



thinkCITY

People, Place, Resilience.

Think City's approach to urban resilience in Southeast Asia.

A woman wearing a brown hijab and a patterned top is sitting on a balcony, feeding a baby with a clear plastic bottle. The baby is lying on its back, wearing a blue shirt. The balcony has a metal railing, and several pieces of laundry, including a white shirt and a yellow garment, are hanging on a clothesline in the background. The scene is lit with warm, natural light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The overall mood is intimate and focused on the act of caregiving.

Climate change, rapid urbanisation, rising inequality.

Cities are where pressure lands first and then compounds. When cities fail, those with the least leave last and lose the most. Resilience is what separates a city that holds under pressure from one that breaks under it — and it begins with equity, not infrastructure.

High-rise public housing Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Southeast Asia is no exception.

13 of 25

major cities face sea-level rise.

80 million people

regionally live without secure housing.

150 million more

will urbanise by 2050 into cities
already under strain.

The pressure is accelerating.

Sources: worldbank.org, adb.org, news.ctgn.com



Residents take shelter from rain in Bali, Indonesia

So, what does the power of small mean to an organisation born on a small island state in Malaysia?

When George Town received its **UNESCO World Heritage Site** listing in 2008, recognition threatened to displace the community that gave it meaning.

**240 grants, RM16.3 million.
RM67 million in economic output.
600 jobs. 87 buildings restored.**

Every **RM1** invested generated **RM2.25** in co-investment.

(As recorded under the George Town Grants Programme, 2009–2014)

The Esplanade seawall, rebuilt with traditional lime and clay, won the **2025 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Award for Cultural Heritage Conservation**.



The restored Esplanade seawall in George Town, Penang, Malaysia

The reinstated Fort Cornwallis moat, buried for over a century, is now a **4,000 square metre water basin** that manages flood drainage and returns civic space to the city.

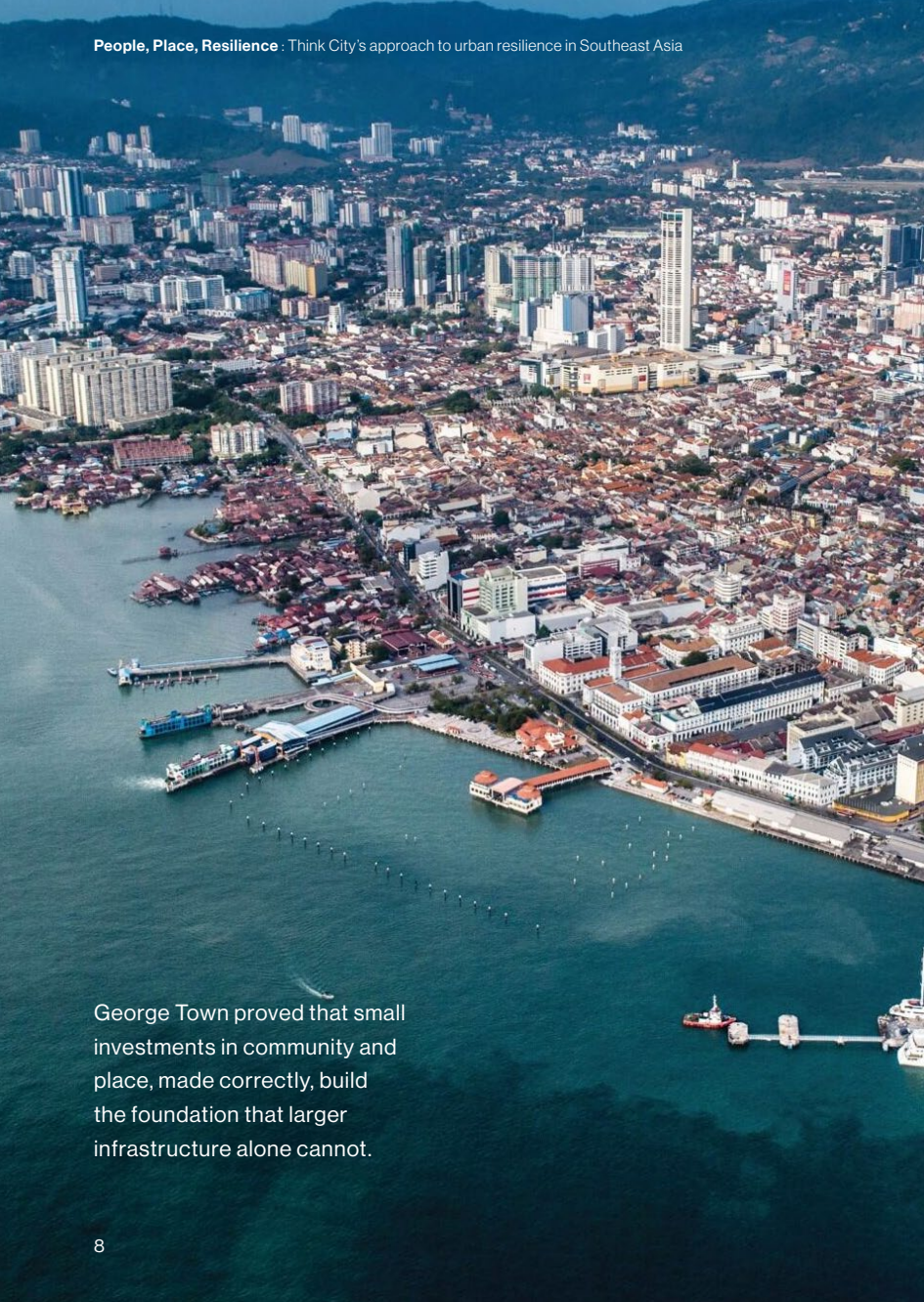


Fort Cornwallis, Penang, Malaysia



While engineering solutions were necessary, it proved to be insufficient on its own. With **USD10 million from the Adaptation Fund**, Think City designed the **Penang Nature-based Climate Adaptation Programme** with the state government and UN-Habitat as Malaysia's national pilot for urban climate adaptation. The methodology is being adapted and scaled to 3 other states in Malaysia - Perak, Selangor and Johor.

Astaka Green roof, Penang, Malaysia



George Town proved that small investments in community and place, made correctly, build the foundation that larger infrastructure alone cannot.



100,000 square metres of public realm transformed through the George Town Conservation and Development Corporation, in partnership with the Penang State Government and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture

That methodology carried Think City to the capital of Malaysia as Kuala Lumpur began to lose itself to the pressures of urbanisation.

Heritage buildings decaying, street life disappearing, identity migrating to newer districts as the historic core hollowed out.

The Kuala Lumpur Creative and Cultural District Strategic Master Plan was developed in 2019, laying the foundation for a place-based, heritage-led, and culture-driven regeneration strategy for Downtown Kuala Lumpur.



In 2025, it became a national agenda endorsed by the Prime Minister, with major revitalisation efforts across a **20km² zone**.

Kuala Lumpur has since been recognised as a **UNESCO Creative City of Design**, further reinforcing the city's role as the nation's creative and cultural capital.

Pentas Seni Merdeka, launched in 2022 with KL City Hall to reactivate the historic civic core and restore the economic and social vibrancy of Downtown KL using arts and culture



In the public housing estates surrounding the historic core, the **Kita-Untuk-Kita (K2K)** programme addresses what physical restoration cannot fix alone.

Residents of a public housing estate (PPR) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



Co-developed with the World Bank and active across 10 sites reaching **50,000 residents**, K2K is facilitating poverty exit to reverse the social, economic, and physical decay in public housing schemes.

K2K community members

Beyond big cities, the resilience gap is just as wide.



Talent leaving. High streets emptying. Communities shrinking around geological, cultural, and ecological assets they have yet to claim.

Seberang Perai, Penang, Malaysia



The Northern Region Archaeotourism Network supported 42 grantees and created 1,713 job opportunities that later generated RM15.6million in economic return across 15 heritage sites in 4 states – Penang, Perlis, Kedah, and Perak.

A craftsperson hand-forming labu sayong – traditional clay pottery in Kuala Kangsar, Perak

For Kuala Kangsar,

a royal town facing rising heat and flood risk, climate adaptation is designed around the town's own cultural landscape, together with the community. At the **nature-culture nexus**, resilience is built from what a place already knows about itself.

Kuala Kangsar, Perak, Malaysia

In Lenggong,

one of Southeast Asia's earliest landscapes of human presence, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** and Global Geopark, **214 heritage interpreters** are now stewards of their own heritage.

Gua Kajang, Lenggong, Perak, Malaysia

We have differentiated ourselves as a multidisciplinary think-and-do tank.

Our Areas of Expertise:

Analytics
Placemaking
Social & Environment Resilience
Culture-based Economic Development

Evidence-Based, Learning Approach; An Experimental Organisation



Proven Neutral Platform that Creates Synergy Between the Public, Private, and People



An aerial night view of a city, likely Singapore, showing a dense urban landscape with numerous illuminated buildings. In the foreground, several high-rise apartment blocks are prominent, their windows glowing with light. A large body of water, possibly a harbor or bay, occupies the middle ground, with a few ships visible. In the background, a range of mountains is silhouetted against a dark, cloudy sky. The overall atmosphere is one of a vibrant, modern city at night.

Making Cities Liveable, Together

If these ideas resonate with the work happening in your city, we'd like to hear about it.

Think City is an impact organisation established in 2009 to create more sustainable and equitable places for the benefit of all. Our knowledge, skills and strategies focus on urban solutions, the environment, social communities, and the cultural economy. Think City is a wholly owned subsidiary of Khazanah Nasional Berhad (the sovereign wealth fund of the Government of Malaysia).

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