



YOUNG LEADER



Wei Yang

Garden Cities: Nature's Gift that Keeps on Giving

Dr **Wei Yang** is the Managing Director of Wei Yang & Partners Ltd. She leads large scale regeneration and low carbon master-planning projects in the United Kingdom and China. In an interview with CLC's Nicole Chew at the WORLD CITIES SUMMIT MAYORS FORUM 2015 in New York City, she shares how the 100-year-old concept of the garden city has been updated for today's needs.

Dr Wei Yang on...

🗨️ Returning Land Value to the Community

The garden city concept was mooted by British urban planner Ebenezer Howard 100 years ago. We are re-inventing it for the 21st century by having the private sector, the public sector and the community work together, in a form of a garden city land trust.

The most essential part is to capture the land value through development, and return that value to the community while developing long-term stewardship within the community. Because the corporation hands the land and the essential infrastructure to the community to manage over the long term, the land value captured stays in the community, benefitting the locals.

For example, in Letchworth, the world's first garden city, the people own the land, and through different community programmes, they grow their own food, and have their own markets. Howard's idea was to encourage local business to thrive in local communities. In the 21st century garden city, modern technologies, like the smart grid, should be integrated, so people can live and work in the same place and have more time to enjoy life.

🗨️ Celebrating Life in Garden Cities

I think a garden city is designed for people to celebrate life. The essential part is to develop the city to a human scale, and have this great integration between human and natural environments; to create a culture of the place and a sense of ownership for the local community.

In our current city model, we test[ed] a financial model to ensure that not all gains go to private developers. Our model tested that if we have a development of a 100,000 new homes, 30% will be affordable homes. About 10,000 new jobs will also be created, to ensure people can live and work together, and the place is connected by an efficient public transport system.

🗨️ Networked, Higher-Density Garden Cities

A lot of people think garden cities are low-density, garden suburbs but they can be in different forms, either high-density or low. Garden cities should be seen as a system, a series of garden cities, complementing the larger city and connected by high-speed public transport.

Land constraints can be seen as opportunities if we look at it creatively. For example, there are a lot of cities developing vertical landscape features; also, people think that integrating the natural environment into a city needs to be done on a big scale, but it doesn't have to be so. The key thing is for the natural environment to be connected; it needs to be part of a network.

🗨️ How Planning Innovation must be Systemic

I think the obstacle is still the current planning system because some authorities say, "Let's do something totally innovative," but still stick to the current system. If we really want to introduce an innovative model, we need a new system to endorse that.

Planning systems should encourage and enable good development. But many planning systems focus more on development control issues, to make sure nothing bad happens. This actually slows down development.

At the Mayors Forum, everybody was talking about the housing shortage, which is now a global crisis. So we need new mechanisms to make sure things happen in a speedy way and also with quality, to help people to fulfil their life. ○

Watch more here:



<https://youtu.be/D-rTxM6bsc>