Greetings from CLC! The new year brings new frontiers for CLC. This year, we look forward to new initiatives and programmes to develop and share knowledge on sustainable and liveable cities.

The CLC research agenda has gotten off to a quick start in January with the hosting of the 5th Cities Roundtable, a forum for policymakers and researchers to collaborate on research within the urban field. We are embarking on new collaborative research on complexity science with the Santa Fe Institute, and have also launched a second joint research project on community planning and rejuvenation with the Seoul Institute.

Other research partnerships, including with the Harvard Graduate School of Design, 100 Resilient Cities, and the National University of Singapore, are going strong. We are renewing our partnership with the Urban Land Institute and also co-organising the ULI Asia Pacific Summit, which will be held in Singapore for the first time.

Two joint publications, one on the industrial transformation of Singapore and China, and the other on the Suzhou Industrial Park, are slated to be published this year, in collaboration with our Chinese partners. New instalments of our signature Urban Systems Studies series will be published in the coming months. Experts Professor Luis Bettencourt, Alexandros Washburn and Henk Ovink will also join us as Visiting Fellows during the year.

The new year also marks the first time that CLC is collaborating with UN-Habitat to stage the Singapore & UN-Habitat Leaders in Urban Governance Programme. The programme would be held annually for city leaders, to equip them with the knowledge and skills to develop their cities sustainably. This inaugural edition will be offered to African cities and would focus on urban issues related to high-density and high-liveability urban development. The initiative is one of Singapore’s contributions to the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly for goal 11 on cities, and the New Urban Agenda adopted last year.

Finally, a key highlight of the year will be our annual World Cities Summit Mayors Forum, a global platform for mayors and senior city leaders to discuss pressing urban challenges and share best practices. This year’s event will be hosted by the city of Suzhou, China, 17–20 May 2017. The theme for this 8th edition will be “Liveable & Sustainable Cities: Embracing the Future through Innovation and Collaboration”.

We are excited about our plans for the year ahead, and we are looking forward to sharing more with you. Do continue to follow Better Cities and keep in touch with CLC on Facebook.

Khoo Teng Chye
Executive Director
Centre for Liveable Cities
Exchanging Lessons: From Seoul to Singapore

How should communities be effectively involved and engaged during the urban planning process? This question is especially crucial when it comes to local town planning and implementing neighbourhood development and rejuvenation programmes, as these would directly impact residents’ daily lives.

One way is to use community consultations and planning exercises to help balance diverse needs and interests among different stakeholders. In Singapore, community workshops have been used to let stakeholders openly discuss their needs and concerns, while in Seoul, maintaining fair representation of all groups during community planning activities has helped to ensure that the process remains inclusive.

Read about these and other community initiatives shared during a Seoul Institute study visit to Singapore.

Bilbao: Staying Ahead of the Curve

Since the 1980s, the Spanish city of Bilbao has undergone a remarkable transformation. For its achievements, the city has received a number of international accolades, including the inaugural Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize in 2010.

Not ready to rest on its laurels, the city continues to reinvent itself. Bilbao today aims to establish a new knowledge economy through a slew of urban rejuvenation developments. One such project is to build an Urban Technological Park containing mixed-use housing, public spaces, as well as “incubator hotspots” for entrepreneurs. To become the “capital city of the Atlantic axis”, it also organised the inaugural Bilbao Cities and Economy Forum in November last year, where cities discussed the role of innovation and the economy in cities. Singapore was represented by CLC Fellow Michael Koh, who shared about Singapore’s urban transformation journey, and the role of cities as generators of business opportunities.

Read the report for other key observations about Bilbao and from the Forum.
The Appeal of Orchard Road

How did Orchard Road develop into a vibrant shopping destination and how has it continued to attract visitors over the years?

Early in the 1950s, the agglomeration of shops, hotels and entertainment venues that we know as Orchard Road today took shape as a result of private entrepreneurial efforts. It was only when the Singapore Tourism Board identified it as an opportunity area, to be part of the “Mall of Singapore” under the Tourism 21 plan, that Orchard Road underwent a major facelift to inject even more vibrancy into the area.

Through a series of coordinated multi-stakeholder efforts involving government agencies and private stakeholders such as the Orchard Road Business Association, Orchard Road has undergone continuous rejuvenation over the years to keep its competitive edge. Initiatives such as the annual Christmas light-up and, more recently, the introduction of Pedestrian Nights has enabled Singapore's most famous shopping street to remain exciting and attractive.

Find out how Singapore's urban landscape for tourism took shape in Planning for Tourism: Creating a Vibrant Singapore.

Keeping Watch Over Singapore’s Waters

“The WWS (Waterways Watch Society) can be said to be keeping former Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s 1977 vision of a clean Singapore River alive and is a good example of how much a community initiative can achieve and contribute to society.”

— from Bay Watch: Keeping Singapore’s Rivers Clean

The Singapore River continues to be in pristine condition today, due in big part to the dedication and efforts of the community. The Waterways Watch Society was first mooted as an idea in the 1990s to encourage the community to take ownership of the cleanliness of the Singapore River. Today, the WWS’s mission is to maintain the cleanliness of Singapore's waterways, in particular the Marina Bay catchment area. Over the years, besides conducting regular patrols, the WWS also holds regular educational programmes, with the mission of promoting the protection of Singapore's waters.

Read about this and other initiatives that have helped keep Singapore clean and healthy in Cleaning a Nation: Cultivating a Healthy Living Environment.
The elderly are a marginalised group in many cities. Dr Emi Kiyota, founder of Ibasho, a not-for-profit organisation that works to create sustainable communities that value their elders, argues that over-reliance on government increases the sense of isolation and helplessness in the elderly. She believes instead that civil society is best placed to provide the social infrastructure needed to integrate the elderly, an approach that can apply to other groups, such as minority groups and people with disabilities, as well.

Loneliness Cannot be Solved with Accessible Ramps

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Rebooting Nation-Building in Singapore

“With political stability and order, our priorities on nation-building seemed to have taken a back seat.”
— Benny Lim

Benny Lim began his 37-year public service career in the Singapore Police Force and rose to become Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs, National Security Coordination Secretariat, Prime Minister’s Office, and Ministry of National Development. In this interview, which was also recently featured in The Straits Times, he reflects on the limits of Singapore’s social harmony, and advocates rebooting nation-building efforts to address the inevitable tensions of increasing diversity.

The “We” Society: Giving Each Other Space and Care

“Citizens have the ideas… if you give them some power, they will come up with very interesting and sustainable solutions.”
— Ahmed Aboutaleb, Mayor, the Netherlands

Rotterdam’s mayor Ahmed Aboutaleb moved to the Netherlands when he was 15. In this interview, Europe’s first Muslim mayor of a non-Muslim majority city shares his vision of a “we” society, where people give each other space for innovative ideas while also looking out for one another.