



THE MAKING OF A CITY

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SMU CITY DIALOGUES
SMU City Dialogues Vienna was organised in conjunction with SMU's 25th anniversary, in partnership with Urban Innovation Vienna, the city's climate and innovation agency. It was a partner event of the Mayors Forum of the World Cities Summit 2025, drawing over 100 participants from 20 countries, across academia, and the public and private sectors.



Scan to find out more about City Dialogues Vienna

Cities worldwide have to balance growth with sustainability and resilience to climate impacts. On July 2, the Singapore Management University (SMU) gathered policymakers, academics, and business leaders in Vienna, Austria, to discuss how to do this.

URBAN GROWTH


Cities are vulnerable to climate change impacts, while also being large emitters of planet-warming greenhouse gases. As urban growth persists, it is increasingly urgent to green cities and make them more resilient.

By 2050, **around 70%** of the world's population will be living in cities, up from 55% today.

Cities contribute **over 70%** of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

More than 60% of people living in low-lying coastal areas are city dwellers, vulnerable to rising seas and hurricanes/typhoons.


- Hotter
- Prone to flooding
- Polluted
- Emissions-intensive
- Gray landscapes



NOTE: Yellow spots show the annual average of nighttime lights in 2023.


METROPOLITAN MAYHEM

Heatwaves, floods and wildfires can batter urban areas, damaging infrastructure and displacing residents. Even affluent cities, such as Singapore and Vienna, are not spared.




Events that had besieged cities: Singapore flash flood, 2021 (left, top); Austria (Vienna) heatwave, 2025 (left, bottom)


But there are ways for cities to battle the climate scourge.



Greening a grey building to combat urban heat island effect



Using solar panels in innovative ways, such as on reservoirs



Microforests to encourage biodiversity

We need to see how investments in resilience can be more targeted to the different issues that cities face.

Winston Chow, Professor of Urban Climate at SMU


THE SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

The SMU City Dialogues explored some strategies that two cities, Singapore and Vienna, are exploring in their pursuit of resilience.

1 DOUBLE DUTY

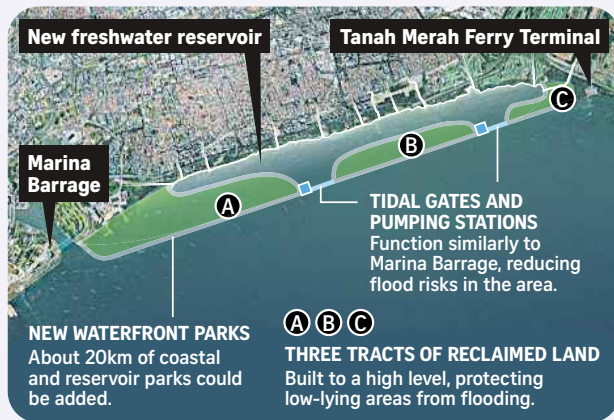
Land reclamation as a multi-use solution to combat floods

Vienna's Danube Island



- In Vienna, the Danube River running through the Austrian city has a channel constructed beside it to increase its capacity to hold rainwater.
- The excavated soil was used to build Danube Island in the middle of the river, which now serves as a green oasis for residents.

Singapore's future Long Island



- **New freshwater reservoir**
- **Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal**
- **Marina Barrage**
- **TIDAL GATES AND PUMPING STATIONS** Function similarly to Marina Barrage, reducing flood risks in the area.
- **NEW WATERFRONT PARKS** About 20km of coastal and reservoir parks could be added.
- **THREE TRACTS OF RECLAIMED LAND** Built to a high level, protecting low-lying areas from flooding.
- About 800ha of land is expected to be reclaimed off the East Coast area to protect the low-lying city-state from rising sea levels.
- This Long Island will create a new reservoir, while hosting homes and other recreational options.

2 TURNING TO TECH

New tools can help cities stay ahead of the storm

- Artificial intelligence, digital twins – a virtual replica of cities – and real-time data can help the authorities spot problems earlier and respond to them faster.
- Early warnings for heat stress, flash floods, or impending coastal disasters can help save lives.
- Vienna has an advanced monitoring system that integrates real-time data on river and soil water levels and rainfall to forecast floods.

3 STRONGER CITIES

Build to weather, by building together

- When people feel heard and are part of solutions, they are less anxious about climate change.
- Both Singapore and Vienna recognise that people are at the heart of the city, and planners are involving them in efforts to climate-proof the city.
- Suggestions from residents in Vienna that have been adopted include a cool zone to escape heat, more urban greenery, and "worm hotels" to reduce waste.
- In Singapore, the Government is consulting with residents on ideas for coastal protection.

SURVIVE

Resilient cities foster neighbourliness, inclusive mobility and intergenerational connection, and they make every effort to cultivate spaces of care.

Alan Chan, SMU Provost

It's not about being a smart city. It's about being a smart-enough city. Smart enough relative to the context, the specific problem we are trying to solve.

Orlando Woods, Professor of Geography and Director of the SMU Urban Institute

THRIVE

Using early warning systems throughout the city to warn residents of temperature shocks.

Sources: SMU, UN HABITAT, ORLANDO WOODS, STADT WIEN, FIER, ST FILE PHOTOS: NASA, REUTERS, CITY OF VIENNA, ST READER LYDIA LEE, ADOBE STOCK STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

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