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Headline: People-centric approach needed for effective urban planning, says expert

**'SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOURAL SCIENTISTS MUST WORK WITH URBAN PLANNERS'**

# People-centric approach needed for effective urban planning, says expert

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**SINGAPORE** – When the Singapore-Kuala Lumpur High Speed Rail terminal in Jurong is ready, it could bring about a much bigger transient commuter population in the area, and with it, implications on how to manage emergencies involving a crowd that includes travellers and workers who may be entering Singapore for the first time.

Such a scenario is one example of how urban planners must take a people-centric approach, and understand how the same built environment can impact different groups of people differently, or impact people differently over time. This is one way of ensuring that urban planning is effective, said Professor David Chan, director of the Behavioural Sciences Institute at Singapore Management University.


Elaborating on the Jurong example, Prof Chan said: “They are less familiar with the physical surroundings of the station than the regular commuter living in Singapore. So, the physical layout and urban forms in the surrounding area must

be aligned with contingency plans for incident management during train disruptions.”

Emphasising that research and development should go beyond technical solutions and include social and behavioural sciences, Prof Chan, speaking at the Urban Sustainability R&D Congress yesterday, said livability is about people’s evaluations, experiences and encounters when they interact with their physical and social environments.

“That is why we need to better understand how people think, feel and act in different settings, and how these thoughts, emotions or behaviours may differ between groups or change over time. This means having social and behavioural scientists working alongside urban planners, architects, engineers and physical scientists to enhance people’s well-being and quality of life in urban settings,” he said.

There is also the need to anticipate how needs and wants may change over time and across demographic groups. “So, as we go around with our housing planning, (planting) of trees, don’t just take needs and wants reported in sur-

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veys as given. Think about how it can change, the different demographics, and how environmental change can actually influence people’s expectations,” he said.

For instance, the idea of living underground may meet some resistance as a result of Chinese superstitions, but a population can change in their beliefs with each successive generation, he said.

“You should ask the question, no matter how technical your study (or) project is: Can (I) actually make people have a more positive attitude about their life and living, as well as the experiences that they encounter?” he said. While people can move between cities in a country, Prof Chan said Singapore is in a unique position where people who want a change of living environment would have to leave the country.

“Whether it is NParks, HDB or URA, what we can do better now is to create more emotional attachment and rootedness to the country for both citizens and non-citizens,” he said.

The two-day Urban Sustainability R&D Congress continues today.