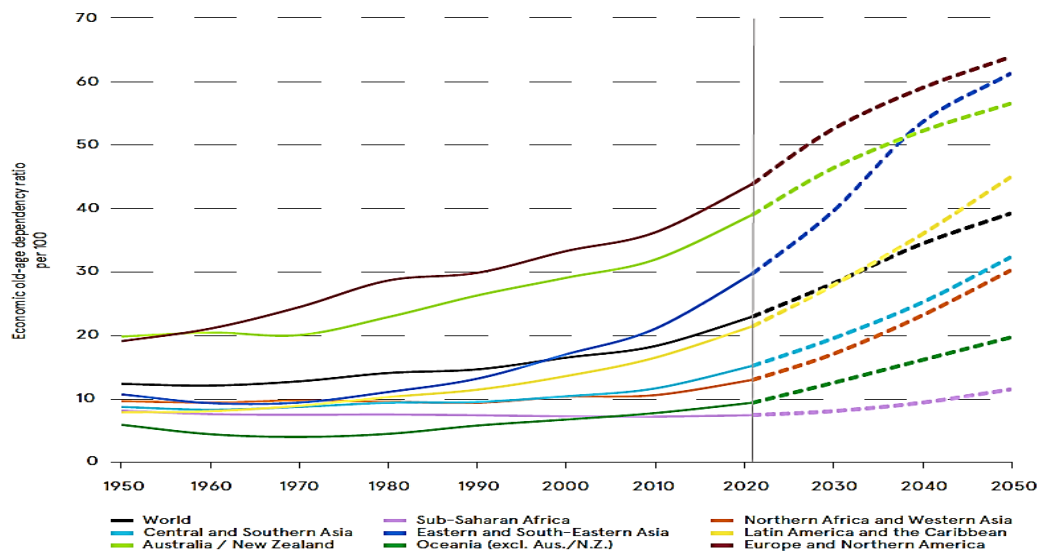


Figure 1 Percentage of people aged 65 years or over, world and regions, estimates for 1950–2021 and projections for 2022–2050

Source: United Nations (2022)

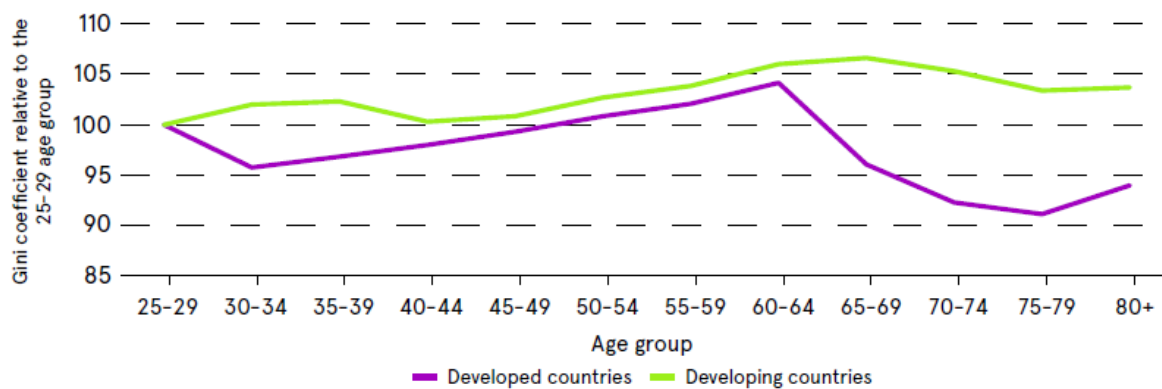


Figure 2 Average older population as a percentage of total population in OECD metropolitan areas, for urban core and hinterland

Source: United Nations (2022); Calculations based on data from the LIS Database (multiple countries; surveys conducted between 2010 and 2020).

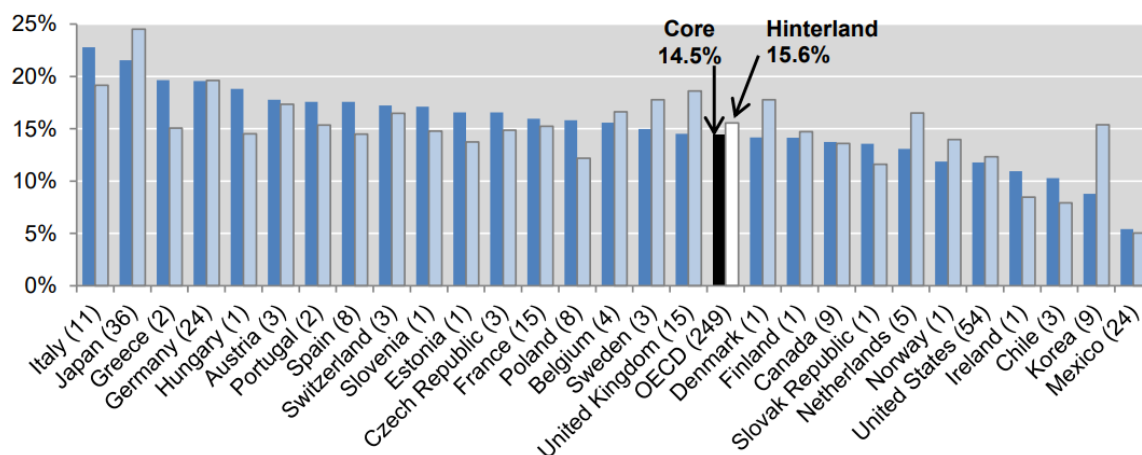


Figure 3 Average older population as a percentage of total population in OECD metropolitan areas, for urban core and hinterland (2011)

Source: OECD calculations based on OECD “Metropolitan areas”,
OECD Regional Statistics (2015)

Urbanization can have both positive and negative impacts on older residents. On one hand, urban city normally offer greater healthcare accessibility, social services, and cultural activities, which can improve quality of life for older adults (Sumalee and Tanchai 2019). Additionally, urban areas often have more diverse populations, which can help combat feelings of isolation and loneliness.

On the other hand, the process of urbanization can cause challenges for older adults. Living in urban areas can require high cost of living, which can be a large burden for those low incomes. Additionally, the density and fast-paced nature of urban areas can be overwhelming and difficult for older adults to navigate, especially those with mobility issues. To address these challenges, cities can take steps to make their urban areas more age-friendly.

It is undeniable that life expectancy of world population is increasing and it is a sign of improved public health and living standards. However, the health among older individuals are different significantly. This means that older people need supportive living environments that can maintain their functional ability to enable and continue their participation in society and support their transitions in physical, mental and social changing conditions. Creating age-friendly cities is essential to promote the well-being of older residents and sustain the decent environment for communities.

Age-friendly city are a concept of an inclusive city that adapts its structures and services to be accessible to older people with different needs and capabilities. This concept has drawn attention nowadays, as local governments aim to create livable inclusive city for all population in sustainable fashion. This article explores the challenges that local governments face in

developing age-friendly cities in the 21st century and the importance of addressing them for the well-being of older residents.

Content

Defining Age-Friendly Cities

According to the World Health Organization (2007), age-friendly cities are defined as places that encourage senior residents to maintain their functional ability in daily life, facilitate access to services, promote social participation, and provide a safe and secure environment in order to enhance older residents' quality of life. The "Age-Friendly Cities," in the WHO term, reflects a view of ageing from an ecological perspective (Steels, 2015). This perspective highlights the connection between an individual and their physical and social surroundings.

The definition of "Age-Friendly Cities" was designed based on the bottom-up participatory approach. In 2007, the World Health Organization's (WHO) contributed the WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities and Communities programs by involving older individuals to analyze and express their own situation, in order to inform government policies to empower older individuals to contribute to society and take part in decision-making processes. Believing that older individuals are the most knowledgeable about their own lives, the World Health Organization (2007) gathered experience of older individuals from 35 cities from all continents by asking questions such as what age-friendly features exist in the city they live in, what challenges they face, and what is lacking in the city that could improve their health, participation, and security. With this research, the World Health Organization presented eight domains that contribute to age-friendliness in the city, which are:

1. outdoor spaces and buildings
2. transportation
3. housing
4. social participation
5. respect and social inclusion
6. civic participation and employment
7. communication and information
8. community support and health services.

The first three domains focused on the physical structures of a city such as outdoor areas, buildings, transportation, and housing. They are significantly impact personal mobility, safety, security, health behaviors, and social involvement. The availability of affordable and accessible housing options that meet the needs of older adults may include the supportive housing services to help older adults age in place, which means living in the community by

choice, with some level of independence, rather than in residential aged care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, 2023). In addition, age-friendly cities prioritize the development of accessible transportation options that enable older adults to travel safely and independently. Outdoor spaces are also an important component of an age-friendly city, as they provide opportunities for physical activity, socialization, and community engagement. These spaces should be designed with older adults in mind, with features such as benches, accessible paths, and shade structures to make them more comfortable and inviting.

While the fourth to the sixth topics focuses on the social and cultural elements that affect mental well-being and participation. Respect and social inclusion refer to the behavior and attitudes of the community towards older individuals. Social participation involves with cultural, educational, and spiritual activities. Civic participation and employment associates with opportunities for unpaid and paid work and citizenship, which are related to socio-economic situation of the older residents. An age-friendly city can promote social participation and intergenerational interaction. This helps the society to recognize the importance of social connections for overall health and well-being. This may involve the creation of community centers, senior centers, and other spaces where older residents can come together to socialize, learn new skills, and participate in community activities.

The final two themes, communication and information, and community support and health services, involve with social environments. These 8 domains concentrate on a positive influence on active aging.

For all the above, an age-friendly city is a place where people of all ages can enjoy a high quality of life, regardless of their age or ability. Such a city is designed to be safe, accessible, and inclusive, with infrastructure and services that support the needs of older adults. An age-friendly values the contributions of older adults and recognizes the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment that enables them to age with dignity, independence, and respect. By prioritizing the needs of older adults, age-friendly cities can create a better quality of life for people of all ages and abilities.

Roles of Local Government Organizations in Thailand and Older Population

In Thailand, the number of elderly people is comparable to many developed countries, which is considered the third largest growth rate in Asia after South Korea and Japan (Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and the Ministry of Public Health, 2021). In 2022, Thailand had entered "Aged Society" with the proportion of the population aged 60 years and over at the rate of 20% of the total population (Ruangkiatkul, 2022). By 2033, it will become "the super aged society" (Ruangkiatkul, 2022). This demographic shift poses significant

challenges for local governments as they must adapt their policy, services and infrastructure to meet the needs of the older residents which will be the majority of the city residents by number in nearly future.

As Thailand is turning from the complete aged society to the super aged society soon, there are challenges for the subsequent implementation of action on the elderly such as stable income security, promotion and extension of occupational chance for the elderly, developing long-term elderly caregiving, provision of appropriate and safe facilities in public places for the elderly and strengthening the local governments in work on the elderly (Madrid, 2002).

Local government practices in Thailand have become more participatory as the country has been adopted and applied modern concepts of New Public Management and participatory approaches in performing their tasks (Krueathep, 2004). The government has implemented a policy of decentralization to empower local administrations, with the aim of ensuring that people of all ages receive close attention and care from the sub-district administrative organizations in their respective areas. Thai local governments initiate various programs to support those who have recently entered the elderly phase of life, such as distributing monthly allowances and creating elderly clubs to enhance their welfare. This is because these organizations work closely with the people and have a deep understanding of their problems. In order to improve the quality of life for the elderly and provide them with the care they need, it is important to provide support and resources to the local governments.

Creating an Age-Friendly City: Challenges and Solutions

As the global population ages, creating age-friendly cities becomes increasingly important and the trends of local governments around the world. However, there are significant challenges to their development. In the following topics, we'll explore some of the challenges and solutions for creating an age-friendly city.

1. Creating an Age-Friendly City with Limited Funding

1.1 Challenge: Limited Funding

One of the biggest challenges in creating an age-friendly city is limited funding. Local governments may not have the resources to invest in large-scale projects, such as building new facilities or retrofitting existing infrastructure to make it more accessible.

Solution: Prioritize Low-Cost Improvements and Finding a Source of Funds

According to Wilson (1976), to increase local government effectiveness, the local government needs to prioritize low-cost improvement. While large-scale projects can be over

budget for local governments, there are still many low-cost improvements that can make a significant difference. For example, Singapore improves safer public space for its older resident. The project is called “Silver Zones,” implemented in areas with high senior resident populations. The government contribute these age-friendly spaces by making the road safety features, such as lower speed limits, center dividers, and road humps and chicanes that slow down drivers and remind them to look out for street users (United Nations, 2018). This can help the local government achieve the goal of an age-friendly city with low spending.

In Thailand, local finance plays an important role in the administration and independence of local administrative organizations. The main source of revenue for local government organizations is central government subsidies, which have the power to limit their potential to generate income. This can result in other problems such as policy, revenue structure, fiscal inequality, and financial administration. Ladbuakhao (2020) suggests to improving local finance, the local government should enhance the efficiency of revenue collection by preparing the local administrative organization and staffs, developing new source of development in creative way to provide services for the local population with income distribution, while working with educational institution to utilize research findings on local administrative organizations.

1.2 Challenge: Lack of Coordination and Collaboration

Creating an age-friendly city requires coordination and collaboration between different stakeholders, including local governments, community organizations, businesses, and older adults themselves. However, this can be challenging when there is no clear plan or framework for collaboration.

Solution: Creating a Network of Partners

Creating a network of partners is important to success in building an age-friendly city. Local governments can work with the community sector, business sector, and older adults to establish networks and plan as well as implement age-friendly initiatives. This network can help the local government identify areas of need, prioritize projects, and ensure that the city’s resources are used efficiently. For instant, Lattasaari Island, Helsinki created Lattasaari Customer-Oriented Service

Network project to provide flexible tailored home-based care service network for older people (United Nations, 2018). The project was a good practice of Public-private-partnership initiative network.

1.3 Challenge: Addressing the Diverse Needs of Older Adults

Older adults are a diverse group with different needs, preferences, and abilities. Creating an age-friendly city requires addressing these diverse needs and ensuring that all older adults can participate fully in community life.

Solution: Engage Older Adults in the Planning Process

Engaging older adults in the planning process is critical to ensuring that their needs and preferences are taken into account. This can be done through focus groups, surveys, and other forms of community engagement. By involving older adults in the planning process, communities can better understand their needs and preferences and design age-friendly initiatives that are tailored to their unique circumstances. A good example is in Manchester, United Kingdom, where the local government created the Locality Programme that operated through older residents, various local networks and all relevant local actors to improve and co-ordinate services and initiatives for senior residents (United Nations, 2018).

Creating an age-friendly city with limited funding is challenging. However, by prioritizing low-cost improvements, establishing a network of partners, and engaging older adults in the planning process, the local governments can make achieves the goal towards creating age-friendly cities that support the well-being and independence of older adults.

2. Creating an Age-Friendly City While Having Resistance to Change

Despite the benefits of creating an age-friendly city, there can be resistance to change. Resistance to change can come from a variety of sources, including policymakers, businesses, residents in other age group or even senior residents themselves. Some of the reasons for resistance to change (World Health Organization, 2016) may include:

- Fear of the unknown: People may resist change because they are unsure of what will be happened in the future and how it will affect them.
- Cost: Implementing age-friendly policies and practices can be in high price, and some stakeholders can be hesitant to bear the expense.
- Inconvenience: Changes to the built environment can be inconvenient for some residents.

Strategies for Overcoming Resistance to Change

Despite the challenges of social resistance, it is possible to overcome those challenges and create an age-friendly city. According to the World Health Organization (2016), followings are some strategies that can be used to create age-friendly environment:

- Work on educating the Public: It is important to educate the public about the benefits of creating an age-friendly city. Policymakers can build support for change and overcome resistance by focusing the advantages. Lisbon, Portugal, created the Senior University offering open classes for senior volunteers that taught literature, history, drawing or computer sciences. They were open to older residents, regardless of their level of education (United Nations, 2018).
- Involve the Community: Engage the community in the planning process. This includes senior residents and other stakeholders, such as business owners and public service providers. By this involvement since planning process, the stakeholders can understand projects that can lead to inclusive feeling in the changes and more likely to support the community.
- Partner with Local Businesses: Partnering with local businesses can be an effective way to implement age-friendly policies and practices. For example, businesses can provide alternative helps and incentives to senior residents.
- Start Small: In building momentum to overcome resistance, local governments implements can start with small changes. For example, Bangkok, Thailand held music in the garden event can make difference in seniors' quality of life by inviting more people to use public parks and workout.
- Show Results: Finally, it is important to follow up and report the results of age-friendly policies and practices to the public. If the policy makers can prove that changes are effective and have a positive impact on seniors' lives, the further supports can grow. For example, Bangkok metropolitan uses online media to track and report the policy implementation, from this way the stakeholders in all age group can build positive perception with the policy outcome.

Resistance to change can make it challenging to implement policies and practices in age-friendly city creation. By educating the public, involving the community, partnering with businesses, starting small, and showing results, policymakers can overcome this resistance to change.

3. Needed Inadequate Data and Research

Creating an age-friendly city is an important aspect of urban planning, especially as aging populations worldwide has been increasing. The World Health Organization (2016) defines an age-friendly city as one that is inclusive and accessible for older adults, enabling them to remain active and engaged in their communities. Local governments often lack

comprehensive data and research on the needs of older adults. This can make it difficult to develop effective policies and programs.

Data and Research Accessibility

A local government can gather the necessary information and data for creating an age-friendly city, from engagement with senior residents to understand the experience that older communities have and their needs. This can be done in many ways, some local governments organize focus groups and surveys to gather information of older resident needs, while some local government gather this data through organizing community meeting.

Another way to access to the necessary data for policy creation in building age-friendly city is to find existing data and research on older adults. Although city-specific data may be limited, data on older adults' needs and preferences are available from various sources, such as the WHO, the United Nations, and academic institutions. These data can provide insights, best practices and strategies for creating an age-friendly city. For example, the local government can tailor strategies to meet the needs of older adults in each area by using 8 domains of age-friendly city from the World Health Organization's recommendations.

Collaboration between various sectors and stakeholders is also essential in creating an age-friendly city. Collaboration can create the sharing of knowledge, resources, and expertise, which leads to a deeper understanding in the city's older residents' challenges and opportunities. The United Nations (2018) promotes the uses of SDGs in national approaches with stakeholder engagement ranging from consultations in decision-making processes to the establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships to achieve the goals. The Lao PDR, was a good example of the country, who focused on stakeholder engagement, including older persons, since the beginning of planning process and reported on engaging older persons (United Nations, 2018).

In conclusion, creating an age-friendly city while having inadequate data and research can be challenging. Prioritizing engagement with older adults, finding secondary data and research, and collaborating with sectors and stakeholders are alternative ways to create an age-friendly city.

By adopting these approaches, cities can create inclusive and accessible environments that enable older adults to remain active and engaged in their communities, contributing to their overall well-being and quality of life.

4. Having Limited Participation and Engagement from Older Adults

Creating an age-friendly city requires input and participation from older residents in the community. However, there are situations where limited participation and engagement from older adults can happen, which can be a challenge to creating an age-friendly city.

When facing limited participation and engagement situations from older adults, there are many strategies that can be employed to ensure that their voices are heard, and their needs are met. One approach is to seek out and engage with community organizations and groups that represent older adults, such as senior centers, retirement communities, or advocacy organizations.

These organizations can provide valuable insight that is useful to understand the needs and concerns of older adults. This can help to facilitate communication between city officials and older residents (World Health Organization, 2018).

Another approach is to use technology and social media to reach out to older adults who may be unable to participate in traditional forms of engagement, such as public meetings or town halls. Online surveys and discussion forums can be used to gather feedback and ideas from older adults, and social media platforms can be used to share information and updates about the city's age-friendly initiatives (World Health Organization, 2018). For example, Azerbaijan used social media such as videos on social networks, online webinars and online peer to-peer discussions to help older residents build their own activities and transfer disease protection literacy during the COVID-19 pandemic period (World Economic Forum, 2022).

Local governments can make decisions about policies and programs that will benefit older residents even if the information is not from the target group directly. This can be done by researching or consulting with aging experts. It's also important to ensure that the local government is well-informed about the needs and concerns of older residents.

Phrompayak (2019) suggests that for Thai society community-based activities were more engaged by older people than individual-based activities. Health status and friendly environment can be the factors that influence older residents' social participation. Health literacy and knowledge about environment need to be provided to the older residents in order to increase their engagement in social activities, either community-based or individual-based (Phrompayak, 2019).

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that creating an age-friendly city is an ongoing process that requires engagement and feedback from older adults continuously. While limited participation and engagement from older adults may be a challenge, it's important to remain committed to creating an inclusive and accessible community for people of all ages. By using combined strategies and approaches, the local governments can work to ensure that the

needs and concerns of older adults are heard and addressed in their efforts to create an age-friendly city.

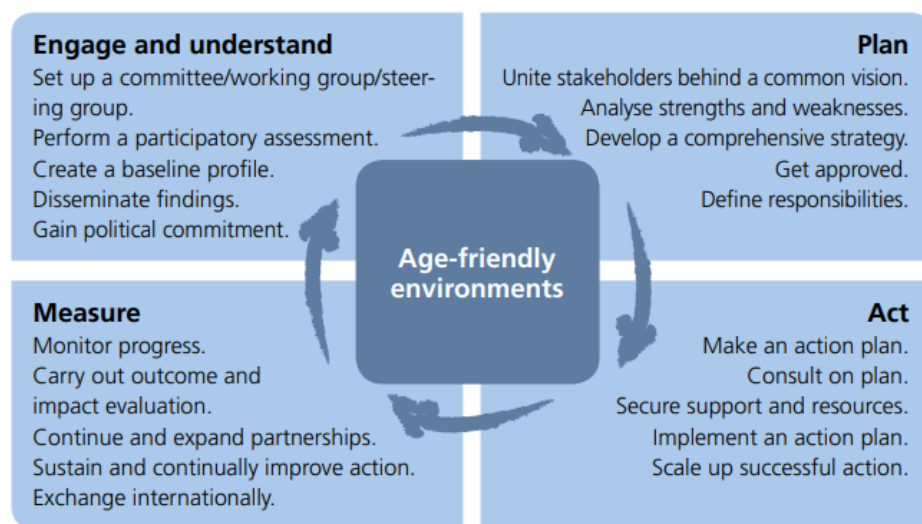


Figure 4 Cycle of continuous improvement for Age-friendly Cities and Communities

Source: World Health Organizations (2018)

5. Lack of Inter-generational Cooperation

Creating an age-friendly city can be a challenging task, especially when there is a lack of inter-generational cooperation. Age-friendly cities are designed to be inclusive and accessible for people of all ages, particularly for older adults. These cities are built with supportive infrastructure that make it easier for seniors to navigate and enjoy their surroundings.

However, creating an age-friendly city requires cooperation and collaboration from people of all ages, including younger generations. The lack of inter-generational cooperation can be obstructed to the progress towards building an age-friendly city. Below are some of the challenges that may arise in such a situation (World Health organization, 2017):

- Limited understanding of the needs of older adults.
- Younger generations may not fully understand the needs and challenges faced by older adults. This may lead to a lack of interest and engagement in creating age-friendly environments.
- Negative stereotypes about aging.
- Negative stereotypes about aging may lead to ageism, which can further obstructed to inter-generational cooperation. Stereotypes may lead younger generations to underestimate the capabilities and contributions of older adults.

- Limited representation of older adults in decision-making processes.
- Older adults may not have representation in decision-making processes related to the development of age-friendly cities. This may lead to a lack of consideration for their needs and preferences.

Despite these challenges, there are ways to promote inter-generational cooperation and create age-friendly cities. Below are some suggestions (World Health organization, 2017):

5.1 Education and awareness-raising

Education and awareness-raising campaigns can help younger generations understand the needs and challenges faced by older adults. This can promote empathy and understanding and encourage younger people to get involved in creating age-friendly environments. In 2014, UN-Habitat surveyed hundreds of spaces in East Jerusalem using the computer game Minecraft to design real-life three-dimensional environments. This can create engagement from more than 40 community members to create new spaces that reflect their key issues and aspirations (World Economic Forum, 2022).

5.2 Engaging older adults in decision-making processes

Involving older adults in decision-making processes related to the development of age-friendly cities can ensure that their needs and preferences are taken into consideration. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the local government of Barcelona, Spain combatted the epidemic of loneliness among older residents with an innovative program designed to foster connections, called the Vincles application (World Economic Forum, 2022). The program was designed by local government partnered with private sector - Barcelona City Council's Area of Social Rights and the Bloomberg Philanthropies. The goals of the program are to encourage relationships among older people, offer participation tools and create a support network. The program ran by giving digital tablets designed for older residents who in loneliness condition by report. This Vincles app has been successful with the number of elderly user up to 3,188 senior users who can build their network and social activities online. This project also have the future improvement plan to integrate the telehealth services and connect other city program for senior residents in the future.

5.3 Intergenerational programs and activities

Intergenerational programs and activities can provide opportunities for younger and older generations to interact and learn from each other. This can promote mutual understanding and respect. According to Thang (2011), Singapore has been promoted

intergenerational initiatives in educational setting with activities that promote grandparent-grandchildren bonding, such as the inter-generational interest groups set up by the People's Association since 2008. The activities pair the mutual interests of people from three generations in teams to do mutual activities such as cooking and sharing recipes, and a family yoga club. While the National Library Board create a creative project to promote intergenerational cooperation invited the grandchildren and grandparents to send letters to each other as a way to exchange and connect to each other improving mutual understanding and relationship. The selected letters were published into books with four languages version.

5.4 Promoting positive images of aging

Promoting positive images of aging can help combat negative stereotypes and ageism. This can encourage younger generations to value and appreciate the contributions of older adults. According to Bradley& Longino (2001), the mass media often underrepresent older adults with stereotypes. Promoting positive images of aging with core values and identity can not only encourage the society to see older adults' past achievements but encourage the older adults to see what they would like to accomplish in the future.

In conclusion, creating an age-friendly city requires inter-generational cooperation. The challenges posed by a lack of cooperation can be overcome through education, awareness-raising, engagement, and the promotion of positive images of aging.

Conclusion

Developing age-friendly cities is an important challenge for local governments in the 21st century. Despite the challenges, there are opportunities for local governments to improve the lives of older adults and create more livable cities for people of all ages. To overcome the challenges of developing age-friendly cities, local governments must collaborate across sectors, secure financing for age-friendly policies, engage older adults in the planning process, and find ways to measure the success of their efforts. By working together, local governments can create cities that are welcoming and inclusive for people of all ages.

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