

Welcome Address by SMU Provost, Professor Alan Chan
2025 SMU City Dialogues, Vienna
2 July 2024, 9am

- Guest-of-Honour, Executive City Councillor for Climate, Environment, Democracy and Personnel for the City of Vienna, Mr Jürgen Czernohorszky;
- Permanent Secretary (Development) for the Ministry of National Development for the Republic of Singapore, Mr Melvyn Ong;
- CEO of Urban Innovation Vienna, Ms Jutta Löffler;
- Distinguished Guests;
- Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good morning.

It is a pleasure to welcome you to SMU City Dialogues Vienna. I bring warm greetings on behalf of Singapore Management University, and extend our thanks to Urban Innovation Vienna for your generous partnership and hospitality.

Vienna is a fitting setting for our dialogues today. A city long admired for its civic tradition and cultural richness — one that was deservingly awarded the [Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize in 2020](#). It continues to exemplify the kind of values we hope to explore – sustainability, resilience and inclusive growth.

City Dialogues began six years ago, with a simple but sincere aim: to open a space for candid, cross-sector discussions on the future of our cities. We believed then, and still do, that the questions cannot be left to urban planners alone. They require the participation of academics, government leaders, business communities and communities alike.

This year, as SMU celebrates its 25th anniversary, Singapore likewise marks its 60th birthday. At SMU, we have always championed education and research that make an

impact — shaping academic debates, informing policy, and guiding how industries engage with the world.

Reflections on Urban Resilience — A 3R Lens by Professor Lily Kong

The theme of today's gathering — *What is the value of urban resilience?* — is one our President, Professor Lily Kong, has thought deeply about. While she is unable to be here with us this morning, I would like to acknowledge her contribution in framing this year's Dialogue.

Professor Kong has encouraged us to consider resilience not only in terms of recovery and robustness, but also as a regenerative and restorative capacity. Her 3R framework invites us to reflect on **Resilient**, **Regenerative**, and **Restorative** cities. If you will indulge me in a bit of a bite-sized lecture, I will share more.

Resilient cities anticipate, adapt, and respond effectively to disruption. Such cities recognise both the physical vulnerabilities and social dynamics. At SMU, Professor Winston Chow, Co-Chair of the IPCC's Working Group II, has brought international visibility to SMU's work in urban climate resilience. His research on urban heat islands and cooling strategies offers data-driven approaches to adaptation that serve Singapore and the region.

Regenerative cities go further. They not only resist harm, but actively replenish what has been depleted — designing circular economies, greening cities, and enabling both people and nature to flourish.

At SMU, Professor Archan Misra's work on ultra-low power sensing and embedded intelligence shows how cities can harness technology not only for efficiency, but also for sustainability. His research exemplifies how digital systems, when thoughtfully deployed, can contribute to ecological regeneration. At the heart of his work is a response to the massive energy demands of data-driven cities. By developing energy-

harvesting, battery-less devices that wake only when needed and distribute computing tasks across a network, Professor Misra's ambitious vision addresses the energy bottlenecks of large-scale IoT deployment. This innovation makes it feasible to deploy tens of thousands of sensors across malls, campuses, parks, garden rooftops and city spaces — without the environmental cost of constant battery replacement — paving the way for scalable, sustainable smart systems that ensure better care for our urban spaces.

Restorative cities bring us back to the heart of why resilience matters. Infrastructure is only part of the equation. Just as critical is the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of residents. Cities must be designed to foster neighbourliness, inclusive mobility, intergenerational connection, and spaces of care.

Taking our SMU Urban Institute as an illustration of the 3Rs, we adopt a deeply interdisciplinary approach — drawing on data science, the humanities, and the social sciences — to better understand how people experience the city. From ageing populations to youth mental health, our researchers explore what it takes to build cities that are resilient to disruption, regenerative in spirit, and restorative in impact. In short, cities are not just of strength, but of grace.

To this audience, I hardly need to belabour the importance of such a perspective. Most of you live and breathe these issues every day — whether through policy, research, or practice. But Lily's 3Rs offer a powerful reminder: resilience is not just about systems. It is also about people.

Urban Resilience in Practice

Today's dialogues explore urban resilience from three interconnected angles. The first considers **economic value and public-private partnerships**. How might investments in resilience unlock long-term cost savings? What role can cross-sector collaboration play in strengthening our infrastructure and services?

The second turns to **social equity and environmental sustainability**. Who benefits from resilient cities? How do we ensure that the most vulnerable are not left behind? How can cities reduce carbon footprints while expanding access to essential services?

The third examines **innovation and technology**. In an age of data, automation, and AI, how can we design smart cities that are also sensitive cities? A sensitive city uses data and technology not just to optimise systems, but to understand and support how people feel, move, and connect in, with, and through the urban environment. Another question is, how do we future-proof urban environments while recognising the diverse needs of different geographies and communities?

Together, these tracks remind us that resilience is not one-dimensional. It is a layered practice that spans the economic, social, and technological.

The Role of Partnership and Dialogue

No city can navigate these complexities alone. Building resilient, regenerative, and restorative cities demand a shared endeavour. It requires what some have described as a ‘triple helix’ — where government, academia, and industry collaborate not only on technical innovation but also on the social and cultural fabric of our communities.

I’m especially pleased to share that yesterday, SMU joined hands with three globally respected partners—the Department of Geography at the London School of Economics, the Initiative on Cities at Boston University, Melbourne Centre for Cities at University of Melbourne, and the School of Cities at the University of Toronto—to launch the **Global Alliance on Sustainable Urban Societies**.

This Alliance is grounded in a shared commitment to human-centric urban research. Together, we aim to deepen our understanding of how people sense, navigate, and shape the cities they inhabit—across cultural, social, and economic dimensions.

The same spirit underpins City Dialogues. Not just to exchange ideas and insights, but more importantly the Dialogue serves as a platform for candid and solution-driven conversations.

We are keen to explore collaboration opportunities with you. Whether through research partnerships or policy dialogues, we remain committed to connecting theory with practice, and reflection with action.

Closing Reflections

Let me close by returning to the question: *What is the value of urban resilience?*

As Professor Kong reminds us, resilience is not just about bouncing back. It is valuable because it gives us the capacity—and the boldness—to move forward. It enables regeneration. It enables restoration. And, most importantly, it enables us to reimagine our cities not simply as places to live, but as places to flourish.

Thank you.

[1,142 words; 10 mins]