



## POSITION PAPER

# ON BUILDING SUSTAINABLE AGEING SOCIETIES

Citizens' Initiatives in Starting up Elderly Care,  
when existing services are insufficient

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### I. Introduction

The 21st century has dawned with several impending problems threatening our societies as we know them. Issues such as population ageing, diminishing birth rates, urbanization and climate change have been identified in the last decades as the biggest challenges governments and civil societies face.

As our cities grow and populations migrate from rural areas to the large urban conglomerates, the latter's share of residents aged 60 and over (known as "senior citizens") is increasing exponentially. This class of citizens can and should represent a resource for their families, communities and economies. This is possible by ensuring an environment that optimizes opportunities for health, participation and security of the elderly as they embark on their golden years.

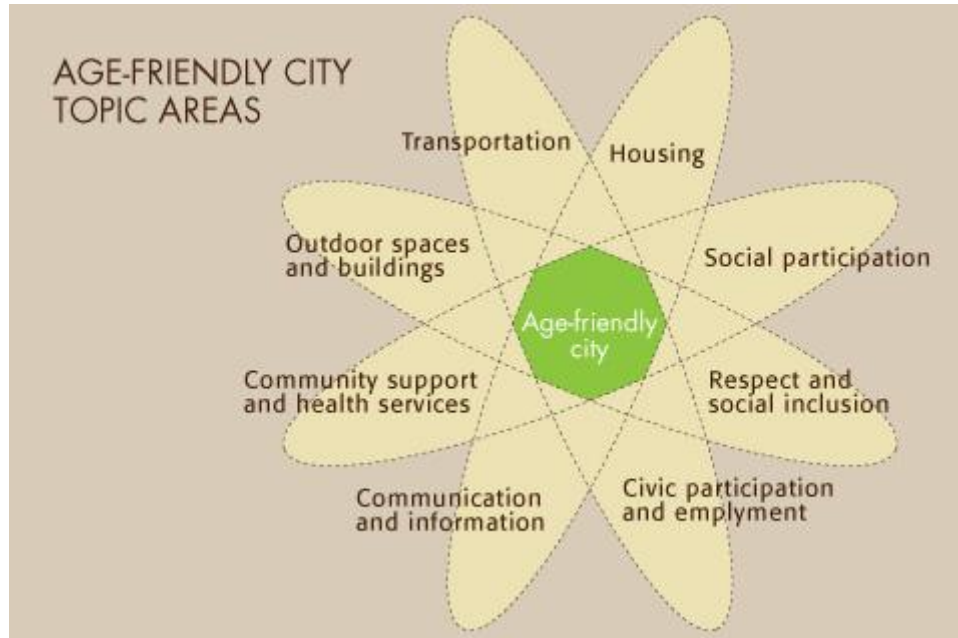
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*Crisis = Danger & Opportunity*

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$$\text{Future Viability} = f \frac{\text{Production}}{\text{Consumption}}$$

In order for senior citizens to fulfil their potential, governments and the civil society must ensure that the structures and services meet the needs and capacities of these citizens. In order to guarantee the sustainability of these new mega cities (with a population of over 10 million), structures and services must be made available to support their residents' wellbeing and productivity. This

necessity was recognized as one of the three priority directions of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing endorsed by the United Nations in 2002 (9).



Source: "WHO (2007). *Global Age Friendly Cities. A Guide*".

Studies have shown that we shall witness an increase of 10 million senior citizens a year from 2014 to 2033. By the end of 2015, China will be home to 24 million people who are 80 or older (11.1% of the population). More than 51 million people who are 65 or older will be "empty nesters", or parents whose children have moved out, according to Minister of Civil Affairs Li Ligu speaking to the China Daily (06-03-2012).

## II. Aging and Decreasing Childbirth

There are two main contributing factors for decreasing childbirth:

- Urbanization: more than half the world's population now lives in cities, where children are an expensive economic liability, as opposed to the former notion of having another pair of hands to till fields or care for livestock.



*Sustainability =*

*Age f(Productivity)*

- Expanded work opportunities for women and the increasing prevalence of pensions and other old-age financial support that doesn't depend on having large numbers of children to finance retirement.

The result is a "4-2-1" society, in which one child becomes responsible for supporting two parents and four grandparents.

In addition, the new migration patterns and the search for better opportunities often lead to children living far away from their parents and grandparents, with few visits during prolonged periods of time. This has spurred initiatives such as the proposed new law in China which would make it illegal for family members to "neglect or cold-shoulder elderly people, as reported by the International Herald Tribune in its June 29th, 2012 global edition.

### III. Productive Ageing and Sustainability

No society has ever experienced the speed of population aging now seen throughout Asia, so looking at history to predict Asia's future is not an option. But we can say with confidence that no region on Earth is more demographically challenged.

Active ageing is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. It applies to both individuals and population groups and allows people to realize their potential for physical, social, and mental well-being throughout the life course and to participate in society, while simultaneously offering them adequate protection, security and care that meet their needs and aiming to extend healthy life expectancy and quality of life.

*"There is nothing more powerful*

*than an idea whose time has come".*

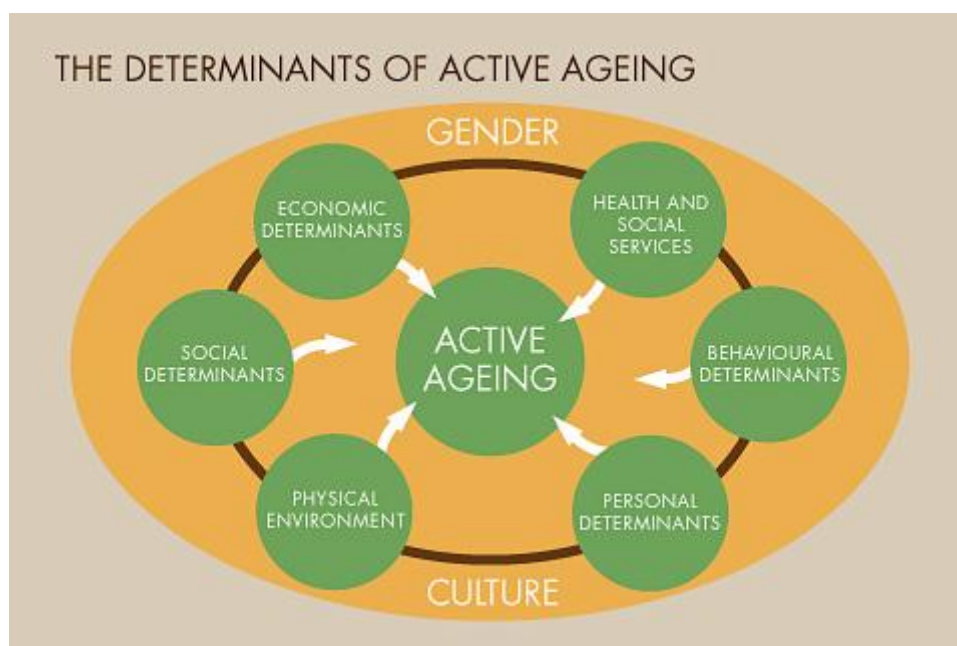
**- THERE IS NO MORE PRESSING CONCERN THAN  
THE ONE THAT HAS MATURED -**

Senior citizens are still productive, despite the natural erosion of physical capabilities. The notion that people retire early to enjoy the wealth they have accumulated is not supported by the data. In general, young retirees—people age 51 to 59 who have left the work force are less well-off than workers their age. People who work into their later years—those who are age 60 and older and are still in the work force—generally are wealthy relative to their nonworking peers.

Being active is not just the ability to be physically active or to participate in the labour force but also to continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic affairs. Older people who retire from work, even with some level of disability, can remain active contributors to their families, peers, communities and countries, notwithstanding the mental or physical limits of the elderly to compete in the global economy of the next 20 years..

*"There is:  
- no better nurse  
for a child, than its  
grandmother...  
- no better tutor  
than its  
grandfather."*

The WHO refers to "Health" as "physical, mental and social well-being so maintaining autonomy and independence for the older people is a key goal in the policy framework for active ageing".



Source: "The Wisdom Years – Ageing into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century".

Thus, it is necessary for policy-makers to explore the effect of ageing on the overall health system. A closer attention to health diets and community involvement and support in decreasing disability among older people are possible alternatives. Encouraging families and the community to be engaged in caring for the elderly seems to be an investment that will benefit future societies by providing effective care at lower costs in the long run.

Social equipment's efficiency, such as in the case of kindergartens, may be enhanced with the participation of senior citizens, allowing substantial savings. Another source of savings is the shared use of social equipment such as sport venues, libraries, canteens, and so forth by the young and the elderly.



A report from the European Commission has pointed out, for example, that providing for more part-time jobs would not only encourage delayed retirement, but could also help boost birth rates by smoothing the tensions between work and family life for parents.

Older people are increasingly playing a crucial role – through voluntary work, transmitting experience and knowledge, helping their families with caring responsibilities or in paid work. These contributions rely on older persons enjoying good health and societies addressing their needs. All this takes place within the context of friends, work associates, neighbours and family members which is why interdependence and intergenerational solidarity are also fundamental pillars of active ageing.

**- REINFORCE THE  
FAMILY -**

**"The best Social  
Security is the  
Family"**

*- Mr.Theo Weigel*

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