Longevity and the Future of Aging

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Designing an urban future for the "longevity society"

By Sheng-Hung Lee

s we enter an era shaped by disruptive demographic change, people are not only living longer but striving to live better. Economist and longevity expert Andrew Scott argues that we are shifting from an "aging society" to a "longevity society," where the focus is no longer on decline but on the possibilities of extended, healthier life stages. MIT

AgeLab director Joseph F. Coughlin further describes this transformation as an evolution from a service–based economy to a "longevity economy," one centered on meeting the needs of a society that spans multiple generations. Meanwhile, Peter Attia, physician and author of Outlive, explores the science and art of living longer and better, emphasizing a scientific approach to health.

These expert perspectives and academic research reveal a broader truth: longevity is not solely about living longer, but about living well across physical, financial, emotional, and social dimensions. Supporting this shift demands more than advances in healthcare or policy—it requires a rethinking of our social infrastructure. We need to address often-overlooked dimensions such as social wellbeing, intergenerational relationships, and a sense of community belonging. We can understand the essence of longevity tech technology extending both lifespan and healthspan—as a holistic approach and attitude to designing systems and services that empower individuals to thrive at various stages of life. This vision can extend into our city and urban planning.

What might a LongevityTech City look like?

While the answers are multifaceted, two critical concepts—slow data and the soft city—can offer compelling starting points. Urban futurist Anthony Townsend introduced the concept of slow data, which he contrasts with the more familiar concept of big data. While big data helps optimize systems and reduce inefficiencies, slow data—gathered intentionally, not opportunistically—invites reflection. Townsend writes, "Big data may make us lean and mean. Slow data will speak our souls." By capturing nuanced, qualitative insights into how people live, slow data enables us to navigate the social trade-offs and behavioral shifts essential for designing age-inclusive urban environments.

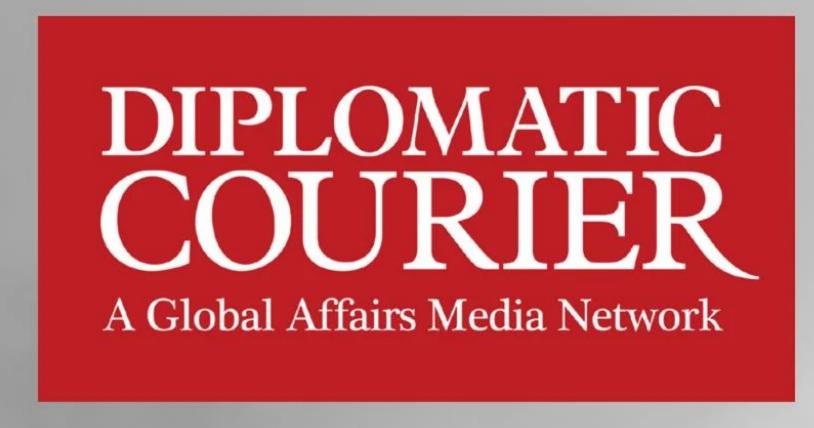
Architect and urbanist David Sim advances the notion of the soft city. This is a city

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shaped by human–scale design, rich in density, diversity, and delight—considering people, places, and planet. As societies become increasingly multigenerational, cities and the environment must accommodate a broader spectrum of needs. That means designing public spaces, transportation systems, and services that are intuitive, accessible, and respectful across all ages. It means seeing age not just as a number, but as a reflection of varied life stages and evolving aspirations to impact and change people's behavior and interactions in the LongevityTech City.

Building a LongevityTech City is not simply a technological challenge—it is a cultural, ethical, and design imperative. By combining the precision of big data with the empathy of slow data and blending hard infrastructure with the soft textures of people's daily life, we can shape urban futures that are not only smart but deeply human.

About the author: Sheng-Hung Lee, PhD is a researcher and designer at MIT AgeLab.



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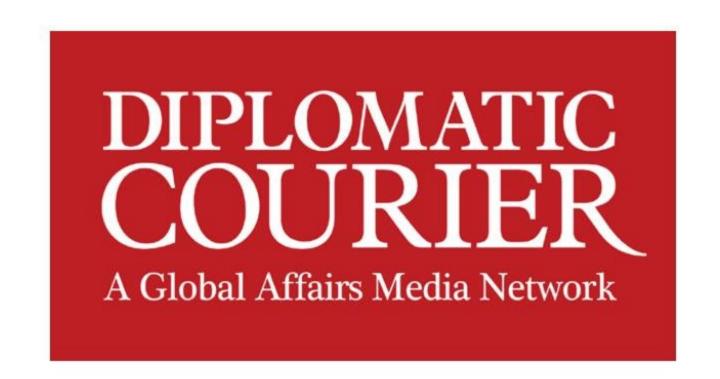
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THE NEXT PHASE FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

SDG 9

INNOVATING TO SURVIVE, THRIVE AMID INSECURITY





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