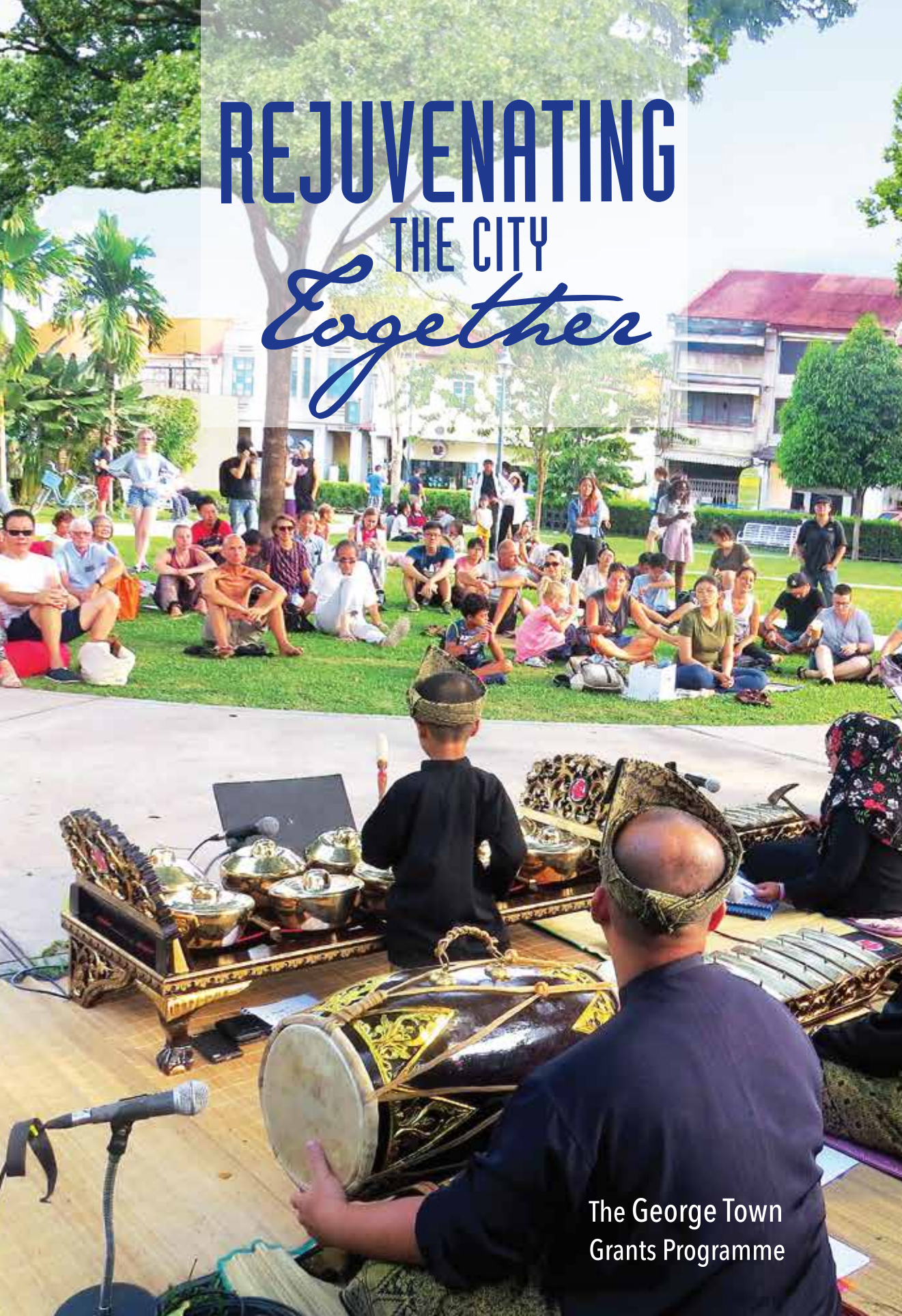




REJUVENATING THE CITY *Together*

The George Town
Grants Programme

Rejuvenating The City Together
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Grants Programme



After renovation, the Ren I Tang boutique hotel transforms the Little India streetscape



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FOREWORD



**YBhg Tan Sri Dato'
Azman Hj Mokhtar**

MANAGING DIRECTOR
OF KHAZANAH NASIONAL BERHAD

GEORGE Town has always been an open and dynamic society, a microcosm of Penang and, by extension, Malaysia. The George Town Grants Programme is part of a wider effort by Khazanah Nasional to catalyse the urban regeneration of one of Malaysia's oldest port cities.

It is in line with Khazanah's broader task of developing strategies for the future growth of the Northern Corridor comprising the states of Perak, Penang, Kedah and Perlis. In 2008, the combined economic footprint of these northern corridor states was roughly 20% of the national gross development value of the country. This is an important region where industrialisation took root some 47 years ago.

Working in close collaboration with the World Bank and local subject experts, including civil society leaders, Khazanah completed a landmark report aptly named *Cities, People and the Economy: A Study in Positioning Penang*.

The central argument of the study is that there has to be closer alignment between urban planning and economic specialisation to future-proof and catalyse a more socially equitable pattern of development. More specifically, people and communities need to be empowered to ensure that they have a greater sense of ownership over the development programmes and projects happening around them.

Now, some nine years later, Think City has expanded beyond the northern region, with offices in Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru. Lessons learnt from the George Town Grants Programme provided the team with a picture of how a bottom-up and community-centric approach could work. This has proven to be very attractive to the many city managers, community leaders and individuals interested in regenerating their own cities.

This book, which is based on Think City's pilot phase as a public grants manager in the George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site, shows how a small dedicated team can ignite passionate responses from fellow citizens keen on helping to regenerate our cities together. We hope it will add to our common pool of knowledge and experience for common benefit, Insya Allah.

PREFACE



Credit: The Edge

Dr Nungsari Ahmad Radhi

FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
KHAZANAH RESEARCH &
INVESTMENT STRATEGY (KRIS)
KHAZANAH NASIONAL BERHAD

Of people, passion and places The George Town Grants Programme

IN June 2017, when Khazanah Nasional first set up its Northern Corridor office, one of its first initiatives was the George Town Transformation Programme (GTTP). The GTTP was a series of studies and engagements that eventually defined how Khazanah positioned itself. Its primary role was that of a 'developmental' investor not driven purely by financial returns. This meant being a convener, using its social capital and resources to align commercial and non-commercial interests to develop the region. To avoid confusion about overlapping mandates, it was important to clarify roles as the northern region already had an area authority.

The city of George Town is at the heart of the Northern Corridor urban conurbation. The Bayan Lepas-Sungai Patani-Kulim industrial zone, anchors the economy here. It is also interlinked with the greater Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle and further out, by the emerging China-India growth story.

But in 1969, the city of George Town lost its economic *raison d'être* when its free port status was revoked. Until then, the city had been defined for two centuries as being part of an imperial port network with key activities involving trading, banking, insurance, storage and logistics, and a burgeoning services sector arising from the congregation of people and goods. These economic activities came to define George Town, resulting in a cosmopolitanism of social life and unique physical spaces in the city – the outcome of the proximity of otherwise disparate communities.

While the island was already populated by small Malay fishing villages along the eastern and southern coasts, it came to be defined by migrations from India and China. It also attracted small groups of individuals and communities with specialised roles. These included the Armenian Sarkies Brothers who built the E&O Hotel in 1885, a thriving Jewish community, Ismailis, and Malayalees – a heady mix of peoples and cultures.

The loss of its free port status deflated the economic and social life of George Town. The decline was a gradual process. However, George Town also had the most number of buildings under rent control, which made the city affordable. The net effect was the preservation of the inner city George Town, which became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2008.

Whilst George Town, the city, languished in benign neglect, Penang developed its new FDI-driven manufacturing destiny in the Bayan Lepas Free Trade Zone. Foreign capital was in search of cheap labour in the right location – one that is supported by good logistics and services. Land was reclaimed, foreign capital and technology poured in, and the new townships of Bayan Baru and Seberang Jaya were developed. This industrial development also spilt into the mainland, into Kedah along the Sungai Patani-Butterworth-Kulim industrial corridor.

Forty years after FDI-driven manufacturing development, the Penang model – the Lim Chong Eu model – became a national model for industrialisation. But low value-added manufacturing had few linkages to the domestic economy and needed to move up the value ladder, going beyond merely more capital and a supply of labour.

It was clear that the Greater George Town industrial conurbation needed human capital to move further up the value chain. The hypothesis was that places that are able to attract talent will be places that will move upward towards knowledge-based enterprises. And talent, a mobile global commodity, goes where the quality of life is high.

For this reason, the GTTP that Khazanah developed stipulated that one of the key assets for the next stage of industrial development in the Northern Corridor is George Town, the city itself. It has the history, the charm and the cosmopolitanism that is unrivalled. If properly conserved, the city can be transformed into a sticky space for talent thus making the regeneration of George Town important.

The George Town Grants Programme (GTGP) was a specific initiative under the broader GTTP programme. Khazanah formed Think City to implement the GTGP, adopting an open and participative bottom-up approach.

The design and implementation of the GTGP leveraged the George Town community. Small community-based institutions – the civil society – became the many pillars of the GTGP. Involving grassroots organisations is always a noisy proposition but it remains the key ingredient for successful implementation of in-situ programmes.

Today, one can see that the George Town World Heritage Site and the buffer zone around it have undergone tremendous transformation. Those involved in that journey, like me, would like to think the GTTP has something to do with the change.

If the measure of success is the amount of private spending this public grant can attract, the GTGP has been a great success. It is so successful that one of our fears at the start of the programme – gentrification – is a serious threat that needs to be managed.

Passion can be stifling and irrational but nothing meaningful is ever achieved without a good dose of passion. Both the GTTP and the GTGP were the dreams and products of passion.

No one embodies that passion more than the team at Khazanah Koridor Utara and at Think City. Two quintessential Penangites, Anwar Fazal and Laurence Loh, agreed to sit on the board of Think City during its tumultuous birth and saw through the implementation of the GTGP, all the time providing maturity and leadership in thought and action.

Hamdan Majeed, as usual, straddles many places at once – he is the Executive Director of Think City and also heads the Khazanah Koridor Utara office. Hamdan typifies the island mentality of synchronised separateness and openness; a global worldview pivoted around Penang! Another colleague, Suryani Senja Alias of Kuala Lumpur, brings to the team the same passion and energy about historical authenticity and value. The author of this book, Neil Khor, is another side of the Penang personality – the fiercely independent and scholarly side. A great team!

I have enjoyed the privilege of being a part of this George Town story at its inception, and witnessed the beauty that comes out from this interaction of passion and place in defining the interaction of people and spaces. I take particular pride in the fact that not much public money was needed to make a big difference. On top of everything else, the GTGP demonstrated that when government intervention is primarily publicly-driven, more good things happen at much less cost to public coffers.

Think City also developed a grants management manual for future reference. Today, the Think City model is being replicated in Butterworth, Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru. The Think City team itself has grown with the expansion of the mandate. This expansion is, in my view, an attempt at developing the central thesis of the George Town experiment – that all places are unique with their own stories and histories. More importantly, the attempt at defining the relationships between peoples and spaces has to be a local exercise.

The bottom-up approach that Think City adopted democratised the process of ideation, widening participation in the projects it funded. It was the people's project. The community owned the projects, so they have every incentive to support them and make them successful.

Policy interventions and programmes that respect local knowledge and are tailored towards local conditions make the most difference – a kind of indigeneity that results in positive endogeneity! This is what the GTGP has demonstrated, and this publication, I hope, will be a record of that wonderful journey.

Melaka and George Town, Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca



Melaka and George Town, historic cities of the Straits of Malacca, have developed over 500 years of trading and cultural exchanges between East and West in the Straits of Malacca. The influences of Asia and Europe have endowed the towns with a specific multicultural heritage that is both tangible and intangible. With its government buildings, churches, squares and fortifications, Melaka demonstrates the early stages of this history originating in the 15th century Malay sultanate and the Portuguese and Dutch periods beginning in the early 16th century. Featuring residential and commercial buildings, George Town represents the British era from the end of the 18th century. The two towns constitute a unique architectural and cultural townscape without parallel anywhere in East and Southeast Asia.

Source: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1223>



A Note on Names

'Melaka' is the Malaysian spelling of the name of the city and the state. On May 3, 2017, the state government announced that the anglicised spelling of Malacca will be discontinued. So, throughout this book, the spelling 'Melaka' will be used. The official title of the UNESCO World Heritage Site is 'Melaka and George Town, historic cities of the Straits of Malacca'. In line with this, the spelling 'Malacca' will be retained when referring to the straits.

'Lebuh' and 'Jalan' are both Malay words for 'street' and are used for street names (such as Lebuh Queen and Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling) throughout this book, except in quotations from people who themselves chose to use the English word 'street'. The Malay word 'Lorong' means 'lane' (as in Lorong Soo Hong).

Quick Take

FOR the first time in human history, there are more people living in cities than in all other places combined. While urbanisation has spawned innovation and efficiencies, it has also created social and environmental issues. Malaysia is no exception and its cities are facing the same challenges confronting other fast-growing economies.

In an era of hyper-mobile talent and capital, city managers must ensure that the urban environment is not only liveable but unique. They must strike the right balance between the needs of the local community, the environment and the homogenising forces of globalisation.

Once known as the Pearl of the Orient, Penang Island at the turn of the 20th century exemplified these challenges, struggling with urban sprawl, increased regional competition, loss of talent and a hollowed-out city core.

The once-bustling port city of George Town, on the Straits of Malacca, had long lost its shimmer.

When George Town, along with Melaka, received UNESCO heritage site status in 2008, Think City was established to help the city retrieve its relevance while respecting its heritage.

Think City launched the George Town Grants Programme as a laboratory experiment to catalyse urban regeneration, conserve heritage values, enhance liveability and create an economy based on culture.

Chapter 1

THE AGE OF CITIES:

Penang In The Global Context

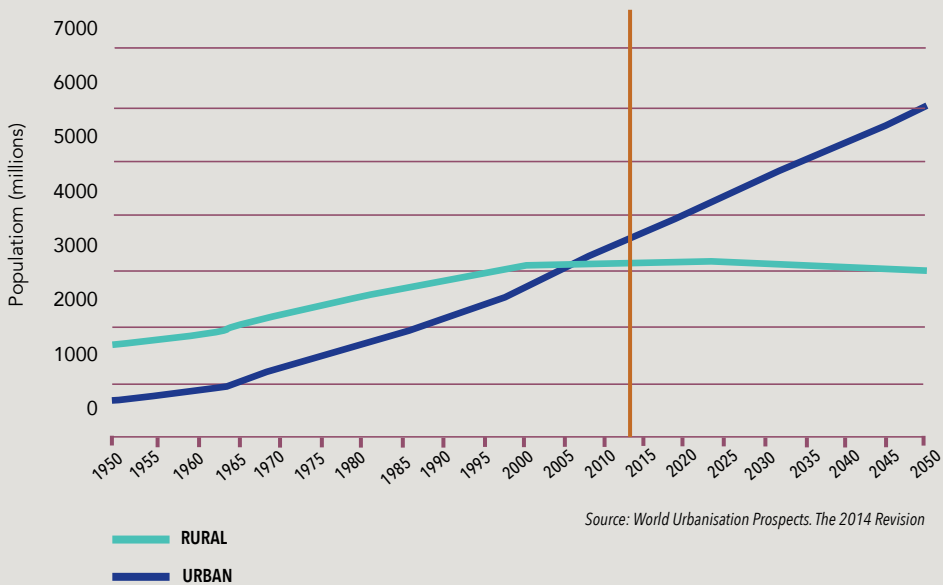
The Challenge of Urbanisation

Cities are engines of growth. They account for 80% of global GDP and more than half of the world's population. Rapid urbanisation is expected to continue, with an additional 2.5 billion people to be added to city populations by 2050, the majority in medium-sized cities in Asia and Africa (*United Nations, 2014*).

There are, however, major challenges associated with rapid urbanisation – traffic congestion, air pollution, environmental degradation, waste disposal problems, crime and inequity. Municipal councils struggle to keep up with the infrastructure and service needs of its citizens.

Urban and Rural Population of the World, 1950-2050

A majority of the world's population lives in urban areas



Moreover, the demands of rapid growth, coupled with globalisation, often result in the homogenisation of culture and urban form. Shopping malls with the same brands, skyscrapers with the same glass cladding, hotel chains with uniform layouts and fast-food outlets with the same menus indicate increasing placelessness. In an era where capital and talent are highly mobile, cities must compete. Place identity, uniqueness and liveability, therefore, matter.

These global trends are reflected in Malaysia. Its rapid development over the last few decades has seen its urban population increase to over 70%, one of the highest in Asia. This growth has led to multiple issues in the way cities have been planned and developed. For example, the distance between jobs and places of residence creates long commutes and adds to congestion.

Suburbanisation has led to 'hollowed-out' city cores suffering from a general decline in amenity values. Malaysian cities are also not immune to the homogenising forces of globalisation, with many new developments lacking distinctiveness. The challenge lies in developing well-planned cities that are uniquely Malaysian, modern, yet reflective of its heritage.

New Ways Forward

Technological improvements in transport and communication in the latter part of the 20th century enabled the relocation of manufacturing hubs to lower cost centres. Much of Malaysia's development success during the 1970s and 1980s was its ability to capture its share of international investment in new industries. However, by the 1990s, Malaysia itself began facing competition from lower cost centres in Asia.

To respond to this challenge, Malaysia and other countries had to adapt. Industries had to evolve and build on acquired know-how to forge out new economic opportunities higher up the value chain. To do this, however, requires talent. While education and wages are of course important, the liveability of cities increasingly matters.

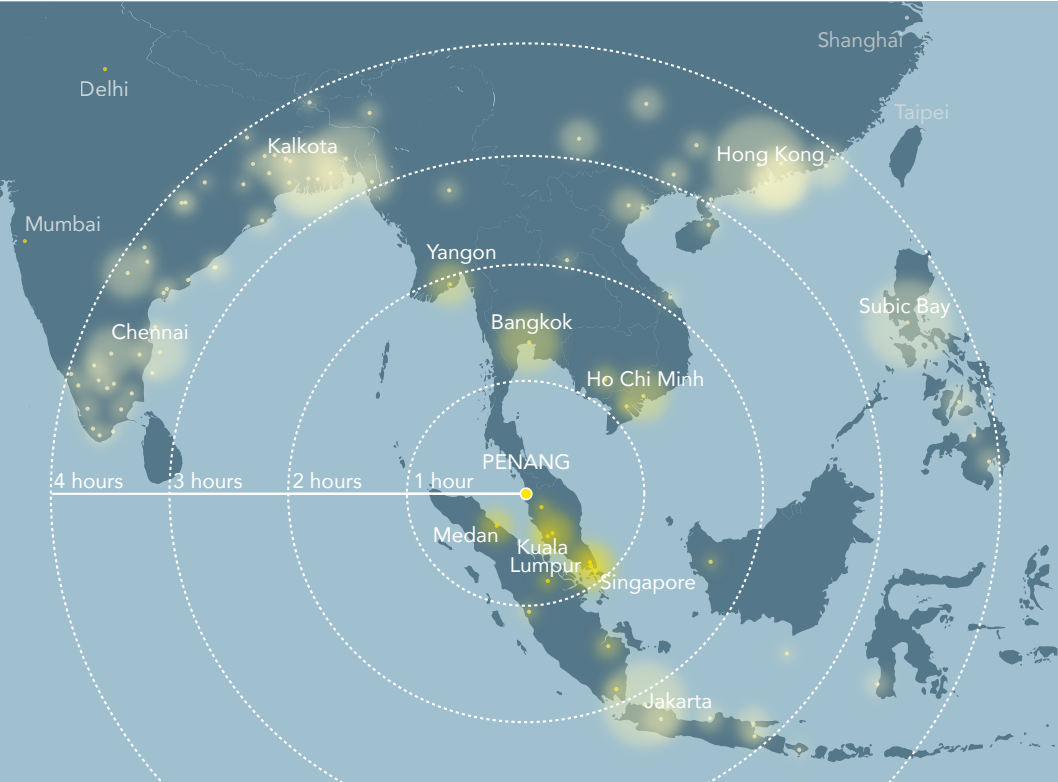
A British poll of some 3,000 business leaders found that 40% felt that urban amenity was a driving factor in determining investment decisions (*Communications Group, 2009*). Similarly, a study on Penang by Khazanah Nasional and the World Bank found that skilled labour considering relocation was just as concerned about the liveability of a city as much as the salary package.

Assuming basic essentials such as good schools, security and cleanliness exist, cities that have a unique sense of place, heritage, culture and character are better positioned to attract talent and new forms of investment. Evidence from around the world suggests that 'identity' cannot be manufactured or imposed from above. It needs to bubble up from the grassroots. City managers, therefore, need to forge a relationship with its citizens based on mutual trust and a shared vision.

Khazanah Nasional Berhad

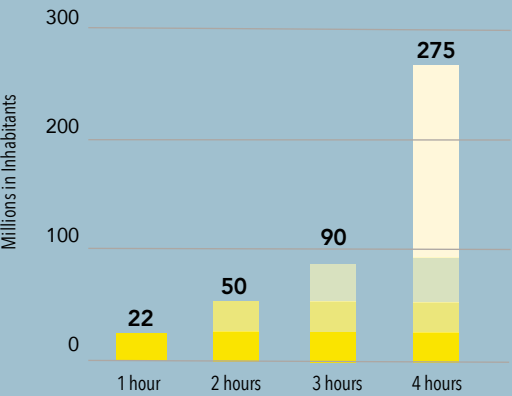
Khazanah Nasional Berhad (Khazanah) is the Government of Malaysia's strategic investment arm. As a trustee of the nation's commercial assets, its role is to promote economic growth and make strategic investments which contribute to nation-building.

Overview of Penang's Catchment Area



Airport Of Penang

Catchment Areas
Population in cities above 500,000



Opposite / General view of clan jetties.

George Town: Challenge and Response

Penang has a population of some 1.7 million people. It sits at the apex of the world's fastest growing region and is within three hours flight to some of the most dynamic regions in Asia. It still remains an export-oriented, high-volume manufacturing region. However, regional competition and declining urban amenity has undermined its comparative advantage.

It must make a transition to a specialised value-adding economy with a higher level skills base, more local innovation and a rediscovery of its historical trade links within the region. To succeed, Penang must reposition itself and transition to a new economic model based on knowledge and culture. To attract and retain talent, it has to offer better amenities and genuine places of interest

A key component of this effort is Penang's capital, inner city George Town, a UNESCO-listed World Heritage Site. During the 1980s

and 1990s the city core had decayed due to a combination of investment in suburban shopping malls and housing estates, a shift in port activities to the mainland, and rent control.

In 2008, when it received its heritage listing, George Town's remnant building stock of more than 5,200 monuments and shophouses along with a community rich in cultural tradition had the basic foundations for a model urban regeneration effort. This potential revitalisation could significantly enhance Penang's appeal for new capital and talent. But it would have to be done in a manner that was bottom-up.

It was in this environment that Think City was established to administer the George Town Grants Programme (GTGP). A founding principle was a community-based approach that would deliver a genuine heritage offering for visitors and residents. This was a new concept for Malaysia, and George Town was to become an experimental lab for city-making, with the GTGP as a tool to catalyse change.



Quick Take

FROM its foundation in 1786 till the 1970s, George Town flourished as a trading centre. It then suffered a sharp decline after its port operations moved to the mainland and it became disengaged from its main economic driver – manufacturing.

In 2000, the Rent Control Act was lifted and long-time tenants lost security of tenure and low rents. Profit-driven property developers stepped in to redevelop properties with little regard for the city's wider needs.

However, the city's fortunes took an upturn in July 2008, when George Town achieved UNESCO World Heritage listing as part of a single, combined site known as 'Melaka and George Town, historic cities of the Straits of Malacca'.

At about the same time, Khazanah launched the George Town Transformation Programme, which aimed to combine the city's rich historical legacy with a 21st century vision of city development based on the principles of economic, social and ecological sustainability. The programme is based around community involvement and public-private partnerships.

As a first step towards implementing the programme, Khazanah established a Special Purpose Vehicle called Think City, whose mandate was to promote and preserve the city's living culture and heritage areas. Think City then launched a four-year George Town Grants Programme, the nation's first public grants programme for urban regeneration in a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Chapter 2

GROWTH, DECLINE & REGENERATION OF GEORGE TOWN

The Growth of George Town

While Penang Island itself, once part of the Kedah Sultanate, has a long history as an important refuelling point for ships and traders en route from India to China, modern George Town began life in 1786 as an English East India Company trading factory.



Above / An aerial view of George Town's historic core which became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2008.



Known locally as Tanjong Penaga (Cape Penaga) after the robust Penaga tree, this British trading outpost soon developed into a regional trans-shipment hub and collection centre for local produce. This included bird's nests (for medicinal and culinary use), pepper, nutmeg, indigo and other important ingredients that made up the spice trade. By the mid-19th century, Penang had become an important port of call in the wider British empire and a leading supplier of tin.

The port and its trade attracted people from many races, religions and ways of life, and this mix gave rise to a culture that became unique to Penang. The island and its mainland buffer, Seberang Prai (formerly known as Province Wellesley), protected by British gunboats, was a safe haven for many peoples who came by the sea to do business and later to settle on the island.

Meanwhile, the natives, mostly former subjects of the Sultan of Kedah, supplied the newcomers with rice and other local produce. Many also became traders themselves and fully participated in expanding the settlement. Two centuries later, George Town remains firmly multi-ethnic and multi-religious.

Together with Melaka, Singapore and Labuan, Penang once formed part of a political unit called the Straits Settlements (1826–1946).



The Straits Settlements

The Straits Settlements was a British colony on the Straits of Malacca comprising four trade centres, Penang, Melaka, Singapore and Labuan, established or taken over by the East India Company.

A British settlement was founded in Penang in 1786 and in Singapore in 1819. Melaka was occupied by the British during the Napoleonic Wars and was transferred to the East India Company in 1824. The three territories were established as a crown colony in 1867. Labuan was part of the Singapore Settlement in 1907 but became a separate fourth settlement in 1912.

The Straits colony was broken up in 1946 when Singapore became a separate crown colony. Singapore gained full internal self-government in 1959, became a part of Malaysia in 1963, and became an independent republic in 1965. Labuan was incorporated into North Borneo (later Sabah) in 1946, which in turn became a part of Malaysia in 1963. Penang and Melaka were included in the Malayan Union in 1946, the Federation of Malaya in 1948 and Malaysia in 1963.



Above / Lebuhr Pantai, the central business district of George Town in the early 20th century.

Opposite / Weld Quay in the early 20th century. This part of town was gradually reclaimed from the sea from the 1880s. By the early 1900s, it had an extended pier, electric trams and merchant houses symbolic of the city's role as a major transshipment port in the region.

George Town in Decline

George Town however lost its free port status in 1969. Its vibrant entrepôt character started to stagnate. Countless attempts were subsequently made to revitalise George Town, but for the most part they failed, because every plan was limited by a short-term outlook and piecemeal approach.

By 1998, the economy of George Town had languished for nearly a decade. This was especially clear in the historic core which had been in a state of gradual decline since its port operations moved to the mainland in the 1970s. It was a city that seemed to have lost its way, cut off from its economic life-blood, manufacturing.

Rent control had kept the culture of the inner city intact with low rents and long-term tenants. But it also meant that owners had little incentive to upgrade their property. Half a century of neglect pushed the city centre into decay.



Above / No place for the pedestrians as vehicles take over the island's streets. Are we moving people or cars?



When the Rent Control Act (1947) was lifted in 2000, it actually worsened the situation. Long-time tenants were hit with soaring rents. They had the choice of paying more or moving out.

Before long, the historic core was drained of its residents, vibrancy and traditional economic activity. Some buildings were left to crumble. The port operations that once anchored George Town's multi-ethnic

communities faded away. The waterfront, once the source of all its wealth and energy, was out of sight, shut down and forgotten.

Soon after, property developers started stepping in and began piecemeal redevelopment projects in the area with the primary aim of profit and with little regard for the city's urban fabric. George Town's unique historic heritage and character were now in serious jeopardy.

Above / The former Mission House of the London Missionary Society. In 2008, this derelict site was the common face of a city in decline.

The George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site

A major change in the city's fortunes occurred in July 2008 when George Town achieved UNESCO World Heritage Site listing as part of a single, combined site known as 'Melaka and George Town, historic cities of the Straits of Malacca'.

To be included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, a site must be of 'Outstanding Universal Value'. This means that it must possess a significance that is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance to present and future generations of all humanity. UNESCO defines the Outstanding Universal Value of the combined site as follows:

"Melaka and George Town, Malaysia, are remarkable examples of historic colonial towns on the Straits of Malacca that demonstrate a succession of historical and cultural influences arising from their former function as trading ports linking East and West. These are the most complete surviving historic city centres on the Straits of Malacca with a multi-cultural living heritage originating from the trade routes from Great Britain and Europe through the Middle East, the Indian Subcontinent and the Malay Archipelago to China. Both towns bear testimony to a living multi-cultural heritage and tradition of Asia, where the many religions and cultures met and coexisted. They reflect the coming together of cultural elements from the Malay Archipelago, India and China with those of Europe, to create a unique architecture, culture and townscape."

Opposite / Traditional festivals and practices remain the heartbeat of George Town's communities. Increasingly there is less space for them as mall culture takes root.

To merit UNESCO listing, a site must also meet at least one of ten criteria. Melaka and George Town fulfil three of the ten:

Criterion (ii): Melaka and George Town represent exceptional examples of multi-cultural trading towns in East and Southeast Asia, forged from the mercantile exchanges of Malay, Chinese and Indian cultures and three successive European colonial powers for almost 500 years, each with its imprints on the architecture and urban form, technology and monumental art. Both towns show different stages of development and the successive changes over a long span of time and are thus complementary.

Criterion (iii): Melaka and George Town are living testimony to the multi-cultural heritage and tradition of Asia, and European colonial influences. This multi-cultural tangible and intangible heritage is expressed in the great variety of religious buildings of different faiths, ethnic quarters, the many languages, worship and religious festivals, dances, costumes, art and music, food, and daily life.

Criterion (iv): Melaka and George Town reflect a mixture of influences which have created a unique architecture, culture and townscape without parallel anywhere in East and South Asia. In particular, they demonstrate an exceptional range of shophouses and townhouses. These buildings show many different types and stages of development of the building type, some originating in the Dutch or Portuguese periods.



Intangible Heritage

As emphasised by UNESCO, cultural heritage is not limited to material manifestations, such as monuments and objects. It also includes 'intangible heritage', i.e. traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, and the knowledge and skills to produce traditional craft.

Intangible cultural heritage is fragile but it is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalisation. An understanding of the intangible cultural heritage of different communities helps with intercultural dialogue and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life.

The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself, but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a state, and is as important for developing states as for developed ones.



Above / Historic clan jetties. Settlements set up in the early 20th century to serve the port economy are being threatened by conventional developments.

Opposite / On a trishaw, one can experience the city at a human pace. But this is mainly now for the enjoyment of tourists as the trade is dying out.

The UNESCO World Heritage Site listing was not unexpected. What was unique about the listing of George Town was that the push for its nomination came about largely through civil society action. After 1983, when the Penang Heritage Trust was formed, a small group of committed members campaigned for the preservation of George Town's unique heritage buildings. In the 1990s, that movement also embraced the city's living heritage, including endangered trades.



In 2000, when the Rent Control Act was repealed, the trust members were spurred into lobbying state and federal governmental authorities to get George Town nominated for a World Heritage Site listing. The Penang Heritage Trust initiated the Penang Story project, together with other civil society organisations that included media organisation Star Media Group Berhad. Its aim was to heighten awareness of the historic significance of the city and its unique living heritage.

The vibrant public campaign, with the theme 'celebrating cultural diversity', also included the participation of community organisations. Malaysia's number one English daily, *The Star*, which began its life in Penang, ran a year-long weekly series. Four colloquiums in vernacular languages and an international conference were held. Most importantly, the Penang Story brought together key documentary evidence to support the nomination of George Town to UNESCO's heritage listing.

George Town World Heritage Site



Zon Teras
Core Zone

Zon Penampan
Buffer Zone



Perniagaan Tradisional
Traditional Trades

Tapak Bersejarah
Historical Sites

George Town Transformation Programme

While the spirited move to get Melaka and George Town on the UNESCO heritage list was underway, an initiative dedicated to George Town's regeneration was ongoing. Khazanah, which had earlier created Iskandar Malaysia (a new city and now the country's second largest urban area, situated in the southern state of Johor) was now keen on exploring a different development model that involved the regeneration of an existing city.

To this end, Khazanah launched the George Town Transformation Programme, with the aim of marrying the city's rich historical legacy with a 21st century vision of development based on the principles of economic, social and ecological sustainability.

Supported by global master planners EDAW (now AECOM) and local subject experts, the Heritage of Malaysia Trust (Badan Warisan Malaysia), the programme proposed a proper evaluation of all the city's assets in its approach to regeneration. This meant implementing a new philosophy of urban planning that placed emphasis on matters beyond economic growth. This included environmental sustainability, economic equity, cultural resilience and community needs. Speaking in 2006 about this approach to 'city-making', the lead consultant, Amna Emir, explained:

"Up until the 1990s, urban planning was very much an engineering puzzle. City administrators were constantly looking for engineering solutions to problems that afflicted their cities. Whether this had to do with urban transport, water management or building density, there was a belief that engineering solutions and technological advancement were the building blocks for a great city.

"Real-estate developers, with vast resources, continued to drive urban development in Penang, often without complying with any overall vision. Because of the density of privately-owned land in the city centre, the outcome was an insular approach that focused on the creation of urban value on specific land plots, often without any consideration for the wider needs of city development.



Right / Amna Emir, consultant for the George Town Transformation Programme.

“The result was a string of private investments that produced short-term profits for private investors but unsustainable outcomes for the city. This real-estate model of city development had to be tempered with a thoughtful approach to area development. In turn, this connected with what the George Town Transformation Programme actually envisaged – a defined vision for the transformation of George Town. The vision would enable city managers to consider selected investments that would generate positive outcomes for Penang as a whole. This would transform George Town’s environment into a more friendly and sustainable one.”

Dr Shahridan Faiez, a former World Bank senior economist and a member of the Khazanah Northern Corridor team, drew up the terms of reference for George Town’s transformation based upon a broadly inclusive interdisciplinary approach.

“The George Town Transformation Programme was looking for a new approach to urban planning by putting people at the centre of ‘city-making’.



Above / Former World Bank Senior Economist Dr Shahridan Faiez drew up the terms of reference for George Town’s transformation.

“The plan would go beyond merely relying on engineering solutions and technological advancement to improve environmental living. This demanded a multi-disciplinary approach where history and sociology would be as important as engineering.

“The discipline of urban planning already takes into account the wishes of different communities, but it was also important to make sure that physical developments were aligned to the specific economic needs and aspirations of Penang,” he stressed.

Thus, the George Town Transformation Programme had an approach to urban development that was based on broader values. Every recommendation and project under the Programme had to fulfil that set of values. They had to be closely associated with George Town and the wider Penang community. Furthermore, urban interventions needed to respect George Town’s human scale, with buildings kept to a particular size and height so as to preserve the city’s character.

The Khazanah team believed that:

“Development should be respectful, inclusive, sustainable and innovative. Additionally, these interventions should foster partnerships and demonstrate creativity. While it might not be possible for a single project to meet all these values, it was important that stakeholders began to think and plan in that direction.”

This values-based approach is perhaps the most important contribution of the George Town Transformation Programme to urban planning in Malaysia.

The Way Forward

The George Town Transformation Programme team began work by interviewing local stakeholders. This included city managers, civil society representatives and business and community leaders. It was also important to align both state and federal governments behind a shared vision of Penang's future development, one that took into account the regeneration of George Town as its starting point.

Khazanah, working with The World Bank, conducted a study on positioning Penang's economy. This included interviews, public workshops and an international conference that featured both local and international industry players. One key conclusion from the discussions was that Penang was already moving up the value chain from a low-cost economy to a more talent-driven one. In the future, the services sector would expand to equal manufacturing as a main supplier of jobs.

A strategy to make Penang attractive to talented professionals also meant turning it into what is sometimes referred to as a 'sticky space'. This involved reducing crime, grime and time spent in traffic jams. The aim was to offer an enhanced quality of life.

In line with its new urban planning aspirations, Khazanah connected directly with Penang's lively civil society groups. By revisiting the Sustainable Penang Initiative (a citizens' initiative started in 1998 to make Penang more sustainable and liveable through a consultative process that involved civil society, government and the business community), civil society groups proposed a different vision for Penang's future.

This vision took into account social equity, environmental sustainability, economic resilience through continuous community engagement and cultural diversity. A series of participatory consultations were held over a period of a year and the findings presented as key inputs to the Penang State Government.

The Northern Corridor Economic Region Initiative

In 2007, Malaysia's Federal Government proposed the Northern Corridor Economic Region Initiative which provided a road map for social and economic development to accelerate economic growth and raise income levels and overall quality of life in the north of Peninsular Malaysia. Many of the initiatives were focused on Penang's economic competitiveness and aimed at improving it through diversification and development of niche markets, giving George Town an opportunity to reverse its decline.

Together with *Cities, People & The Economy*, the findings of the Sustainable Penang Initiative forums were incorporated as defining principles of the George Town Transformation Programme. Moving forward, all development plans associated with the programme had to be in line with the principles of being catalytic, sustainable, developmental, inclusive, respectful and innovative.

Creative Cities

The thinking behind the George Town Transformation Programme was stimulated by the 'creative city' phenomenon.

According to UNESCO, as explained in *Creative Cities: Promoting social and economic development through cultural industries (2004)*, creative cities are successful cities. They succeed culturally, economically, socially and environmentally. They are good places to live. They attract talented people, who in turn attract investment and create jobs. By finding innovative solutions to problems such as crime and traffic congestion, they make life better for citizens.

A key ingredient for the success of creative cities is the creation of public-private partnerships that help unlock the entrepreneurial and creative potential of small enterprises which play an important role in industrial restructuring. These small creative businesses need innovative talent to underpin their development. As a result, cities with strong contemporary art, fashion, craft, music, and design schools are best placed to flourish.

Regional and town planners are increasingly taking into account the role of creativity in economic policy planning. They now want to integrate cultural assets – tangible and intangible – into their education systems, the natural environment and their geographic location. In an ever more competitive economy, regions and cities are beginning to realise that to be successful, they must develop, attract and retain talented and creative people who generate innovations, develop technology-intensive industries and power economic growth.

Creative-friendly environments are key to achieving this and cities across the developed world are establishing municipal services to sustain the local creative economy, facilitating cooperation between the private and public sectors as well as civil society.

Regenerating a Historic City

Although the George Town Transformation Programme was being developed before UNESCO decided to list the historic core of George Town as a World Heritage Site, it not only adopted the physical boundaries of the site as its parameters for intervention but it also took into account the guidelines required by UNESCO for the long-term care and preservation of George Town's Outstanding Universal Value. However, conservation was but one element in the George Town Transformation Programme's urban regeneration strategy. It also included an alignment with the Penang State Government's plans for the management of the city.

While UNESCO's heritage listing of a large area of George Town provided a useful demarcation and established very clearly a set of developmental principles, it also brought new challenges. The management of the island, which included the highly urbanised north and east coasts as well as the more rural west coast and interior region, had to now contend with the special requirements of a UNESCO World Heritage Site in George Town. This required not only additional resources but also people with specialised skills. Property owners and developers affected by a new set of restrictions, including height limitations and conservation practices, had to be persuaded to support the listing. The living trades and the very lifestyle that got the city nominated and listed were now hit by higher rents as property prices began to escalate.

By the end of 2008, fresh from the celebratory state-declared public holiday on July 7 and all the fanfare that went with the listing, the city managers had to come to terms with the new challenges and responsibilities associated with being a UNESCO World Heritage Site. These

The George Town Transformation Programme at a Glance

The George Town Transformation Programme's key objective was to create a collective vision for a sustainable and 'liveable' George Town (including the larger George Town area) within the Northern Corridor. There were four component projects:

- **FAST: Facilitate Accelerate Support Transform**

An innovative small grants programme designed to provide financial support for the development of civic, cultural and intellectual skills in George Town. It was intended to promote the regeneration of George Town through a series of relatively small-scale initiatives.

- **CLICK: Connect Learn Imagine Create Kick-start**

For the Komplex Tun Abdul Razak (KOMTAR) area of George Town, a programmed physical intervention designed to boost environmental, economic and social sustainability. The aim was to turn it into a centre for creativity and learning with the right initiatives.

- **EASE: Efficient Access in a Sustainable Environment**

A transport strategy involving traffic calming, encouraging public transport and transferring the vehicular ferry to align with the Jelutong Expressway (now Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu Expressway).

- **Full Life on the Waterfront**

To develop George Town's waterfront by expanding and connecting civic amenities along the Esplanade from Dewan Sri Pinang to Swettenham Pier, which features a cruise ship terminal. Opportunities for investments in the form of new developments would also be created.

challenges included the immediate need to set up an area authority to build public awareness of the city's Outstanding Universal Value. They were required to develop the measures needed to protect the site, to set up a monitoring and enforcement system to regulate development, encourage private investments and rehabilitate the city. Most important of all, they had to develop a Special Area Plan to protect the site.

These new developments meant that some parts of the George Town Transformation Programme had to be reconfigured while its phased development plans were being implemented.

Penang's famed chaotic traffic situation had to be 'calmed' to bring it in line with the

city's UNESCO World Heritage Site status requirements. Basically, traffic calming demands the use of physical design and other measures to improve safety for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists. It aims to encourage more responsible driving and, potentially, reduce traffic flow.

The proposed creation of a green artery linking the KOMTAR development through Lebuhraya Carnarvon into the Lebuhraya Armenia area up Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling (now popularly known as the 'Street of Harmony' because of the peaceful coexistence of a number of different places of worship along the street) to Dewan Seri Pinang would have to take into account the recommendations of the Special Area Plan.

The entire waterfront redevelopment now had to be scaled down to protect 'viewscales' and height restrictions. Waters surrounding the city on the north and the east were now buffer zones with uses that must not detract from the city's Outstanding Universal Value.

Working with the British Council, Khazanah brought in Adam Wilkinson of the Edinburgh World Heritage Site to share his experience and insights culled from the management of the Edinburgh site. The aim was to help city managers in George Town to understand the new benchmarks expected of them by UNESCO, as well as by visitors, to the site.

In many ways, George Town was not quite prepared for the listing. However, it galvanised all parties, including local government, civil society and business interests, to work together. It was upon this spirit of cooperation that the George Town World Heritage Inc was established. It was formed to fulfil the UNESCO requirement for the setting up of an office dedicated to overseeing development in the World Heritage Site. Dato' Maimunah Mohd Sharif, then Deputy Director of the Penang Island City Council, was appointed to head it.

Meanwhile, experience elsewhere showed that many other UNESCO World Heritage Sites attracted robust tourism. This raised the question of what other complementary growth generators would be needed in George Town to moderate the impact of tourism. In this regard, the experience of UNESCO World Heritage Site of Lyon in France, was instructive.



Right / Aerial view of George Town.





Source: [wikimedia Commons](#) CC BY SA 3.0

Lyon World Heritage Model, France

French architect Didier Repellin has great enthusiasm for his home town of Lyon, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in eastern France, near Switzerland, in the beautiful Rhône Valley, well known for its fine wines.

“I was at the forefront of the heritage movement back in the 1960s when parts of the ancient city were threatened with demolition,” he said. “But more importantly, I have lived to see the change in people’s attitudes towards heritage conservation. I am glad to say it has been a positive change.”



But this did not happen overnight. It was the result of years of education and awareness campaigns, stakeholder meetings and much political lobbying. Eventually, the heritage movement became so popular that locals started to take ownership of the heritage agenda.

“The first time a visitor sees Lyon, he cannot imagine that the city was once threatened with demolition. Medieval Lyon traces its origins to the Bronze Age. The historic city was built close to the Alps by the river Rhône. From this strategic trading location, the city fanned out to the south,” said Repellin, the honorary Chief Architect of Historical Monuments and General Inspector of Historical Monuments, member of the French Society of Archaeology, the French Heritage Society, ICOMOS, and assignment manager missions for UNESCO.

Lyon suffered extensive damage during the French Revolution but managed to retain its mixture of medieval, French Renaissance and 18th century architectural styles. There is also a Roman amphitheatre, now used for concerts and stage performances. In the 19th century, it was the silk capital of Europe.

Today, Lyon is France’s second city, powered by pharmaceutical, software engineering and biotechnology industries. With a population of about 1.7 million, the city is the centre of a larger urban conurbation totalling 4.5 million people. However, its unique identity is derived from its architectural and gastronomic legacies.



Source: www.rla.archi/en/team/didier-repellin

Challenges

“In the 1960s, we had a mayor who felt that we needed to demolish the centuries-old buildings because the medieval streets were too narrow,” Repellin said. “In fact, as you can see, they replaced some of the old buildings with a modern concrete structure.” This was in the ‘red light’ district and part of a wider effort to clean up the city. “But the modern building does not work because it is too impersonal, while the old medieval buildings are a big hit with locals and visitors alike. They continue to draw people.”

Above / Didier Repellin, the honorary Chief Architect of Historical Monuments and General Inspector of Historical Monuments and assignment manager missions for UNESCO.

According to Repellin, in the 1960s, some experts told the city council that the old quarter of Lyon was not suited to the modern economy due to the hilly terrain and narrow medieval streets. They suggested the old quarter be demolished and a new city built.

Heritage enthusiasts had other ideas, and they happened to have the Minister of Culture on their side. Winning that battle was just the beginning of their four-decade journey. They had to demonstrate that historic cities could also be economically viable.

The first step was a weekly article featuring a building or street in the local newspapers. Property owners began to get interested in their buildings. Citizens began to realise that these buildings were legacies left to them by their forebears. Education programmes aimed at raising awareness among young people began bearing fruit as the younger generation grew up. By the 1980s, Lyon’s historic quarter had become a popular place. The heritage movement had mass support as the Lyonnaise now saw themselves as custodians of the ancient city.

Popular Historic Quarter

“We are only now beginning to realise that historic cities are popular because of their size. The height of the buildings do not make us feel small. The streets may be narrow and not built for cars, but they are ideal for walking. Most importantly, the materials used suit the local climatic conditions and little innovations, like natural drainage systems, are still working. They’ve withstood the test of time.

“Businesses in the historic quarter are more sustainable while many businesses in the modern buildings nearby have a high attrition rate. Businesses in historic buildings tend to flourish for years,” he added.

But what can be done about modern man’s love of cars? “We have a four-lane highway exiting at the bottom of the medieval town. This creates a terrible bottleneck. We are now in the process of scaling down the highway,” he said.

Car parking is also a nightmare in the historic city and parking fees are high. Lyon has come up with a radical solution – underground parking. “At first, people did not want to park their cars underground. We decided to tender out the car park design to creative architects. Now our underground car parks are regarded internationally as works of art. The Celestin car park is seven-stories deep and even attracts tourists! The car park operator continues to make a lot of money,” Repellin said.

Astonishingly, these car parks were constructed below Lyon’s historic town squares. They were then connected to trams, subways, pedestrian walkways and, the latest innovation, park-and-cycle facilities, where bicycles are provided for a small fee and are returned when the riders return to their cars.

Despite being wedged between two rivers, modern engineering has made it possible for these huge underground car parks to be constructed. As for the park-and-cycle facility, it is privately driven. “The companies make money from advertisements (hoardings beside the bicycle parks), and earn enough for them to service their bicycles every evening.”

Citizen’s Support

Lyon’s success as a historic city would not have worked without its citizens’ support. People felt the city was valuable and that it defined them. They felt that it needed to be protected. Now, a younger generation has made it work for them economically. This is one reason why there is such a big mix of people, shops and businesses. Lyon is not a city primarily given over to tourism. In fact, tourism is the consequence of its intrinsic beauty.

It has a human scale, good conservation initiatives and cultural vibrancy. In addition, it has an excellent transport system. Lyon is so attractive that many international agencies have decided to locate their headquarters there. They include Interpol, the International Agency for Cancer Research, and Euronews.

For Didier Repellin, heritage is not something impractical or something that belongs in a museum. As an architect, he thinks of heritage as something living. “Building materials, techniques and scale require specialised knowledge handed down to us from the past.”

At a time when the world’s resources are being used up at a phenomenal rate, the old knowledge of building sustainable cities is more important than ever. In that sense, heritage is modern, up-to-date and crucial for our survival.



Above / One of the first grants provided for an arts incubation space in Lebuh Muntri.

Establishment of Think City

In line with the 2009 budget, Malaysia's Federal Government announced that RM50 million was to be allocated to Melaka and George Town to support heritage conservation work subsequent to the listing of the cities as a joint UNESCO World Heritage Site. This special allocation was

to support private property owners and non-governmental organisations. More importantly, the Ministry of Finance made it very clear that the allocation could not be used for public buildings, which already had their respective maintenance allocations. The special allocation for Melaka was managed by the National Heritage Department while the allocation for Penang was to be managed by Khazanah.

As a first step towards implementing the George Town Transformation Programme, Khazanah established a Special Purpose Vehicle to manage the RM20 million allocation that the Federal Government had set aside for Penang. While the historic core of George Town was part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it was also the nucleus of a larger urban conurbation. A purely conservation-driven approach would be ignoring this wider role as well as duplicating the duties of the newly formed George Town World Heritage Inc. Moreover, the special allocation was meant for the private sector and civil society groups, so the usual top-down model was not the most efficient way to disburse the allocation for urban regeneration.

To get this message across as clearly as possible, Khazanah decided that the Special Purpose Vehicle would be called Think City. It was incorporated as a not-for-profit private limited company with a mandate 'to carry out efforts in promoting and preserving the living culture and heritage areas'. Think City is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Khazanah and operates with its own independent board of directors. For decision-making purposes, it also has an advisory board of international and local subject experts. Think City would begin operations by 'initiating projects relating to the rejuvenation and transformation of George Town, Penang', but it could also operate elsewhere in Malaysia.

George Town Grants Programme

With the incorporation of Think City in August 2009, the role of Khazanah's office in Penang now involved monitoring the implementation of Think City's plans for George Town, while all financial management would be conducted from Khazanah's headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. By December 2009, Think City was ready to launch the George Town Grants Programme to run for four years. This was the nation's first public grants programme for urban regeneration in a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The decision to use public grants as a medium for resource allocation was based on the objectives of the George Town Transformation Programme, especially the FAST initiative. This initiative defined Think City's role to 'Facilitate, Accelerate, Sustain and Transform' the city through 100 small projects.

Operating in a city where 85% of all buildings are in private hands and where 75% of all businesses rent their premises, the Think City team was convinced that a bottom-up strategy was the best way to reach out to as many stakeholders as possible using public-private partnerships, with public grants acting as an incentive.

Through these partnerships, an inclusive approach was instituted with transparent fund management. Public grants would be the tool to enable policy to be put into practice. Only by winning public confidence through innovative ideas, prudent financial management and successful projects would Think City be able to make sure that its initiatives were sustainable. This was a new way to launch urban regeneration and, with it, the initial steps were taken to create a liveable and sustainable George Town.

Quick Take

UNDERSTANDING why George Town developed the way it did involves investigating why people originally came to trade and settle there, how the city's evolution was affected by climate and topography, and how George Town relates to its hinterland and the wider region.

In addition, the George Town Transformation Programme had identified a number of key interventions for urban regeneration, the success of which could only be monitored if a quantified assessment of the current social and economic characteristics of the city was undertaken.

For these reasons, Think City commissioned a baseline study of George Town's historic core, involving a land use survey and a population census. The study revealed that many properties were vacant and in bad shape. There weren't that many residents and few people were interested in renting office space there.

In addition, it showed that the population had fallen by nearly two-thirds since 1964, that it was demographically unbalanced, that there was a lack of skilled and professional workers, and that cultural diversity was in sharp decline. Moreover, traffic congestion and inappropriate development projects and economic activities were having a bad effect on the city.

To address these issues, Think City refined the objectives of the George Town Grants Programme by combining the best ideas from the ground with a more strategic and targeted approach, and by uniting stakeholders behind a shared vision for regeneration. This resulted in a series of initiatives designed to help establish a creative economy and attract new talent and knowledge to the city.

The Special Area Plan and a Heritage Management Plan were also drawn up to strike a balance between community needs, economic realities and environmental concerns.

Chapter 3

MAPPING THE CITY:

The UNESCO World Heritage Site

Understanding the Site

A city's historical development usually determines its contemporary character and features. Therefore, before devising a strategy for urban regeneration, the first task is to gather the essential background information.

Knowing why people originally headed for a particular location in order to trade, sojourn and settle makes it easier to understand why a city developed the way it did. At first, a city may develop economically because of its strategic location. Over time, however, it may go on to evolve into a place of special historical and cultural significance. This is the case with cities that qualify for UNESCO World Heritage Site status.



Coming to grips with a city's historical development requires a multi-disciplinary approach. It involves understanding its communities – the way they function and how they relate to the environment from which they derive their principal sources of livelihood. It also involves a study of the local climate and topography – where the city is located, its geological characteristics, the availability of stone or timber or clay for bricks, the watercourses and their flood plains, and the supply of fresh water and food.

In the case of George Town, investigations began with a compilation of all available geological and geographical information. The fact that large parts of the city were once swamps was crucial to understanding the early building techniques and the materials used. It was also vital to remember that George Town is part of a larger ecosystem and that the urban fabric evolved in adaptation to it. Fresh water, which was brought to the city by an aqueduct in the early 19th century, is supplied through underground pipes today.

Above / A city of shophouses in gentle decline.

A modern sewerage system, to which many parts of the city are not yet connected, is still being laid, as is the electricity supply. Drains, many of them covered, also required mapping as flooding is a fact of life. As more green spaces were replaced with buildings, an urban 'heat island' has emerged causing residents to suffer higher temperatures.

In terms of economics, it was important to understand how George Town relates to its hinterland, upon which it relies on for so many of its needs. This involved studying the larger George Town and it raised questions about the city's 'comparative advantage' and future role in the wider region. It was also necessary to consider how the conurbation was likely to expand in future by exploring its tapped and untapped networks across the region.

It was equally important to understand the current and future needs that would help sustainable growth. Only then could a set of strategies be drawn up to improve the city's 'liveability' and, thereby, attract the kind of well-qualified, talented people who would propel economic structural reform.

Another issue to examine was whether the small towns that had developed within the conurbation could retain their resilience if Penang realises its post-industrial aspiration to become a knowledge-centric economy.

George Town Baseline Study

The George Town Transformation Programme had identified a number of key interventions for urban regeneration. These included the redevelopment of the city's waterfront communities, investment in sustainable transport, education initiatives, refurbishment of the KOMTAR area and a small-grants programme aimed at revitalising neglected housing and small businesses.

To monitor the success of these interventions, a quantified assessment of the current social and economic characteristics of George Town was required.

In the case of the George Town World Heritage Site, some data did exist, but there were no reliable estimates of population, enterprise or land use. Such data as existed was lodged in different government departments and academic research was not widely disseminated. The collection and analysis of this data and its integration into existing Geographic Information System (GIS) provided an important foundation on which to base future plans and investment priorities, while other initiatives were to follow with the monitoring and measuring of changes against long-term aspirations.

However, given the paucity of data, Think City commissioned Geografia, an Australian social and economic planning consultancy, to assist with two specific projects – a baseline study involving a land use survey and a population census, and a conurbation strategy to understand George Town's relationship with other urban centres in its immediate sphere of influence.

This Baseline Study would form a benchmark against which future changes, incorporated within a strategic regional framework for growth (a regional spatial strategy), would be measured.

The Conurbation Strategy articulated the ‘comparative advantage’ – both current and potential – that could enable George Town to secure the multinational corporate investors it needed to attract and to retain people with the right skills. It also identified the features of the city that required protection and enhancement in order to make George Town the kind of ‘sticky space’ whose lifestyle, creativity and innovation would give Penang a genuine competitive edge.

It was decided that the best measure of progress would be a theoretical ‘Liveability Index’ that had a combination of social, economic, environmental and cultural indicators. This index needed to be framed within the broader regional context encompassing the Penang conurbation and the wider South Asian region. The impact of the proposed interventions could then be monitored. The Liveability Index was applied during the subsequent assessment of the grants programme.

With these objectives in mind, and to oversee the Baseline Study, a partnership was formed between Think City, George Town World Heritage Inc, the Town and Country Planning Department and the Penang Island City Council. The partners were involved in pre- and post-survey workshops that served to refine the methodology and the analysis of results. Local civil society group ArtsEd assisted with the survey design and the training of surveyors.

Swiftlet Breeding Houses

Swiftlet nests are used both for medicinal and culinary purposes. To encourage swiftlet breeding, old shophouse interiors were gutted and rearranged to maximise the amount of nests that could be accommodated, and were sometimes painted with lime plaster to imitate the swiftlets’ natural habitat, limestone caves.

Swiftlet breeding houses were located next to homes, shops and restaurants and the bird droppings posed a serious health hazard. In addition, such houses often had to be kept moist, damaging party walls, while the incessant playing of recorded birdsong was a constant irritation.

Despite swiftlet breeding being illegal in the core zone, the practice continued to spread, reflecting inadequate law enforcement. According to the Swiftlet Farmers’ Association, as of the end of March 2008, the total number of swiftlet breeding premises in the heritage zone was 155 and it was estimated that in the core and buffer zones new premises were being created at a rate of one a week. By January 2015, swiftlet houses were made illegal in George Town.

The Baseline Study was one of the first initiatives coordinated by Think City and the Penang Island City Council as well as the George Town World Heritage Inc.

Land Use

Working with other governmental organisations, George Town World Heritage Inc collaborated with Geografia to determine the database structure, including spatially geocoded lot boundaries. Satellite imagery was used to identify land use in these lot boundaries. This was then cross-referenced against existing data as well as cross-checked with on-site surveys.

There are over 5,300 buildings in the George Town World Heritage Site, with about 2,790 in the core area and about 2,580 in the buffer zone. This ecology of shophouses, townhouses, places of worship, clan enclaves and civic buildings had been last surveyed in 2006, some six years after the lifting of the Rent Control Act in 2000. The Baseline Study was the most comprehensive audit yet and had the full

support of the Penang Chief Minister YAB Lim Guan Eng, “George Town needed a thorough audit. City planners and state officials need to have the facts about the city at their fingertips before they can make informed decisions,” he said.

The survey involved a meticulous appraisal of the types of activities that went on in the city. This included seven separate colour-coded forms, one for each major land use, namely businesses; residences; hotels and tourist accommodations; government agencies; educational institutions; clan, non-governmental, religious or political organisations; and vacant properties. Surveyors gathered information about the use of every floor of each building. One of the key objectives of the survey was to find out if there was any clustering of economic activities. This would inform precinct plans and associated zonings.

Land Use Activity

Land Use	Percent of Surveys	No. Establishments	Floorspace (sqm)	Percent of Total Floorspace
Business	40.11%	2973	923287	42.23%
Residence	31.74%	2353	383797	17.77%
Hotel or Tourist Accommodation	0.80%	59	60787	2.78%
Government	0.43%	32	134972	6.17%
Education	0.23%	17	162338	7.43%
Clan, Non-government, Religious or Political Organisation	2.35%	174	76330	3.49%
Vacant	17.09%	1267	311472	14.36%
Unable to Survey	7.26%	538	125129	5.76%

Source: George Town Baseline Study

Household Ethnicity

Ethnicity	No. Households	Percent
Malaysian Chinese	1701	73.13%
Malaysian Indian	304	13.07%
Malay	225	9.67%
Malaysian Other	11	0.48%
Non-Malaysian	192	8.25%

Source: George Town Baseline Study

A separate sweep of the George Town World Heritage Site was undertaken to document the location, nature, opening hours, employment and length of operation of market vendors and stalls. Vendors were separated into those operating within buildings and those on the street. As geocoding was done, it was possible to ascertain where all the favourite eating places were located, how many people they employed and their operating hours.

To ensure that the diversity of George Town’s land use was recorded, a unique coding system was developed – the Land Use Census & Survey Attribute System, or LUCSA Code. Over 400 land use types were identified and classified into 30 super-classes. Each type was assigned a four-digit code, a name and a land use description. This coding was then used to map and analyse the landscape.

Reflecting on the great diversity of land use, Think City’s advisory panel member Dato’ Dr Goh Ban Lee said: “This is what makes George Town so fascinating, it is a transaction space with its own special identity”. Dr Goh, an urban planning expert and former Universiti Sains

Malaysia professor, underlined the importance of the surveys being updated every three years, with the local authority undertaking ownership of such projects. “Today, with the internet, we can also have wider public consultation and support. All the information can eventually be put on an open source platform,” he said.

The main survey was conducted from November 2009 to March 2010. At the end of the survey, a total of 7,413 land use survey forms were collected. These recorded 2,973 (40.1%) businesses; 2,353 (31.7%) residences; 59 (0.8%) hotels and tourist accommodation; 32 (0.4%) government agencies; 17 (0.2%) educational institutions; and 174 (2.4%) clan, non-governmental, religious or political organisations. A further 1,267 (17.1%) were identified as vacancies. Some 538 premises could not be surveyed, out of which 59 were known to be swiftlet breeding houses. The city was found to have 834 street stalls and market vendors.

Ethnic Groups

Malay-Arab Peranakan:

Descendants of traders of mixed Malay and Arab ancestry.

Jawi Peranakan:

Malay-speaking Muslims of mixed Malay and non-Malay ancestry.

Straits Chinese:

Descendants of Chinese traders operating in the Straits Settlements.

Population Census

While land use information describes the city as a living and economic space, the population census describes it as a social organism. In early 2010, George Town's inner city had a population of 10,159 with an average density of 42 people per hectare. Residents were especially concentrated in the clan jetties, the area between Lebu Campbell and Chulia and a band between Lebu Carnarvon and Pantai (to Lebu Aceh). As expected, the population density was relatively low in the central business district.

Some 2,353 households were surveyed with an average household size of 4.4 people, which was slightly higher than the Penang State average of 4.2 or the average for the whole of the George Town city limits, which was 4.0. This is most likely because of the number of extended families and groups of workers living in the area.

Males comprised 55% of all residents owing to the large population of mostly male migrant workers who work in the service industry. A major household typology was elderly couples with mature children living at home (14.4%), followed by one-person households (12.2%) and groups of workers. The groups of workers clustered mostly around Little India and between Lebu Chulia and Lebu Kimberley.

Ethnically, following historical trends since the mid-19th century, George Town's single biggest ethnic group was Chinese. Chinese made up 73.1%, with Indians (13.1%) and Malays (9.6%) making up most of the rest. Hokkien, a south eastern Chinese dialect, remained the town's lingua franca followed by Cantonese, Malay and Tamil.

However, 16.4% of households said that Bahasa Malaysia, the national language, was the language they used at home. Most of George Town, following the present ethnic breakdown, was Buddhist/Taoist (72.1%), while Muslims made up the second largest group (17.3%). This was followed by Hindus (8.6%) and those who professed other religions, including Christianity and Sikhism (4.2%).

Equally interesting, 59% of George Town's population was employed and most employees worked in the city itself, generally in retail and the services sector. 5.3% worked in the professions, 10.2% in the restaurant business and 1.5% in education and training. Particularly significant was the fact that most of the residents were either self-employed or general workers.

There was also a sizeable number (7.0%) of retirees with 1,623 people over the age of 60 (16.0%), which is double the rest of the state. Retirees lived mostly in the clan jetty area and the core heritage zone.

Outcomes

The Baseline Study provided city managers with much-needed information about the people who lived and worked in the city. The survey revealed how many people worked in the city and where they travelled from to get to George Town. This was crucial for traffic and public transport planning. The Baseline Study also indicated which roads were the busiest and at what time, making it possible for the local council to invest limited public resources more effectively. It was now possible to make estimates of which streets had the highest number of pedestrians and, hence, what kind of pavements should be built to make it easier for people to walk.

The study also led to the generation of some 100 maps describing the city's many characteristics, and enabled the updating of the State and Municipality GIS database.

Think City organised workshops for governmental stakeholders and non-governmental organisations to enable them to follow and monitor the progress of the survey. Endorsed by the Penang State Planning Committee, the Baseline Study Report was submitted to the National Heritage Department and was used to develop a Special Area Plan and Conservation Management Plan for George Town.

Baseline Study Main Recommendations

- Maintain the Outstanding Universal Value that underpins World Heritage Site status
- Minimise the displacement of existing businesses and residences
- Maintain the supply of affordable housing and commercial premises
- Maintain the demographic diversity of the population
- Enhance the number of businesses within the 'new' economy and the creative industries
- Reduce the property vacancy rate
- Maintain the high percentage of people working and living in the historic core of George Town
- Improve the amenities for pedestrians, including the enforcement of clear five-foot ways in select locations (five-foot ways are pedestrian walkways indented into the ground floor of a building so that the overhanging upper floors can provide a cover to shield pedestrians from the sun and rain)
- Upgrade existing parks and civic spaces

George Town's Main Challenges

The Baseline Study was a useful guide providing greater clarity about the state of the George Town World Heritage Site. Historical information contained in similar population surveys, particularly the McTaggart Report (1964), the Monroe Report (1968) and the Nathan Report (1970), describe a city whose main economic activities were dependent on trade and based upon Penang's free port status.

However, since the 1970s, after trading gave way to manufacturing as the chief source of employment, the economic centre moved across to the other side of Penang Harbour to the Prai deep-water container port. Back on Penang Island, manufacturing, particularly of electrical and electronic goods, had grown in the new industrial area to the south, in Bayan Lepas. The depopulation of George Town can be understood in this context.

By 2010, when the Baseline Study was completed, the George Town World Heritage Site had a residential population of 10,159 compared with approximately 30,000 in 1964¹. Furthermore, a high proportion of its citizens were over 60 years old and over half were male. The number of professionals and those in the education sector was also disproportionately low. If the city aspired to base its regeneration on the creative industries, it was essential to attract more highly qualified citizens.

In terms of its buildings, there was a very high vacancy rate indicating that a significant proportion of the residential building were in a bad state. As new development areas opened up to the south of the island, very few people wanted to live or work in the city. Yet, so many unused homes and offices offered an opportunity to redesign and repopulate the city with people who needed affordable housing. Some of the vacant buildings could also be used as student accommodation, as there are several higher education institutions operating in the city and its environs.

Following the lifting of the Rent Control Act, long-term residents and small businesses had to cope with rising rents. As some 75% of the businesses in the city did not own their premises, there was a very real danger of the city hollowing out completely. In the business district – the area around the northern end of Lebuhr Pantai to Lebuhr Downing – there was hardly any residential population. Moreover, the premises in this area no longer housed the major shopping arcades and merchant bank headquarters of two decades ago. The area seemed more suitable for new businesses associated with the services sector.

There was a general sense of gentle decline and the level of economic and cultural activity was low. The historic core lacked any 'creative economy' clusters such as value-adding services involving design, branding and communications, although there was a wholesale textile cluster in Lebuhr Campbell. Meanwhile, George Town's night-time activities were largely limited to eating places and a row of bars along the northern end of Jalan Penang. Fine dining and mid-range restaurants could hardly be found outside established hotels.

1 Note the area of the 1964 data is larger than the George Town World Heritage Site. Follow up baseline studies in 2013 did, however, indicate a decline in the resident population.



More alarmingly, it was clear that there was an urgent need to stem the decline in the city's cultural diversity.

Many historic communities owed their origins to port operations which provided jobs for stevedores, ships' chandlers, warehouse workers, dockyard workers, sampan wallahs, petty traders, etc. When port operations shifted almost entirely to Seberang Prai (formerly known as Province Wellesley) and barter trade ceased in the 1980s, many of the traditional jobs were lost.

Above / The frequent traffic congestion in George Town.

The vitality of these communities was sapped as residents migrated to the suburbs, to Kuala Lumpur, or to Singapore. Today, there are an estimated 250,000 Penangites living and working overseas.

This outward migration is fast altering George Town's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural complexion. The Baseline Study showed clearly that the heritage site was now overwhelmingly Chinese, with 73% of its residential population from that single ethnic group. Other ethnic groups visit George Town on a daily basis, but it was evident that they were not living there. Particularly acute was the decline of the Malay-Arab Peranakan community that had once thrived in Lebuah Aceh but had dwindled to a handful of households by 2010. Traditional Jawi Peranakan, Eurasian and Straits Chinese neighbourhoods were also on the brink of extinction.

Equally problematic was the high use of private cars. The working population of George Town swells to 25,000 in the daytime. Coupled with tourist buses and street hawkers, this puts the city's 19th century streets under tremendous stress. Traffic congestion is making it very difficult to live in the city and the traditional street vendors, who are a vital part of the city's identity, are struggling to compete with the traffic.

Finally, development projects and economic activities insensitive to the city's new status as a World Heritage Site also needed to be curbed. This included the practice of transforming shophouses into swiftlet breeding houses, the flouting of height restrictions, and inappropriate in-fill developments that detracted from the city's Outstanding Universal Value.

Developing a Common Vision

With these challenges in mind, Think City began to refine the objectives of the George Town Grants Programme. It took on board several recommendations by UNESCO, which had conducted a review of the grants programme in June 2010.

It was decided that, while the grants programme was designed to cultivate the best ideas and proposals from the ground, there was a need to balance this bottom-up effort with a more strategic and targeted approach to ensure that the cumulative results of each project would lead to visible and meaningful results for the heritage property and the city as a whole.

With the Baseline Study describing a city that was fast losing its multicultural diversity, George Town needed to unite its stakeholders behind a common vision for regeneration. Think City started mapping out key stakeholders in the city, especially community and civil society players. Engaging with them and getting everyone around the table was the first step towards the creation of such a vision.

The George Town Grants Programme provided an incentive for property owners and communities to take the lead in regeneration efforts. Think City began to identify the most difficult areas within the city, using cultural mapping, conservation and/or community activities to implement projects designed to promote the regeneration of the area.

Capacity-building was also fundamental to George Town Grants Programme projects. Communities, including individual property owners, needed to be brought together and given new ways of thinking about

urban regeneration. It was not the place of Think City to assume a regulatory role, so the grants programme was tied to the normal regulatory processes.

At the institutional level, Think City supported proposals and projects requested by George Town World Heritage Inc. This included targeted technical workshops that helped to enhance existing skills, particularly those that involved the whole spectrum of conservation work from the writing of conservation statements or briefs to the assessment of buildings.

In the area of intangible heritage, Think City evaluated and supported existing programmes that focused on endangered arts and crafts in the city. A number of traditional trades and crafts that had been identified by civil society groups, such as the Penang Heritage Trust, also received support from Think City.

The Baseline Study also indicated that street activities, including hawking, religious festivals and community games, were on the decline. Street-based themes and the galvanising of entire streets through public recognition projects, therefore, became a new area of emphasis for the grants programme as a way to boost public awareness and involvement.

Another important initiative was 'demonstration projects' addressing the most critical conservation problems. These projects provided examples of how to identify a problem and implement solutions within a sustainable heritage management plan.



UNESCO's Tim Curtis and the Role of Heritage in Urban Regeneration

Dr Timothy Curtis, UNESCO's Head of Culture in Southeast Asia, presented a paper spelling out the benefits and responsibilities of being a World Heritage Site.

By adapting heritage buildings to meet contemporary business needs, cities can actually kick-start their rejuvenation programmes. Even in less prosperous cities like Mumbai, it is possible to unlock the potential of heritage properties. Essentially, the upgrading of Link Street was very simple. After much stakeholder management, it was decided that, with government aid, all property owners in the street

could upgrade the façade of their buildings. This triggered such a positive reaction from their customers that the street is now itself a tourist attraction. This led to more customers and more profits.

Waterfront properties presented another opportunity to change the economic fortunes of a city. George Town, like other port cities, has a waterfront that is presently inaccessible. A lot of properties along Weld Quay are in disrepair but all have the potential for upgrading. The problem here is that there is hardly any reason for property owners or investors to do so if the waterfront remains largely 'off limits'.

However, waterfront redevelopment has powered the regeneration of many cities across the globe, including London (Canary Wharf), Sydney (The Rocks), Baltimore, New York, Marseilles, Vancouver and, closer to home, Clarke Quay and Boat Quay in Singapore. City managers have been able to re-orientate and diversify the economic offerings in the city with opportunities for cultural tourism and all the services that accompany a boom in visitor arrivals.

Other than that, a revitalised city also attracts talent, and this is crucial to a middle-income country like Malaysia that is trying to break into the higher income bracket. In the global battle for talent, a comfortable and lively city will play a major role when it comes to deciding where to live. Here, heritage can be a reason to improve roads, experiment with green technology and generally make the city a better place to live in and raise children.

Together, all these initiatives provided George Town with the opportunity to establish a creative economy by attracting new talent and knowledge into the city. This would not only help moderate the impact of mass tourism, which was beginning to overwhelm the city,

it would also provide George Town with a second engine of growth. In addition, both policymakers and local stakeholders were encouraged to put forward proposals to promote the creative economy, whether this involved a festival, a community centre, graphic design, arts schools or trade exhibitions.

Towards a Special Area Plan

In line with a UNESCO requirement, a special area plan had to be prepared to protect the George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site. Forming part of the wider State Local Plan, the Special Area Plan had to lay down a set of sustainable development principles as well as regulations designed to protect the city's Outstanding Universal Value and guidelines for conservation, economic activities and intangible heritage. The Heritage Management Plan would also be responsible for guiding the ongoing care and maintenance of Category One buildings.

Complementing the Special Area Plan, an Action Plan was to showcase government policy through a set of projects involving public spaces, historic monuments and demonstration projects.

In May 2010, Think City, working with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, organised a two-day conference to highlight the importance of urban planning for historic cities. The trust has extensive experience developing heritage management plans, especially in historic cities throughout the Islamic world. Having shared with the trust the challenges facing George Town, as well as the key characteristics of the city based on the findings of the Baseline Study, the conference brought key governmental, business and civil society stakeholders to the table.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture also helped George Town World Heritage Inc to draw up the terms of reference for the Special Area Plan and a Heritage Management Plan. A historic city requires city planners and managers to understand its evolution, unique features

and special requirements. But while an understanding of the past is crucial, the city must also continue to evolve. To think of a historic city as a monument would be a tragic mistake.

On the other hand, approving development plans that do not respect the urban fabric would rob the city of its historic appeal. A fine balance is needed between community needs, economic realities and environmental concerns. At the time of writing, the George Town Special Area Plan, which aspires to create 'an intelligent and sustainable heritage city', remains a draft document that can be a guide to regulating development.

Many buildings of heritage significance have now been categorised and documented. The work is ongoing. The categories include the different types of shophouses, townhouses, bungalows, temples, mosques and other building types. Taking a leaf out of the Baseline Study, building and land use activity zones have also been adopted.

Finally, the Special Area Plan also takes into account public spaces, cityscapes and intangible heritage. All available green spaces, parks, roads and back lanes have been identified according to their significance to particular communities. Particularly important to George Town is its cultural diversity, which the plan has recommended be protected. With the public exhibition and adoption of the George Town World Heritage Site Special Area Plan, the first major step towards transforming George Town into a sustainable and liveable city was taken. With legislation and protection in place, Think City was better able to support its partners in the regeneration of the city.

Building Activity Zones of George Town

Source: George Town World Heritage Inc.

By and large, the plan observes the existing land use and categorises the site into ten different zones. Category One Buildings (buildings of exceptional interest, sometimes considered to be internationally important) are marked out in black.

Institution Zone

This zone includes government offices, police stations, cemeteries, schools and other institutions. Much of the area along Lebu Light is in this zone.

Financial Zone

This zone covers the Central Business District, including the banking areas of Lebu Pantai, Lebu Union, Lebu Bishop and Lebu Gereja. It is located within the original grid of George Town that was drawn up by Francis Light (founder of the port settlement) in the late 18th century.

Waterfront Zone

This zone covers the areas which were reclaimed at the turn of the 20th century, creating new land for warehousing and port activities. It is bounded by Lebu Pantai and Lebu Chulia Ghaut.

Enterprise Zone

This zone covers areas that developed in the latter part of the 19th century. It includes the Lebu Carnarvon, Lebu Campbell and Lebu Kimberley areas. It also includes areas on both sides of Jalan Penang which used to be a predominantly South Indian settlement.

Tourism & Leisure Zone

This zone includes areas in Lebu Farquhar and upper Jalan Penang.

Trade Zone

This zone encompasses the Chinese merchant precinct on the northern side of Lebu Pantai, west of Lebu Chulia Ghaut. This is where wholesale traders have had their businesses since the early part of the 20th century.

Jetty Zone

This zone encompasses the Clan Jetties which came into existence at the turn of the 20th century following the rapid expansion of the Penang Port.

Special Zone

A special zone is designated for the area bounded by Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling (formerly known as Pitt Street), Lebu Chulia and Lebu China. This area has some of the oldest shophouses and townhouses in the city and is part of the original grid laid out by Francis Light in the late 18th century.

Mapping for Decision Making

Visions of Penang

Visions of Penang (www.visionofpenang.com.my) is a website designed and run by George Town World Heritage Inc and is a group of young (at heart), experienced (or getting there), enthusiasts keen to share what they know and love about Penang and its rich heritage. They are collecting, researching and reviewing as many old photographs, maps, postcards and other materials as possible in order to build a knowledge bank of Penang's rich history. The Visions of Penang online images come from (or provide links to) collections scattered around the world in many different archives. Some historic material has never been digitised, archived or catalogued. In such cases, George Town World Heritage Inc aims to find funding and run projects, big and small, to carry out this work to ensure that historic material is easy to research.

Kelly Maps

The Jabatan Ukur dan Pemetaan (Penang State Survey Office) houses a collection of surveys, including the famous Kelly Maps. These maps of George Town, Penang Island and Seberang Prai (formerly known as Province Wellesley) were originally pioneered by the Surveyors Department in India, and the first trigonometric surveys were undertaken in Balik Pulau, Penang, in 1885 by Messrs Laseron & Peters, surveyors (1885–1890). Between 1891 and 1893, F. W. Kelly, Superintendent of Surveys, took over the earlier survey work and went on to supervise the block surveys of the entire state of Penang. Kelly also updated the original 1885 Laseron and Peters surveys. Between 1893 and 1897, Kelly's block surveys were put together in a grid forming sheets of maps. Although not signed by Kelly, these, together with the block surveys, are locally referred to as the Kelly Maps.

Penang State Library Collection

The Rare Books Room of the Penang State Library (www.penanglib.gov.my) contains a collection of photographs of Penang Island and Seberang Prai from as early as 1869. These feature buildings, streets, everyday life and grand occasions. The collection includes a set of albumen prints made in 1883. Research is being carried out to provide accurate data alongside each image. The Library has an ongoing programme to digitise their collection of rare books, newspapers and photographs.

Wade Collection

The Wade Collection is a collection of postcards assembled by Malcolm Wade for publication in Wade, M., and Khoo, S. N. (2003) *Penang Postcard Collection 1899–1930s*, published by Janus Print & Resources and republished by Areca Books. These postcards show buildings, streets, everyday life and special occasions on Penang Island and Seberang Prai between the boom years of 1899 and the 1930s.

Quick Take

A key characteristic of George Town is that its multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities have evolved to form a unique tapestry of cultures. Think City established a working partnership with these communities, using physical conservation projects as the first step in a long-term community renewal process. Four community demonstration projects illustrate Think City's approach to urban regeneration that is based on its belief that all projects should be catalytic, inclusive, developmental, sustainable and innovative.

The Kapitan Keling Mosque Project involved repairs to the leaking dome of the mosque but led to a growing awareness of and pride in the community's heritage. There was widespread congregational involvement, with young people taking an active role.

The Lebu Armenian Affordable Housing Project demonstrated how a physical conservation initiative led to community renewal, better housing, and an enthusiastic and ongoing cooperation between tenants and their landlords.

The Cheah Kongsî Project brought about a significant shift in thinking about the role of clan organisations in the city. It made the clan house and its affairs more open to its members and the public, and more inclusive, especially of women and young people.

The Muslim League Project expanded and enhanced the League's premises, significantly facilitating its activities. It also opened opportunities for the next generation of leaders and made the League a key partner in the revitalisation of Lebu Queen.

Chapter 4

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO CATALYSE CHANGE

Unique Tapestry of Cultures

One of the outstanding characteristics of George Town is the city's multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Most of the city's communities can trace their origins to 18th and 19th century sojourners and settlers. These people brought to the settlements on both sides of the Malacca Straits cultural influences from their homelands in the Malay Archipelago, South India, the Arabian Peninsula, Bengal, Myanmar, Thailand, Hong Kong, southern China and Britain.

But what makes these communities so special is not so much their diverse places of origin but the way they adapted to each other and formed a tapestry of many cultures unique to the ports of the Straits of Malacca.

In George Town, these communities established themselves along one major arterial road, formerly called Pitt Street (now Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling). The road, organised along a north-south axis, linked the coast to a swampy hinterland that was historically called Malay Town. Today, this central axis comprises three streets – Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling, Lebuh Canon and Jalan Kampong Kolam. The last joins up to Lebuh Carnarvon, which links the heritage site's core zone to its southern buffer zone.

Modern-day Malay Town comprises Lebuh Armenian, Lebuh Acheh and the smaller streets between them. Within this historic core, George Town's early settlers often established themselves around a well. These wells were the most important sources of water before the days of piped water.

It was important for Think City to establish a working partnership with these communities and to understand both their needs and the challenges they faced. Very often a physical conservation project was a first step towards a long-term partnership that also involved a community renewal process.

In this chapter, four community demonstration projects illustrate the Think City approach to urban regeneration. All of them began with consultations and a sharing of the main objectives that underpin Think City's approach – that all projects should be catalytic, inclusive, developmental, sustainable and innovative.



Kapitan Keling Mosque Project



Above / The majestic Kapitan Keling Mosque.
Before 1970, this was the Penang State Mosque.

Background

Under the National Heritage Act, the Kapitan Keling Mosque is a gazetted National Monument. It has also been listed as a Category One building by the Penang Island City Council. Up until 1980, when the present Penang Island State Mosque was completed, it was Penang's state mosque. Established in 1807 by Cauder Mydin, the leader of the South Indian Muslim community, the Kapitan Keling Mosque is also one of the oldest mosques in George Town. Throughout its long history, the mosque has remained the centre of Penang's Muslim community with both Malay and Indian Muslims serving as imams. Its grounds continue to be used for ritual, educational and religious purposes.

The Challenge

At the end of August 2009, almost on the very day it was formed, Think City received a letter from the congregation of the Kapitan Keling Mosque requesting help in finding a lasting solution to leaks in the mosque roof. According to the congregation's chairman Dato' Meera Mydin the leaks were so bad that during a formal function, when it started to rain, "the congregation rushed to place pails underneath the leaks and this was reported in the newspapers". The congregation was convinced that the leaks had something to do with the restoration work on the dome roof carried out some four years previously.



Above / Dato' Meera Mydin, head of Kapitan Keling Mosque.

Middle / The water leaks caused mould to grow in the mosque's interior.

Below / Water seeping into the dome prior to restoration works.

Addressing the Challenge

Starting in September 2009, more than ten meetings were held between Think City and the congregation to understand the nature of the problem and carry out cultural mapping through discussions, workshops and archival research. Cultural mapping and research activities made it possible to piece together the evolution of the mosque and the renovations carried out in the mid-1990s and early 2000s.

It was discovered that in 1996, Bruce Pettman, then the Senior Conservation Architect at the New South Wales Department of Public Works, had led a team of volunteer South Australian heritage specialists, under the sponsorship of the congregation and AusHeritage, to inspect the mosque building and its site. The team then prepared a conservation study and a condition report on the mosque and its immediate environs (the *1997 Pettman Report*).

In 2000, various repair works were undertaken by the Public Works Department and further conservation works were done in 2005 by the Malaysia National Museum. AusHeritage was not involved in either of these upgrading works. The upgrade of the various parts of the mosque appears to have followed the general recommendations of the *1997 Pettman Report*, which should have brought the building back into good condition.

However, not all of the recommended works were carried out. With this history documented, Think City contacted the relevant governmental stakeholders to involve them in the project management. In the case of the Kapitan Keling Mosque, this included the National Heritage Department, the Penang Island City Council, George Town World Heritage Inc, the Penang State Islamic Council and the

Public Works Department, as well as local conservationists. After a number of meetings, a working brief was established to identify the main areas affected by the leaks and a visual examination was carried out in October 2009.

As it was vital that the physical conservation activities took into account the needs and aspirations of the people using the mosque, Think City also involved one of its international partners, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, to help develop an outreach strategy, including social activities, which would deepen community involvement in the conservation project.

In January 2010, local contractors were asked to conduct a comprehensive visual assessment. It was discovered that the problem was complex and beyond the ability of any single consultant to address. Luckily, Bruce Pettman was in Penang conducting a workshop at George Town World Heritage Inc. With the congregation's support, Pettman was brought back as an expert on conservation methods to advise on dome repairs. He was also involved in developing a Special Action Plan for the area around the mosque in line with the community's needs and aspirations.



The Conservation Works

In January 2010, Pettman, the then Senior Conservation Architect at the New South Wales Department of Public Works, visited George Town and was asked to help the Kapitan Keling Mosque congregation rectify the leaks in the mosque's main copper-clad dome as well as the damage caused.

Water had seeped into the space above the inner roof of the dome and from there to the walls below, and had caused staining and mould growth. The water had also penetrated parts of the general roof area of the mosque.

In April 2010, the brief to investigate and resolve the leaks was expanded to include the design of adaptation works and new facilities on the site.

In June 2010, investigations within the dome and other parts of the mosque were undertaken by AusHeritage (Bruce Pettman and Mary Knaggs) and Arkitek Urbanisma (Haris Fadzilah Abdul Rahman and colleagues) and the recommended solutions were implemented with the help of the mosque's facilities/maintenance management contractor, Kemuncak Facilities Management.

Above left / Bruce Pettman, former New South Wales Department of Public Works Senior Conservation Architect.

Above right / It was a vertical worksite, with the restoration on the dome going on while the mosque below was fully operational.



Above Left / The 100-year-old copper dome had 3,421 holes that led to leaking and flooding issues in the mosque.

Above Right / A worker sealing the cracks.

Below / Prayer at the restored mosque.

Outcomes of the Project

In the words of the congregation chairman Dato' Meera Mydin: "We are very happy with the approach that Think City took as it was different from the failed approaches taken in the past". After the project was completed, Uncle Meera, as he is fondly known, was very pleased that the leaks had stopped. He was impressed by the approach taken by AusHeritage, which involved a preliminary study and extensive testing of the dome, to ensure that the cause of the leaks were correctly identified.

"Without Think City's involvement to ensure that the proper experts were brought in, the old dome would have been completely replaced," he said. He is grateful to his mosque committee for agreeing to go along with the unorthodox plan proposed by Think City, which involved repairing every hole in the dome instead of stripping and replacing the copper sheets entirely. "This has helped preserve the pride of the Kapitan Keling Mosque community."

"More importantly, Think City's continued involvement with the community, even after the dome repair works were completed with the help of our youth members, is very good for us. The mosque remains an important site for Muslims of all ages who gather here regularly to worship, celebrate and study," he said.

While the repair of the dome was an important project in itself, the opportunity it provided to forge a working partnership with the congregation was equally important. The partnership was further deepened through small grants to enable the community to take part in the George Town Festival project which involved opening the mosque compound to the public.

"Think City then came up with the next step for engagement and that was to help highlight the history of the mosque and the stories of the communities who live around the mosque. Most of our congregation – both adults and young people – didn't understand the history of the mosque. Think City brought in historians, especially experts in Indian Muslim heritage, and through the talks, we began to learn about our glorious past," Meera Mydin said.

Having had its mandate extended, Think City is now working with the Kapitan Keling Mosque congregation to revisit the recommendations of the Special Action Plan, which includes upgrading works and the greening of the mosque compound. Meanwhile, the technical skills learned from AusHeritage experts have made the local architects, Arkitek Urbanisma, into one of Malaysia's foremost experts on copper domes.

Most important of all, however, is the strong intergenerational cooperation between the elders of the mosque and the younger members, with the youth now advocating and promoting Indian Muslim heritage centred on their mosques in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

Opposite / Main entrance to the mosque. Throughout the restoration of the dome, the mosque remained open to the public as a result of good coordination between the Khariah and the project team led by Think City Programme Director Suraya Ismail.



Lebuh Armenian Affordable Housing Project



Above / The shophouses after restoration. A key feature was affordable conservation where the tenants and owners worked together to determine the level of conservation on a mutually agreed basis.



While the Kapitan Keling Mosque project demonstrated how a physical conservation initiative could lead successfully to community renewal, the Lebuh Armenian Affordable Housing Project began with efforts to organise tenants and owners to work with one another to move forward.

Background

Located at the bottom of Lebu Canon, Lebu Armenian, like the adjacent Lebu Aceh, is a historic stronghold of George Town's Hokkien clans. Chinese migrants who arrived in the late 18th century organised themselves into groups based on clan affiliation, dialect group and place of origin, as well as into professional guilds.

One example can be found at the corner of Lebu Canon and Lebu Armenian, where the small and unimposing entrance to Hock Teik Cheng Sin can be found. Hock Teik Cheng Sin is a conglomerate of three associations dedicated to the patron saint of migrants, the deity Tua Pek Kong (Grand Uncle Spirit). Hock Teik Cheng Sin, which had its origins as a self-help organisation, also owns a row of ten shophouses that have their backs to the central courtyard of the main temple building. The residents of these shophouses, collectively represent some 200 years of heritage. Some families have lived in the same street for several generations.

The Challenge

UNESCO had recommended that Think City adopt a difficult area or street to demonstrate new ways of thinking about community and heritage conservation. A decade ago, the residents at neighbouring Canon Square had been forcibly removed by another clan organisation pending a physical upgrading project. Similarly, an entire community around the Lebuh Aceh Malay Mosque had to leave their homes and business premises owing to another physical conservation project. Once they heard that their landlords had submitted a proposal for a grant from Think City, the Hock Teik tenants were convinced that their time was up.



Above / Khoo Kay Hean, trustee of Hock Teik Cheng Sin.

Middle / Tee, community architect from Asian Coalition For Housing Rights.

Below / Ng Hooi Seam, Project Coordinator.



Addressing the Challenge

However, the Hock Teik project proved to be a prime example of heritage conservation at its best, based on mutual respect and understanding between property owners and tenants.

In the words of Khoo Kay Hean, a trustee of Hock Teik Cheng Sin and main supporter of the project: “Hock Teik Cheng Sin is different from other clan associations because our aim is to benefit our tenants. As a temple, we try our best to help the tenant. It is a win-win policy because we help them and they help us to maintain the property. It is not just about money, it is also about heritage. If it were

just about the money, we would have tied up with a project partner to turn the place into a hotel, or allow eateries to set up shop.

“Before we got the Think City grant, we just took care of the buildings. But after we were drafted into this project, we started looking at the project as a means to also benefit the community and not just treat them like tenants.

“It [the project] has helped to build a bridge between the tenants and the landlord. In the past, the landlord didn’t care much about the tenants. But as a result of the project, the landlord has come to understand the situation holistically – both the technical and the human aspects of the restoration. Out of our 20 trustees, at least half now understand the project and understand the tenants.”

Above / The restoration works were carried out in stages so that business was not disrupted. The tenants and businesses did not have to move out throughout the duration of the works.



Above / A composite of the 10 shophouses belonging to the Hock Teik Cheng Sin, all in various stages of neglect and decay.

Both parties cooperated to minimise disruption during the restoration process. This involved a phased implementation process so that the tenants never had to move out during any stage of the work. Success also depended on ensuring that the conservation would not be too burdensome financially. This meant that the cost of conservation had to be kept within the means of both owners and tenants.

Think City appointed Ooi Bok Kim, a conservation architect, to oversee the restoration process, while the tenants formed a working committee to carry out site visits to all ten houses, identify work that needed to be done and establish a schedule of works.

The conservation architect provided guidance on best practices, while the community was actively involved in the process of cultural mapping.



This included research into the history of the neighbourhood, the evolution of the shophouse style and the significance of the site.

After six months of work, the tenants presented their recommendations to the Hock Teik committee. Both parties then agreed to share costs. The property owner would pay for roof repairs and facade upgrading and the tenants would take care of the internal maintenance.

However, there were many teething problems when the time came to start work. As tenant Leow-Lim Hsu Kuang explained: "Implementation is different from planning. We initially obtained a quote from a single contractor, but then we decided to look at different contractors to try to find the most economical way of restoring the buildings.

"It was challenging to do interior work because we had to manage the workers ourselves. There was some miscommunication with them and damage was done to the properties during the work. This resulted in some wasted time because the contractors had to rectify the mistakes. Coordinating a project of this scale was difficult. We had no experience with this kind of responsibility and, again, there was some miscommunication. The process of the restoration was not properly coordinated," he said.

Cheah Kongsí Project



Above / The Cheah Kongsí's eclectic clan house, with British lions on Chinese architecture, is also raised in the style of a traditional Malay house on stilts. The clan house was Penang's oldest dating back to 1804.



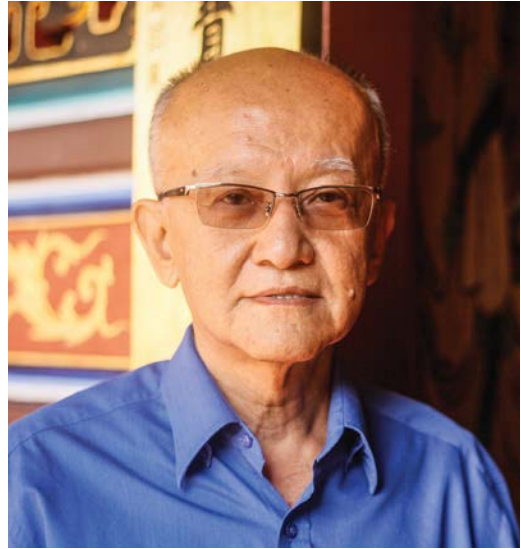
Resilient, well-organised communities committed to the spirit of volunteerism remain the bedrock of a sustainable and liveable city. However, leadership is also required to push through what may at first seem to be hopelessly idealistic concepts. In the case of the Kapitan Keling Mosque, the congregation took the leadership role but also offered opportunities to their youth wing to carry out innovative community history projects. Khoo Kay Hean and the trustees of Hock Teik took a gamble by encouraging their tenants to organise and form a viable Hock Teik community. In the case of Cheah Kongsı (clan association), leadership and the ability to adopt new ideas was crucial to a significant shift in thinking about the role of clan organisations in the city.

Background

The Cheah Kongsí is the first of Penang's five great Hokkien clan houses and while its ornate building recalls China's grand temples and palaces, it is the only clan house in Penang that fuses traditional Straits Chinese, Malay and European design.

The Cheah Kongsí was established in 1873 by Cheah Yam, an immigrant who came from the Sek Tong village in South China. When Cheah Yam died, his widow Ong Sin Neoh took over the management of the clan house. Before her, women had never wielded direct influence over the local Hokkien clan associations. After her, her son Cheah Choo Yew and his descendants have served as the presidents of the Cheah Kongsí.

In 2007, however, a fire destroyed the wooden houses that enclosed the clan house, revealing the previously concealed building to public view. That fire ended up providing a catalyst for both conservation and renewal.



The Challenge

“Suddenly, our main clan temple was exposed. It was like self-advertisement or publicity,” said Peter Cheah Swee Huat, the chairman of the Cheah Kongsì. Clan associations are traditionally very conservative and shy away from publicity. This was responsible for the impression they were secretive organisations. “Although we are one of the oldest Hokkien *kongsì* in Penang, we did not share information with the public in the past. But we have a very long and rich history, and I wanted the Cheah Kongsì to share this history.”

According to Cheah, not only did the fire present an opportunity to be more open, “it was also fortuitous as, in terms of *feng shui*, our frontage should not be blocked.”

During the course of the project, two other major issues facing Chinese clan associations were addressed – apathy, particularly amongst the young, and the lack of opportunity for women’s involvement in the clan’s affairs.

Cheah’s main challenge was to persuade his trustees to make the *kongsì* and its affairs more accessible and more inclusive.

Addressing the Challenge

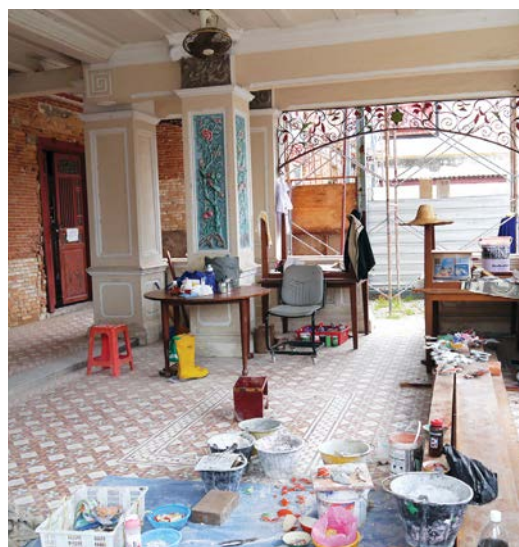
“Think City’s grants programme made it possible to convince the board of trustees that the *kongsì* should actively participate in the city’s renewal,” said Cheah. This and the designation of George Town as a World Heritage Site made it possible for the *kongsì* to adopt a new way of thinking about its heritage assets.

“It was important for me to convey to my trustees that Think City was very supportive of our plans to preserve the history of the *kongsì*. I also had a plan to revitalise our properties, starting with our own ancestral hall, and then moving to our other properties in the core zone of the World Heritage Site. These were not small projects,” he said. He was referring to the restoration of the main temple and the decision to create an open space in front of it. “A project of this scale had never been undertaken before by the *kongsì*. Although we wanted to make things happen, there had always been resistance and differing opinions when it came to spending money on our property.”

Right / Artefacts being carefully catalogued and removed for safekeeping.

Opposite Top / Peter Cheah, chairman of the Cheah Kongsì.

Opposite Below / Chinese porcelain shard work or *Chien Nien* carried out by artisans from China.





By commissioning a plan for the entire Cheah Kongsì enclave, the trustees were persuaded to actively invest in the future. The Heritage Management Plan's assessment of the heritage significance of the Category One clan hall and the building's relation to the surrounding neighbourhood has now become a guide for future generations who would also want to make their mark on the *kongsì*. Thanks to the plan, they can do so without detracting from the heritage significance of the site.

Above / The *Kongsì*'s roof under restoration. This was a key challenge in the entire restoration process, owing to the complexity of the works and the artisans available.

Opposite / The main hall of the clan temple fully restored with new terracotta floors.

The entire process of developing the Heritage Management Plan with the consultants was an important first step. "We have to look outside the box. As I see it, the Cheah Kongsì must think ahead, at least 50 years down the road. We are changing the management procedures by putting in an SOP (standard operating procedure), and using the UBS software accounting system for transparency instead of doing things manually. We even changed the name of the *kongsì* for legal reasons – we were known by seven different names! Legally, it was a big headache with official documents in different names. We needed to settle this to prevent 'funny' business in the *kongsì*," said Cheah.



As the project progressed, it successfully demonstrated the importance of cultural mapping involving archival research. During the mapping, a sealed safe was discovered containing title deeds and other documents relevant to the *kongsi*'s early development. This collection, one of the most intact of its kind, enabled the *kongsi* to trace its history back to the early 19th century.

"After I took over, we have had visits from clansmen overseas who wanted to trace their roots in Penang. They often come to us to trace their forefathers, to get help tracing their burial plots. It made me realise that we needed an archive system to store all this data for future generations," said Cheah.

Meanwhile, inspired by the heritage conservation project that was now well under way, the Cheah Kongsi decided to engage the young members of the clan by reviving its Youth section. Cheah said it was important "to let them take part in the cultural activities of the *kongsi* and assist in organising the various festivities".

The Cheah Kongsi also broke with convention by creating a women's section. "They are currently a *pro tem* committee, and they also take part in the organising of the cultural activities. In the old days, women did not get involved in clan activities, which was the business of their sons. This is because daughters marry out of the clan. Now, we have amended our rules and regulations to offer scholarships to our Cheah daughters."

Before, they were only for male descendants. Our daughters are now happier because they feel more connected to the Kongsì,” Cheah said.

Today, the Cheah Kongsì is a vital contributor to George Town’s regeneration. Its strategic location in the middle of the historic enclave meant that it had a special responsibility to lead by example.

“I did not want Cheah Kongsì to be left out of the development of the World Heritage Site. We want to contribute to the vibrancy of Lebuh Armenian. By our own initiative, we set the criteria for our Lebuh Armenian tenants, based on trades that are related to the tourism industry or heritage and handicrafts. If we were only concerned about rental, we could have easily rented the premises out to whoever was willing to pay us the highest rent,” said Cheah.

Outcomes of the Project

What is the project’s greatest significance? “Psychologically, there has been a change of mind set since we started making the physical changes. We needed to change and do new activities. We have plans that are already taking shape. Even by having our AGMs and EGMs in a hotel, our members can see that we are changing the way the *kongsì* is run. It is positive for our members to see that we are moving forward,” said Cheah.

Even more dramatic are Cheah Kongsì-organised events that are now open to the public. These include an annual walkathon, with the 2014 event held at the Sungai Pinang Promenade.

“Now more people are noticing the clan. Visitors are busy taking photographs of the clan hall, our new fence, and the temporary cat mural. We also worked with the George Town Festival on the installation of the famous ‘mirrors’ bicycle mural on Lebuh Armenian, and worked with the Penang Island City Council on Marking George Town installation on Lebuh China and Lorong Soo Hong.

“A trustee from the Ong Kongsì told me that he had come to see the Cheah Kongsì’s artistic fencing three times because it made the *kongsì* look grand! We have now even attracted attention from the State Government and are exploring possible ways to work together.”

Cheah said that after the Cheah Kongsì received the George Town Grants Programme grant, its members were promptly informed. Others got the news from the mass media. This created awareness among other *kongsì*, which now regretted that they did not apply for the George Town Grants Programme. Like the Cheah Kongsì in the past, “they have a fear of change”.

In time to come, it will not be only the physical upgrading of the clan house that will be remembered, but rather the decision by Cheah and his trustees to open up the *kongsì* to the wider world. Looking back, future historians will take note of how the *kongsì* provided space for non-traditional events. These included hosting the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights workshop in 2011 and supporting the Architecture Association of London’s summer programme in 2013.

By April 2015, the *kongsì* restoration project, which also included affordable housing and a community garden, was completed.



Above / The restored clan house in full view. The Clan decided to put in a garden and opened it for public use instead of restoring a row of burnt out shophouses.

Muslim League Project



Above /The Lebuh Queen project began with the upgrading of the Muslim League building and the restoration of its traditional facade



Leadership, resources and willingness to accept new ideas remain crucial to community resilience. However, a project sometimes needs slowing down to ensure that the right results are achieved. The Muslim League Project showed how crucial lessons could be learnt when an organisation goes back to its original charter to determine its future direction.

The Kapitan Keling Mosque Project focused on the preservation of an Islamic national monument, the Hock Teik Project on uniting its community and the Cheah Kongs Project on revitalising a clan organisation. The Muslim League Project was all about regenerating a well-established religious league.

Background

The men who founded the Penang Muslim League in 1948 were inspired by their Indian subcontinent brethren. The League brought Muslim organisations together and was amongst the first to put up a candidate to contest and win a seat in the 1951 George Town City Council elections – the first local elections of their kind in Malaysia. It attracted many young, community-oriented leaders. One of them was Dato' Haja Najmudeen Kader.

Describing his career in the League, Najmudeen said: “In the 1980s, the then president of Liga Muslim (Muslim League), the late Dato' Haji Shaik Allaudin, invited me to attend the AGM. I suddenly found myself being nominated as a committee member, heading the Youth Section of the League. From there, I became Vice President, and with the unfortunate passing of Dato' Haji in 2002 when he was still in office, I was elected to take over as president of the league”.

The Challenge

The League faced two challenges. First, it wanted to replace the unsightly and incongruous modern concrete facade of its building in Lebu Queen, at the heart of the Little India neighbourhood. Second, it needed to create more space for its activities. “Some of the most popular activities are our religious classes, Koran classes, and the *tafsir agama* [religious understanding] classes,” Najmudeen said.

They decided to do away with the modern concrete facade and replace it with a ‘traditional’ design in line with the streetscape, and add a mezzanine floor for more space. The wall dividing the two shophouses would be removed.

Everyone agreed that the concrete façade must go but few agreed on the look of the ‘traditional’ façade. There was no documentary evidence. Neighbouring buildings did not have such a façade and conservationists believed that the design, though well-intentioned, was a mockery of the evolution of shophouse façades. According to the conservationists, the mezzanine floor was out of scale with the adjacent shophouses.

The conservationists expected the funding agency to exert greater control over the League. However, one of the cardinal principles of Think City as a community-based urban regeneration organisation, was that it would not replace governmental institutions or presume to enforce the law on their behalf.

The League was able to convince the authorities, in this case the Technical Review Panel of the Penang Island City Council, that the design was appropriate. Think City, being sensitive to the concerns raised by civil society groups, conveyed them to the Muslim League and ensured that the Technical Review Panel was also kept informed.

Outcomes of the Project

“This year [2014] will be the sixtieth anniversary of the league, and we are happy with the completion of the restoration of our building at 33 and 35 Lebu Queen. We can comfortably seat 250 people upstairs in a theatre set-up,” said Najmudeen.

“Our focus right now, is on the next generation of Liga Muslim leaders. It’s up to them to take up official positions and take responsibility for leading and managing programmes. I see the league as a vehicle for them, with funding available. But they need to be part of it, and they need to know where they want to head.

“Now, the youth section wants to bring in martial arts and exercise-related activities. They want to set up the classes at the League.”

Equally important was the way the Muslim League became a key partner in the revitalisation of Lebu Queen. “We plan to have more activities with an interactive element and to boost community participation. As it is, we have a public complaints bureau that is open to everybody.

“We help with all sorts of things, including scholarships, legal aid when dealing with Jabatan Pendaftaran Negara (the National Registration Department), arbitration in family and business disputes. We even provide financial aid for our members through interest-free loans,” Najmudeen said.

In line with the aim in its original charter, which was to raise the socio-economic status of the Indian Muslim community, the Muslim League now has a raft of initiatives that will be rolled out from its new community centre in Lebu Queen.

“In the future, we plan to have more socio-economic activities, health-related talks, home welfare and talks on education. Indian Muslim art and culture can be showcased in the newly restored building. We will look at avenues to create an appreciation of the importance of heritage,” he said.

Conclusions

These demonstration projects were all based on community needs. Though each began with a physical conservation or rectification project, they spurred each community to determine what role it would play in urban regeneration. All began with the revisiting of their original charters as part of a cultural mapping exercise. This helped create an understanding of why the community was rooted in a particular place, how its built heritage had evolved, and how it could be adapted to meet present and future needs.

These projects were also catalytic in that they prompted soul-searching by the community leaders, which often led to new ways of thinking about the community's role in relation to the wider needs of the city. While each community had its origins in a closed social environment, all have now embraced the chance to open up and become more inclusive.

This experience cuts across ethnic, religious and class boundaries. In every case, this is happening in an area of George Town that represents the city's multi-ethnic and multi-religious heritage.



Not all these projects presented equally complex conservation challenges and one involved an approach to an adaptive reuse that remains controversial. An important lesson, however, is that all heritage sites of special significance need a proper heritage management plan. This may seem unnecessarily restrictive, but in the long run, it will help connect the present generation of custodians to the next. Most important of all, these projects demonstrated that the greater the level of community involvement in tackling the challenges, the stronger the community became.

Each community faced different challenges – whether financial or social – and found strength in numbers. Each of the projects involved some level of internal fund-raising. By involving newer generations in the management and implementation of these projects, they were able to get younger people interested in community affairs. Some of the youths helped carry out documentation work to prepare milestone and financial reports.

Each of these community demonstration projects was developmental in its own way. Each was the more sustainable for involving intergenerational cooperation. Finally, each one showed how innovative ideas, championed by committed leaders, were key to successful urban regeneration.

Quick Take

IN 2007, Khazanah Nasional's team in Penang began to introduce local community leaders and civil society organisations to George Town's heritage scene because the citizens appeared to have little understanding of the significance of the city's heritage and architecture, even after a number of conservation initiatives had been successfully completed.

However, the various stakeholders had different notions about what heritage conservation meant. Heritage activists wanted best practices to be followed. Property owners and tenants saw conservation guidelines as expensive and unaffordable. They felt it would make their business operations less viable.

This chapter looks at how the George Town Grants Programme helped to address these concerns by providing an incentive for private individuals to undertake restoration projects based on a public-private partnership principle.

The team also focused on the proposed future use of the restored properties as being just as important as the method of restoration. The team favoured projects that involved dual purpose usage – a home-cum-business model – to foster the repopulation of George Town.

A variety of project case studies had demonstrated that 'adaptive reuse' was the only approach that would be both financially affordable and respectful of the heritage significance of the buildings and neighbourhoods concerned.

Adaptive reuse would also enable buildings to continue to function in a manner consistent with maintaining the Outstanding Universal Value of George Town. The projects also highlighted the need to balance local authority regulation with site-specific issues.

Chapter 5

CONSERVATION & ADAPTIVE REUSE

Awareness of George Town's Heritage

By 2009, the city was dotted with abandoned and semi-derelict buildings. Vacant houses were boarded up and some had been turned into swiftlet breeding houses. Shophouses were frequently used as poorly maintained boarding houses for migrant workers or as warehouses. Clan association temples, once grand places bustling with activity, were lifeless. Many parts of the city suffered from a lack of funding and maintenance. The 2009 Baseline Study had revealed that some 17% of the city's 5,000 buildings were vacant. While the decline had been gradual, there was a perceptible lack of purpose. Clearly, George Town's citizens had little understanding of the significance of the city's heritage and architecture.

Yet there were real gems in this city. A few restoration projects, including the renewal of significant buildings, symbolised early attempts to demonstrate that a different future was possible. One of the earliest involved the Syed Al-Attas Mansion on Lebu Armenian. The project was funded by the Penang Island City Council and the State Government, with substantial support from the French Government. In contrast, the restoration of the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion and Mansion 32 were pioneering private ventures. Awarded the UNESCO prize for Best Conservation in Asia, the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion set a new benchmark for heritage conservation in Southeast Asia and put George Town on the world map. It also persuaded the authorities to treat heritage buildings with greater seriousness.

Endangered Site

By 2001, after the repeal of the Rent Control Act, there was a very real danger that Southeast Asia's largest assemblage of pre-World War II buildings would be exposed to extensive demolition and indiscriminate development. George Town was therefore put on the World Monuments Fund's *Watch List of 100 Most Endangered Sites*. It was during this time that Penang's civil society organisations, including the Penang Heritage Trust, increased their advocacy activities to highlight the importance of basing development projects on the conservation of heritage buildings.

The success of pioneering conservation projects like the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion was followed up by community efforts, including the restoration of the Leong San Tong Khoo Kongsi Temple, the Yap Temple, the Teochew Temple, and the upgrading of the Kapitan Keling Mosque.

There was even an initiative by the Penang State Islamic Council to revive Lebu Acheh by upgrading shophouses and properties in the Syed Hussein Idid *wakaf* (Muslim endowment land). While the *wakaf* project was supported by public funds, the other projects had to rely on private fundraising. The results were mixed. Some, such as the Teochew Temple, received both national and international recognition for excellence. However, the upgrading of Lebu Acheh and the Khoo Kongsi led to the eviction of local tenants, effectively emptying entire neighbourhoods.

As early as 2007, Khazanah Nasional's team in Penang began introducing local community leaders and civil society organisations to the heritage scene. This helped the team to understand local dynamics, key stakeholders and the challenges earlier efforts had encountered in regenerating the city. The Penang State Government's efforts to provide incentives through a heritage fund had few takers because of excessive red tape. With 85% of the UNESCO World Heritage Site in private hands, a top-down approach involving government regulations and collective schemes was clearly not going to be effective.

Looking at Other Models

The Khazanah team realised the need to explore other models and these included Edinburgh World Heritage's Repayable Grant Scheme. Through a partnership with the British Council, Khazanah initiated a series of workshops exploring different possibilities for the management of heritage sites.

The Edinburgh World Heritage Repayable Grant Scheme had invited applicants to submit proposals explaining how their conservation project would help preserve the city's Outstanding Universal Value. Then an independent technical team evaluated each proposal and made a recommendation. To prevent property speculation, they decided that if a property was sold before a specified period was up, the grant would have to be repaid without interest.

Adapting the Edinburgh World Heritage Repayable Grant Scheme to local conditions, Think City designed the George Town Grants Programme to meet the needs of both physical and non-physical projects. While the restoration of derelict buildings was important, Think City also wanted to encourage property owners to think about how their properties would be used.

However, unlike the Edinburgh heritage scheme, Think City chose not to infringe on the jurisdiction of the local authorities in regulating conservation. It included George Town World Heritage Inc and the National Heritage Department in its decision-making process. But it also relied on an independent technical advisory panel that included both local and international subject experts. It maintained a neutral stance and a transparent process. When the George Town Grants Programme was launched in December 2009, Think City was able to secure strong participation from Penang's civil society organisations, private property owners and local communities.

Conflicting Definitions of Heritage Conservation

A major difficulty that conservation projects encountered in early 2010 was the different definitions of heritage conservation by the various stakeholders. While the local authorities had a set of guidelines, conservation activists and private property owners had other ideas. The Baseline Study showed that a significant number of conservation projects did not conform to local regulations. These included shophouses that had been converted into swiftlet breeding houses and hotels.

A decade after the lifting of rent control, the informal economy had evolved into a variety of land uses in the city. This often manifested in illegal extensions and overcrowding, with a thriving 'back lane' economy and an expanding number of migrant workers. Yet all of this contributed to the burgeoning multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, non-conformist identity of the city.

Heritage activists, particularly those involved in the conservation of buildings, stressed that best practices must be followed when restoring or maintaining buildings. They admitted that proper methods of restoration might cost more but insisted that they would deliver bigger savings in the long term. Property owners and tenants, on the other hand, felt that conservation guidelines simply meant higher costs, making business operations less viable. The challenge was how a largely 19th century city could adapt to 21st century requirements and lifestyles.



The key challenge for Think City was to ensure that all projects implemented under the George Town Grants Programme complied with conservation and restoration guidelines. At the same time, it could not unduly burden property owners and tenants. This balance could only be achieved if conservationists, architects and contractors agreed to work together to make a success of their projects.

Think City realised early on that if the stakeholders were properly informed, half the battle was won. To make this happen, it undertook multi-faceted outreach and public

awareness activities. These included media interviews, individual stakeholder briefings, town hall meetings with community leaders and the setting up of an official website with extensive information about the purpose of the grants programme. This way, Think City was able to gain support for restoration and conservation projects from like-minded applicants. For Penang, this bottom-up approach was seen as a bold social experiment that aimed to spur well-informed property owners – whether individuals or communities – into taking ownership of the city’s built heritage.

Above / *Chien Nien* (porcelain shard work) at Rebecca Duckett’s *Jalan China* home.

Public Money for Private Properties

Despite initial setbacks, the early batch of grant applications attracted promising projects. Think City was able to demonstrate that through a transparent assessment procedure, proposals developed from the ground up could work.

The George Town Grants Programme offered an incentive for private individuals to undertake restoration projects. It was therefore crucial for all the projects it funded to deliver visible and meaningful transformations.

During the fact-finding stage with prospective grant applicants, the Think City Board emphasised that it would take into consideration the existing use or change of use of their proposed projects. This was an effective way of demonstrating to private property owners that every project – whether residential, commercial or dual purpose – would have an impact on the neighbourhood and its streetscape. From the perspective of the grants programme, the use of the building was just as important as the method of restoration and the competence of the contractors.

Another regeneration strategy that the grants programme sought to encourage was the repopulation of George Town. Data from the Baseline Study showed that the heritage site's residential population had shrunk from about 30,000 in 1964 to 10,159 in 2009. Furthermore, a high proportion of its citizens were over 60 years old and males comprised 55% of all residents. Restoration projects, therefore, favoured dual purpose usage, that is, a home-cum-business model reflecting the original use of the shophouse buildings.

Strict Conservation or Adaptive Reuse

'Strict conservation' refers to an attitude prevalent in many heritage sites where conservationists insist, as far as possible, on employing 'authentic' building materials, that is, those used when these buildings were built. This approach is often part of a wider discipline that developed to protect ancient monuments and is quite Eurocentric.

In the case of a living city like George Town, where buildings have undergone different adaptations, strict conservation often leads to high conservation costs, usually starting with the hiring of conservationists and other related professionals. Very often, the professional fees alone would constitute nearly half of the entire project cost. This makes conservation expensive. It also unintentionally drives out the original residents who cannot afford the increased rental demanded by property owners wanting to recoup their investment.

'Adaptive reuse' refers to the process of adapting a heritage building to new uses. This, too, is open to subjective interpretation as property owners try different types of economic activity to generate additional income or to capitalise on the investment made in the upgrading process.

Adaptive reuse is particularly suitable for in-fill developments where a dilapidated building can be reconfigured for new uses. The key is finding the right balance and observing the golden rule that all interventions can be reversed in the future.



Alongside residential projects, businesses that were heritage-related were preferred, such as small guesthouses and boutique hotels that had a lower carbon and residential footprint than purpose-built, multi-storey hotels.

Some of the early criticism from the public was that funding was given to foreign owners (e.g. Singaporeans and Australians). The team took the view that preventing neglect and decay, and preserving George Town's Outstanding Universal Value should take precedence over questions about 'who gets the money'.

In the second year of the George Town Grants Programme, an internal review of project outcomes led the team to moderate its approach to regeneration. After the first batch of projects, a pattern was emerging. The streets where the early projects were sited began to attract more applications than other streets that had few or no projects.

Above / The ever busy Lebu Chulia, a haunt for backpackers where conservation projects sprouted organically.

The team, therefore, decided that:

- future funding would be specifically directed to selected streets to demonstrate the beneficial impact of project funding on streetscapes and neighbourhoods;
- other management initiatives to promote liveability – such as placemaking (planning around community needs) and greening programmes – would be planned around the selected streets in order to raise the socio-economic and real estate values in those areas.

This prioritisation strategy resulted in a hybrid system, bringing in certain top-down initiatives for improving connectivity and liveability to complement the bottom-up projects that had already been started. This was especially useful when Think City began to embark on more placemaking initiatives. These offered a way of securing greater local community involvement through multiple engagement points throughout the project.

Attempts to Scupper the Programme

The response from the public and the authorities was a mixture of high expectations and scepticism. Innate distrust for a Federal Government agency (Think City is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Khazanah) resulted in many questions about Think City in Parliament and elsewhere.

At the grassroots level, negative perceptions of the George Town Grants Programme’s objectives, and misinterpretations of the terms and conditions of the grants were compounded by rumour-mongering. Early enquirers often thought that accepting a grant meant signing over control of heritage properties to Think City. There was even a press report where the youth wing of a local political party claimed to be an ‘agent’ representing the grants programme, and promised easier access to the funds!

Making a Home in the City

Among the Think City physical restoration projects, residential properties seemed to be the least technically challenging. On the face of it, they presented a straightforward chance to fulfil one of the basic objectives of the grants programme, which was to retain existing populations in George Town by restoring Category Two buildings. These were normally shophouses.

In most cases, residents only used their shophouses as homes and did not operate businesses out of them. To the credit of the

property owners, they were quite resilient and willing to embrace the daily complications that came with the privilege of owning a century-old property. Although most of them had carried out periodic maintenance and repairs to make their property more tenable, they were still in dire need of technical advice and financial assistance to improve overall living conditions.

The team asked prospective grantees about their doubts, hopes and decisions, and what gave them the desire to live and work in George Town. In other words, why did they call George Town ‘home’? Here are some examples of the interviews with the property owners.

Project Selection Criteria

Be catalytic, stimulating further developments within the World Heritage Site	Include developmental elements that provided capacity-building opportunities	Demonstrate social, economic or cultural inclusiveness
Be sustainable, delivering future socio-economic benefits to George Town	Be creative and innovative in approach, whether technically or socio-economically	Demonstrate the effectiveness of the public-private partnership model

100 Lebu Armenian

Eric Loh Kam Weng inherited his shophouse from his grandmother, who bought the property in 1958 – an astute purchase by a widowed lady who, according to him, had saved diligently. Before the UNESCO status was awarded, Eric had wanted to rectify the leaking roof by replacing it with asbestos. But the Penang Island City Council's Heritage Unit (now subsumed into George Town World Heritage Inc) stopped him, advising him against asbestos even though he had a very practical reason for doing so.

“At that time, it was just too expensive for me to restore the roof according to conservation methods. Many years ago, I did hear of some government funding, but I wasn't convinced [of it] and the government then didn't really push it [to the public]. When I heard of the Think City grant in 2010, I felt that it was the perfect opportunity. I had waited eight long years to finally get no-strings-attached funding to restore my house,” Loh said.

During the process of restoration, Loh learnt a lot about the house he had lived in for decades. “One of the things I realised was that the traditional design of the shophouse was very good. Even though it was considered an old building technology, the builders had taken into account natural ventilation by installing air vents and letting light into the house through the airwell. If you think of it, it's actually very environmentally friendly. The construction materials used suited the local climate, and the walls were built very thick to keep the house cool, even on hot days.

“However, I realised that it's definitely more expensive to do proper restoration work, and if not for the Think City grant, it would be impractical for us normal house owners to come up with so much money when there has been little government incentive to help relieve our financial burden,” Loh said.





Above / Eric Loh, long time resident of Lebuah Armenian.

Below / Loh's shophouse received a grant for facade and roof works.

Opposite / Street view of Lebuah Armenian.

A self-professed heritage lover and sentimentalist, Loh also helped his late neighbour, Siew Ewe Gai at 94 Lebuah Armenian to apply for the grant. “We are among the few private house owners on this stretch of Lebuah Armenian as most of the people who live here rent from *kongsis* and richer property owners,” he said.

“I was born here, and we have stayed here for four generations. Every article in this house has a story behind it. Spatially, this house is very comfortable for us to live in. And since the restoration, I can say it's become more comfortable for us to continue living in it. The property value here has increased. In fact, I can sell it off anytime, but then we would have to move out very far.

“I will then lose all the convenience I have. The market, the bank, the food stalls, and shops are all so near and within walking distance. Even my son feels the same. For me, I would rather keep this house than sell it. Living on Lebuah Armenian means that we are in the core of the heritage area.”

Loh lamented that there were few, if any, incentives provided by the authorities to encourage people to continue living in George Town. “The older generation usually wants to remain in George Town, but I don't know what will happen with the house when my children eventually take ownership. In the future, even if I move away, I will still keep this house ... maybe I'll turn it into my own business.”

Reflecting on his current decision to remain in George Town, Loh said: “I must say that not everyone is like me. Most people would want a new life, in a new environment. But I am sentimental about this inheritance from my grandmother and I value the antiquity and heritage.”

73 Leboh Acheh



As one of the few remaining residential properties in the shrinking urban Malay community in George Town, the owner of 73 Leboh Acheh, Halijah Hashim, was practical about her reasons for remaining in her family home.

“I grew up here, in this perkampungan (village enclave), because my father was the imam at the Leboh Acheh Mosque. I’ve spent my entire life here. Now my children, who used to walk to their school (all my three sons attended St. Xavier’s Institution) are now adults and have moved out to houses of their own.”

As an elderly resident of George Town, she enjoys the convenience of living in the middle of town. “I used to walk just 20 minutes to Leboh Pantai to work at the Standard Chartered Building. The market is nearby, and we live right next to the mosque. That’s why I like to stay in George Town, and that’s why the older folk remain here,” she said.

Above / Hajjah Halijah’s house under renovation. It is one of the few traditional Malay houses in George Town.

Opposite / 73 Leboh Acheh after renovation.



When faced with the challenge of replacing a leaking roof, Halijah applied to replace the existing zinc roof with clay tiles. Due to her financial situation and the cultural significance of the property, the Board approved a special allocation to fund 90% of the project. She has since benefited greatly from the upgrade and feels a renewed sense of pride in her house.

“I can tell you honestly that if it wasn’t for the Think City grant, I would have just changed the roof to zinc or asbestos. It’s just too expensive for me to change the roofing to clay tiles. If it wasn’t for the grant, I could not have afforded it. As I see it, *buruk-buruk pun rumah kita*, our

parents *tinggal* for us, *kita kena jaga* (even if the house is decrepit, our parents left it to us, and we have the responsibility of looking after it),” Halijah said.

However, the 2008 World Heritage Site status has still not eased her fears about the future. She said that earlier, the Penang State Islamic Council (MAINPP) had “told us of plans to demolish our houses and to build flats here. But it didn’t happen. Now, we have many tourists coming to take pictures of the wall murals on Lebuh Cannon and Lebuh Armenian. But still I don’t know what will happen to this area.”

22 Lorong Toh Aka



Loh Choon Kueng and his partner Yen only made the decision to move to George Town in 2010, driven by Yen's strong desire to set up home in the historic city. But for Loh, it was a reluctant homecoming.

"I was born in Weld Quay, and grew up in George Town in the first 30 years of my life. Then I moved away to other places [on Penang Island] because I didn't really have that sense

Above Left / No 22 Lorong Toh Aka before renovations.

Above Right / Facade of 22 Lorong Toh Aka after renovations.



of attachment [to George Town]. If not for my partner Yen, who has always wanted to live in George Town because she loves old things, I would not have moved back. But I have to admit that only in George Town do we see a real community existing. The spirit of community is still here."

Accordingly, they looked for and found a neglected property on the narrow, L-shaped Lorong Toh Aka, located off Lebuhr Pantai and within the core zone of the World Heritage Site. After applying for the grant, and investing part of their savings in the restoration work, Loh and Yen did a reality check of their decision to restore a crumbling shophouse.

“Doing renovation on a pre-war shophouse is like falling in love for the first time. You don’t know what you are getting into. I was warned by some friends before I took on the restoration project, but I felt I just had to try it at least once. But now I know, they were right! The contractors are going through red tape on their own terms [i.e. often ignoring rules and regulations], and they even think that getting a summons from the Penang Island City Council is the only way to obtain a repair permit!”

Loh was also uncertain, given his budget, about what would be the best method of restoration to enable comfortable urban living. “At the end of the day, it’s quite impossible to restore and maintain a house for normal living conditions by following strict conservation methods because it’s too expensive for any house owner. Maybe pure conservation practices can work for a museum, but not a house. The open airwell is a constant challenge, because it makes the house permanently dusty. Even contract cleaners don’t want to clean my place.”

Loh compared this with the restoration of his café on Lebuhr Pantai, which was done using modern materials and adaptive reuse methodology. However, this was because the building was a wooden shack and had very little architectural significance. He installed air-conditioning and renovated the space in a way that did not make it look too new. Customers’



positive feedback supported his belief, that to make Category Two buildings more user-friendly, it made more sense to opt for adaptive reuse rather than a strict conservation approach.

“As long as my business is here, I will live in George Town. If I retire, I would still prefer to retire in George Town because it’s much easier to get around. Our friends live nearby. Food is cheaper here and things are still relatively cheap,” indicating that his original reluctance had changed into commitment to George Town.

Above / Loh Choon Kueng.

Below / Loh's partner Yen.

Anjuman Himayathul Islam

The Anjuman Himayathul Islam Association was established in 1930 as a *madrasah* (Islamic school) for the Indian Muslim community that traces its roots back to Kerala, India. It was George Town's first Tamil school. Though housed in a simple wooden building, it represents the community, providing the younger generation with education and a sense of security and belonging.

When the association heard of the George Town Grants Programme, it wondered if its building, which was relatively modern and located in the buffer zone of the World Heritage Site, would get a grant. After consulting with other associations such as the Penang Island Muslim League, the then president of the Anjuman Himayathul Islam Association, Abdul Kader bin K.N. Haja Mydin, began to compile the documentation needed for the grant application. Fortuitously, this made him realise that many of the association's records were not in order and that six of its seven trustees had passed away. Despite these changes, Kader saw it as a valuable learning experience in dealing with official documentation and the Penang Island City Council.

One of the biggest challenges for Anjuman was deciding on the repairs to the building (which had last been renovated in the 1960s) and how to restore the façade in a manner sensitive to the historic environment of Lebu Chulia.

Right / Entrance to the Anjuman Himayathul Islam building, a community centre for Indian Muslims, one of the oldest communities in town.







They turned to Think City for guidance and consulted with independent technical advisor Prof Madya Dr Yahaya Ahmad about the design and materials. Kader then roped in his engineer son as part of the restoration committee.

“My son was a key person in this process as he was the one who did a lot of the groundwork by searching for a suitable design for the façade restoration, as well as locating materials and contractors. Because of his professional training, he was thinking of the restoration by linking it to the function of the building.

“What was the function of Anjuman? It’s a *surau* [prayer room] and it’s a *madrasah*, which means that the doors must always be open to members. We also had to think of ways to cool the space while keeping it open,” Kader said.

They felt that the standard air-conditioning units would not work since the condensers were not aesthetically suited to heritage buildings. After doing research on available cooling systems, they went to B. L. Thompson on Jalan Dato’ Keramat and ordered a system which drew in cool air from outside to ventilate the interior space. This proved far more effective in cooling open areas than the old method of using multiple ceiling fans, he said.

“In the end, we decided on three key aspects for the restoration – a pebble wash exterior, the air cooling system to improve ventilation, and a heritage-inspired façade design. We decided to use pebble wash rather than emulsion paint or tiling the façade because we needed the interior to be cool and comfortable. My son tracked down a Chinese contractor in Seberang Prai who could do a very good job with the pebble wash façade. We then designed timber doors and installed coloured pane windows because they gave a heritage look to our building. We also ordered heritage-like cement tiles from Muda House [another George Town Grants Programme Project].

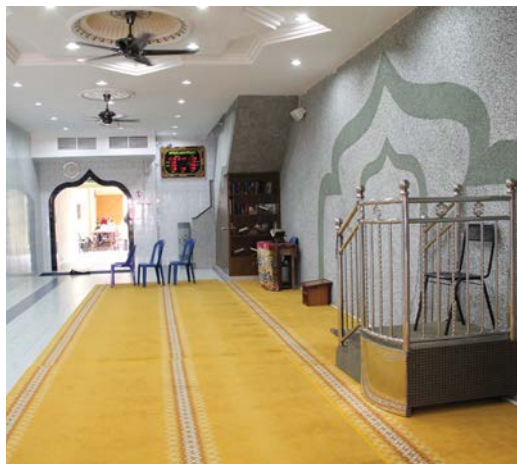
“Overall, the interior work blends in well with the building, and it doesn’t look as if a lot of work has been done to the façade. Our members are very happy with the changes, and sometimes I see tourists taking pictures of our building!

After the restoration, we also added a recreation area for younger kids by putting in ping pong tables and dartboards on the first floor,” Kader said.

Above / External view of the Anjuman Himayathul Islam building.

Opposite Top Left & Right / The prayer hall is a multi-use space.

Opposite Below / Abdul Kader bin K.N. Haja Mydin.



Kader and his son's commitment to the association stems from his family's long history of serving the community. "My father was *Bendahari* [Treasurer] and Honorary Secretary of the committee, and my grandfather was one of the people who donated to the upgrading of the Anjuman building in the 1960s. This was at a time when most of them were just labourers earning small money. But even then, they were able to think about improving the building for future use.

"Now that I am President, my son too has contributed to the restoration of the façade by becoming the main contractor for the restoration. We managed to save a lot of money on the restoration work. Anjuman only forked out RM10,000."

With visible pride, he said the association received a federal grant of RM100,000 from the Prime Minister of Malaysia in 2013. They plan to channel this money into a youth outreach programme to include sporting activities. The association also gave its youth the task of starting a social media account for Anjuman



on Facebook, demonstrating its willingness to encourage community-building efforts beyond the physical space and traditional roles of the *madrasah* and *surau*.

"Many times, our members would ask 'What has the *persatuan* [association] done for us?'. I think the question should be 'What do you want to do for the *persatuan*?' Anjuman is a very big part of our lives because being here gives us that feeling of *ketenangan jiwa* [peace of mind]. That's why for me and for all of us, this place is also our home," he said.

Adaptive Reuse and New Uses of Heritage Shophouses

From the early days of the George Town Grants Programme, many applications came from business owners who regarded any financial incentive as a sweetener in return for their investment in the city. This may sound opportunistic and capitalistic but Think City decided to use this attitude to spur investment and socio-economic regeneration in the Heritage Site. By providing a home for businesses, new investment gave George Town a boost as well as improving its reputation as a

business-friendly and commercially viable city. Commercial owners usually had relatively large and prominent properties to restore and their investment in these properties was relatively high. They also had the ability to generate employment during and after the restoration and to revitalise run-down neighbourhoods, as was predicted by the team at the start of the grants programme.

A tangible indicator of the impact of such restorations was the rising real estate values that Think City tracked over the duration of the programme.



Above / 1881 Hotel is an example of adaptive reuse.

George Town World Heritage Site Property Price Change



Source: Geografia, 2014. Property Price Analysis for GTWHI

Anecdotal evidence suggested that prices per square foot had tripled since the award of UNESCO World Heritage Site status. The 2013 Population and Land Use Study conducted by Geografia – a second commission by Think City – showed that, while the residential population had not grown, hospitality and tourism businesses had flourished significantly since 2009.

The increasing commercial interest in George Town also showed that heritage buildings could be adapted to the requirements of small businesses despite the constraints of conservation and the Penang Island City Council’s regulations. This provided a new and affordable way of restoring and conserving buildings based on the needs of the current owner or tenant.

Many of the commercial projects that the grants programme supported combined traditional and modern building materials while respecting the historic environment. In cases where traditional conservation methods proved unsuitable, there were many on-site innovations specific to a particular structure or particular conditions within a building. In most cases, the property owner took on the role of lead conservationist or project manager to ensure that the contractor adhered to Penang Island City Council guidelines. Their accountability and sense of responsibility in protecting the Outstanding Universal Value of the Heritage Site as well as their pragmatism in the use of innovative and adaptive reuse methods for their properties has been a success.

Ren I Tang Boutique Hotel

In 2009, Low Teng Lei and her colleagues at Green Building Sdn Bhd began to scout for possible properties to purchase and convert into a boutique hotel. As a branch of a travel and tourism company based in Kuala Lumpur, their initial forays were guided by leading lights in the local heritage community such as Khoo Salma of the Penang Heritage Trust, Janet Pillai of Arts-ED and local tourist guide Joann

Khaw, who is a strong heritage enthusiast and supporter. They were persuaded by them to consider the vacant, three-storey building, Ren I Tang, at 82A-B-C Lebuhr Penang owned by the Cheah Kongs. However, it was not for sale.

“I remember standing at the corner of Lebuhr Penang and Lebuhr China one morning at 7am. While waiting for Salma to join us, I found



myself liking the building and being drawn to it. Part of the building's appeal was related to its backstory. There used to be a traditional Chinese medicine hall there that was evicted due to a tenancy dispute with the building's owner," said Low.

They had to consider the viability of investing a large amount of money to restore a building they did not own. So they looked at various business models and approached the Cheah Kongsi for a 30-year lease. This was unprecedented in the *kongsi*'s history.

When Green Building approached Think City for a grant, the case was regarded as very unusual given their status as tenants. So Green Building decided to organise a special meeting with the *kongsi* trustees and Think City to discuss the terms and conditions of the grant.

"I can honestly say that this project would not have materialised if the *kongsi* had not agreed to the terms of the long-term lease we had asked for. But it would not otherwise have made sound economic sense for us to pour our investment into creating the new Ren I Tang," Low said.



Opposite & Above / The Ren i Tang boutique hotel, a Cheah Kongsi-owned property on Lebuhr Penang. After renovation, it enhances the streetscape around Little India.



Above / Retaining the historic links to Chinese medicine was a key objective of the managers for the boutique hotel.

Opposite / Low Teng Lei, Ren i Tang proprietor.

During the process of submitting technical documentation to the Penang Island City Council for the Technical Review Panel's approval, they conducted further historical research so as to compile a Heritage Impact Assessment. They were assisted by Lim Gaik Siang of the Penang Heritage Trust, and Dato' Maimunah Sharif who was then the General Manager of George Town World Heritage Inc. It was through the process of fact-finding that they came to realise the significance of the building within the historic social fabric of George Town and the Little India locality.



They also befriended the evicted operator of the Yin Oi Tong medicine hall, Chong Yit Leong, who regaled them with stories and helped them to identify the old items that were left behind in the building. This prompted them to incorporate the character of the medicine hall into the design of the new hotel.

Their restoration journey was fraught with difficulties. “One of the main challenges of working on this project was getting the right contractor to work on the restoration and conservation. Less than midway through the project, our contractor flew the coop and we were stranded!

“But we had the good fortune of hiring skilled workers who had prior experience working on heritage properties [Rebecca Wilkinson’s previous property, 25 Lebu China, which later became a George Town Grants Programme project], and we ended up supervising the workers ourselves and becoming almost like contractors,” said Low.

“We learnt quickly about conservation and had a tough time searching for recycled building materials. We had to show our workers how to rehabilitate recycled materials because we couldn’t outsource the work. For example, seasoned wood needed extra work to strip miscellaneous materials to make them useable. We ended up buying our own tools and guiding our workers through the process.” said Low.

Importantly, the workers took into consideration the previous use of the building and retained existing structural elements, lightly adapting them to fit the function of the building as a hotel. According to Low, there were no complaints from the heritage activists in George Town about either the workmanship or the adaptive reuse methods after the project was done. In fact, they started getting requests from friends with heritage properties who wanted them to manage the restoration and carry out interior design work on their buildings too, mimicking the aesthetic treatment of Ren I Tang.

43 and 45 Kampung Malabar



Above / A family business that was upgraded and modernised without compromising on standards. Owner Mr Lai has kept his promise to keep prices affordable in exchange for volume.

Opposite / Entrance to the coffeeshop.

Food entrepreneur Lai Yew Chong is the fourth generation inheritor of his family's modest business, selling pork porridge and rice noodles in George Town. Previously based outside a coffee shop on Kampung Malabar, he saw the opportunity to upgrade and expand his business in 2009 when buildings 43 and 45 and Lot 47 (then an empty lot) came up for sale at a good price. The two buildings and the attached lot had been vacant for a while and 45 had interior fire damage. However, despite the need for a heavy financial investment in these buildings, Lai liked their proximity to his father's food stall.

"It was timely because customers were starting to expect a different eating environment. They wanted a place that was cleaner and more comfortable for them to enjoy their meal. Not everyone continues to enjoy eating by the roadside. And what if the Penang Island City Council decides to discontinue my father's hawker licence in the future? It just made sense for me to change the concept of my business and to house it in a heritage property."

Lai was also a pragmatist. He did not base the project wholly on Think City's financial incentives, since he genuinely believed in his concept of changing his business model from a stall to a restaurant. With the help of April Sham, who was also a grant recipient for 8 Lorong Muda, he submitted his plans to Think City to convert the shophouse and the vacant lot into a restaurant. He also consulted the Penang Island City Council's in-house architect, Tan Lin Hai, on an appropriate design for his project.

"Tan suggested the design and configuration of connecting the three lots in his drawings. In fact, he really encouraged us to carry out our restoration because it would encourage other hawkers to upgrade their business."



Even though the amount provided by the George Town Grants Programme was very small compared with his personal investment in the project, the result was a reflection of Lai's attachment to George Town and his role as a business owner in the World Heritage Site.

"Though I'm doing this to upgrade my business, I also consider it a contribution to the tradition of food and maintaining the reputation of Penang's food culture by showing that it can be done better. Customers are my number one supporters. So far, they seem very happy with the restaurant. I, too, am very happy with the outcome of this restoration and the incentives from the grant," Lai said.

Seven Terraces

Boutique hotel entrepreneurs Christopher Ong and Karl Steinberg had experience in conserving and transforming old properties using adaptive reuse methods before they bought their first property in Penang. The Galle Fort Hotel in Sri Lanka, which won the UNESCO Award of Distinction in 2007, had been their first heritage property and provided them with extensive on-site knowledge of how to restore an old property using a combination of traditional and modern methods.

“There is a language in the World Heritage Site, and you need to know the language before you start doing any restoration and conservation work. This language can’t be regulated, and it doesn’t have strict rules. It comes from a generosity and openness of the spirit and the heart. The only way to learn the language is to listen to the site and let it speak to you to show you what’s special about the site. It’s an intuitive process,” said Steinberg.

“Most people do not fully understand the tension between conservation and adaptation. We often walk around the World Heritage Site to soak in the spirit of the place by looking at other buildings, and to a certain extent, adapting what we see. We saw a need to restore Seven Terraces without losing the spirit of the place. Because if you lose that, it’s a sin and that’s the destruction (it brings) to George Town.”

At the time of purchase in 2011, the seven shophouses had been abandoned for a decade, suffering both extensive fire damage and neglect. There was even a 25-foot tree growing in the middle lot. They had already conceptualised the buildings as a boutique hotel and had begun working on it when they realised that a neighbouring shophouse was being used as a swiftlet breeding house. To safeguard the structure of their building from the damp caused by the swiftlet breeding house, they ended up buying No. 16 and incorporating the restoration of the property into their overall plans.



Right & Opposite / Interior of Seven Terraces before restoration.



Steinberg said their approach was realistic, seamlessly integrating old and new. One of the main innovations was to hide 90% of the utilities infrastructure away from view, including the fireproofing, plumbing, electrical wiring, air conditioning and security systems. This was all done in an environmentally friendly manner, even though this was harder to implement and cost more.

Nonetheless, their foresight and planning won them the ultimate accolade from their guests, who cannot tell that the building had been through a massive programme of adaptation. Guests believe that what they see is the original building.



Right / A derelict row of shophouses along Stewart Lane was identified in the George Town Baseline Study as an important street to improve.



Steinberg, who has a professional background in film production design, was a hands-on property owner and designer. He responded strongly to complaints from certain heritage professionals about their adaptive reuse approach.

“Conservation zealots need to realise that not every building is the Parthenon. They have to understand that conservation is a living thing. For buildings to have a new use, we need to adapt them, upgrade them, make them safe, make them useable. Otherwise, the buildings will all be dead and ugly. You cannot apply Category One conservation guidelines to Category Two buildings. We cannot adapt these buildings using only the old conservation methods because it would make it untenable.

“Take for example the design of the central courtyard, which wasn’t an original architectural element of these buildings. We built it in such a way because we needed air and light in the building. We needed our guests to walk in and immediately feel that they are on vacation, and most importantly, not to feel like they are in a museum. It needed to feel tropical and resort-like. You see, we had envisioned *all* of this, even as we worked within our own technical limitations,” he said.

“This has been a project where we not only contributed towards the World Heritage Site [by restoring the row of shophouses] but we have also created a self-sustainable project that is able to generate income to make it economically viable. We did it because it gives us personal pleasure on a daily basis. For us, wealth is about the intangible, and the true value is in the appreciation. We are able to enhance people’s lives by giving them this experience of the hotel.

Opposite / Amazingly transformed by hoteliers Christopher Ong and Karl Steinberg, the Seven Terraces is now one of Malaysia’s top boutique heritage hotels.

“For instance, we had an open cheque to acquire antique furniture from Penang of the same era as when these shophouses were built. We generated plenty of work with the wood carvers, carpenters, crafts people, etc., because we needed to ensure everything in Seven Terraces represented Penang. We worked with local suppliers and showed them innovative ways to make their products. Now they have new products that they can sell to their other clients,” Steinberg said when outlining his view of how this project had impacted George Town.

From the perspective of the George Town Grants Programme and the owners, this project is a prime example of the adaptive reuse approach to conservation. In a public area of Seven Terraces they included a restaurant, which provides a fusion of Peranakan and other types of food. This was in line with one of the requirements of commercial George Town Grants Programme projects – that portions of the property must be publicly accessible.

Peranakan Cuisine

Most Peranakans are the descendants of Chinese immigrants and Penang Peranakan cooking is the result of blending Chinese ingredients with spices and cooking techniques used by the Malay and Thai communities. This makes Peranakan cuisine tangy, aromatic, spicy and herbal. The Peranakans have also adopted certain dishes from the Malay repertoire, such as assam fish and beef rendang.



“We reinvented, refined and reinterpreted Peranakan culture and cuisine and brought it into the 21st century by giving it a new audience and appreciation. Our intention is to provide multi-tiered access to the experience of the hotel through the bar. The restaurant allows everyone to enjoy a slice of the essence that is Seven Terraces,” Steinberg added.

He also said that the type of tourists their project has been drawing to George Town “are more responsible, respectful and sensitive to the local culture and the locals.” Their tourist

Above / The furniture and antiques are part of a curated Peranakan experience. Museology work ensured that every piece was catalogued and their provenance traced back to a prominent Peranakan food.

Opposite / Public access is provided to its bar and restaurant, which offers a contemporary interpretation of Peranakan food.

dollars have a significant economic spillover effect on the World Heritage Site. This has repositioned and rebranded the site, setting a new standard for heritage conservation that has attracted accolades and recognition by *Conde Nast Traveller*, *TripAdvisor*, and the *Financial Times*.

Their innovative vision and successful track record in Sri Lanka and Penang have prompted people from other Asian World Heritage Sites to ask them to take on conservation projects there.

Aside from the commercial success and public recognition earned by their commitment to excellence, the project reflects their core aspirations. “At the end of the day, the real rewards are spiritual, cultural and utterly personal. We have shown a vision of what can be achieved with that belief,” Steinberg said.



Evolution of a Living City

From 2010 to 2014, the George Town Grants Programme funded 80 physical projects representing a total commitment of RM7.8 million. While the programme has been criticised for exacerbating gentrification, current evidence suggests that physical restoration has stimulated regeneration, even among ordinary people and neighbourhoods. In fact, it can be argued that through community housing programmes, some of the projects have fostered socio-economic plurality and diversity.

The list of projects featured in this chapter is not exhaustive. The many issues and challenges faced by the other recipients, by the Penang Island City Council and the Think City team have thrown up some very useful lessons.

Lesson 1: Balancing economic input against tenable project outcomes

Property owners, residents or business operators have shown that financial viability takes precedence over perfectionistic conservation or 'best practice'. This is even more apparent when the actual cost of conservation and/or restoration does not end at the completion of the restoration process. Owners have to constantly invest to maintain their heritage properties. This has come as a shock to many new owners (as illustrated in the case studies above). The maintenance of heritage buildings is invariably more expensive than that of new buildings.



Right / A corridor at the Seven Terraces.

In the long run, it would be possible to provide other types of financial incentives to encourage property owners to retain and maintain their properties, either through low-cost loans from the government or financial agents (as already suggested and detailed in the current Draft Special Area Plan, submitted to UNESCO in 2011), or through a preventive tax to curb property speculation within the World Heritage Site.

However, speculation has already begun and property prices are soaring. There has also been a backlash, with various heritage proponents blaming the greed of the locals and even Think City for the gentrification that has resulted in the establishment of so many hospitality and tourism-related businesses in George Town since 2010.

Although there will always be people who seek to make a quick buck, this cannot be a good reason to allow gradual neglect, decay and ultimate oblivion. The past can never be recaptured, but as long as people are inspired by their heritage and others want to come and see it for themselves, the future is assured.

Lesson 2: Balancing local authority regulation against site-specific issues
There are now two schools of thought regarding conservation and restoration in George Town – the traditional ‘best practice’ conservationists and the proponents of adaptive reuse. The rift is related to site-specific problems that are threatening the current stock of shophouses.

The case for a hybrid approach that favours the adoption of adaptive reuse restoration methods is overwhelming if modern life is to carry on in these buildings. However, it must be sensitive to the historic and social context of George Town. Both of these approaches are now acceptable within the current regulatory environment overseen by the Penang Island City Council.

In the long run, there is a need to develop a widespread knowledge of conservation, restoration and adaptive reuse methodologies to create Penang-specific ‘terms of engagement’ for future built heritage projects in George Town.

Naturally, this has wider implications for the country. A number of other mining, agricultural and capital cities of similar age are facing the same issues about what to do with their pre-war shophouses. The case requires a collective effort by the state authorities, the National Heritage Commission and the pool of heritage professionals to raise awareness about urban conservation guidelines among property owners and developers. At the same time, there is a need to promote a more balanced approach to working with our built heritage.

The future of George Town depends on the alignment of conservation and development. More examples of rejuvenation projects that respect the city’s historic fabric and that take into account its intangible heritage need to be highlighted. A long term view of these investments are crucial and the economic returns will become apparent in the future. As these community projects have shown, we are merely custodians for the future generations. Our duty is to pass on what we inherited in good order.

Quick Take

THE various peoples that came to call George Town home also gave the city its distinctive culture and identity through an intangible heritage ranging from religious celebrations to traditional everyday activities.

This chapter looks at the series of initiatives launched by the George Town Grants Programme to keep alive the creativity and energy of the city's traditions and its intangible heritage.

The Penang Story Project involved specialist lectures on Penang's history and interpretations by the city's communities and institutions of their own history and heritage. Among the interpretations were the Street of Harmony Wayfinding System, the Eastern and Oriental Hotel Gallery, the documenting of Chinese Clan Histories and a Penang Muslim Culinary Heritage initiative

Meanwhile, ArtsEd delivered a series of heritage education programmes and a Penang Artisans Project sought to revitalise George Town's traditional crafts. Think City sponsored a Creative Industries initiative to stimulate the growth of another type of business to drive the economy, in addition to heritage tourism.

Finally, a Centre for Arts, Heritage and Culture was established to connect the elements relevant to creativity and intangible heritage, including community participation, innovation, management and programming.

Chapter 6

THE PENANG STORY:

Creativity & Intangible Heritage

The City as a Creative Space

One reason for George Town qualifying as a UNESCO World Heritage Site is its mix of different cultures, all influencing each other. This exceptional level of cultural infusion and adaptation is a key characteristic that makes the city so vibrant, exciting and resilient. The backdrop for all this is the city's built heritage, which reflects a mix of architectural styles, including Malay, southern Chinese, Indian and Western colonial. This built heritage is a vehicle for cultural transmission.



Above / Penang is famed for its street food, which is a key component of its intangible heritage.

As with many other heritage cities worldwide, the communities of George Town and their cultural diversity give the place its unique identity, which we refer to as place identity. Essential to George Town's culture and identity is its intangible heritage – the range of activities related to differing lifestyles within the communities that live and work in the city. The more obvious ones are religious celebrations, but equally important are everyday activities that have been going on for generations. This is related to specific occupations, leisure activities or traditional rituals. The city is also defined by the way it prepares and consumes food, whether in the street, in restaurants, in hotels or at home. Dubbed the world's 'street food capital' by *The New York Times*, Penang's street food remains a major unifier, with different ethnicities and classes sharing a common space for a meal.

At the core of the cultural activities that take place in any city is the creative use of imagination and design. Penang is no exception with its ability to imagine and project its unique cultures at both the community and the individual level. 'Agency' is the word used here to convey that feeling of association, of being involved with the shaping of one's cultural identity, giving the community and the individual a strong sense of ownership. In George Town, many can claim that their ancestors had a hand in the making of a particular building, monument or neighbourhood. However, this sense of ownership needs to be kept alive by the simple acts of living and celebrating in the city.

With this in mind, the George Town Grants Programme supported the creativity that underpins Penang's cultural identity through a series of initiatives and programmes related to its place identity.

The Penang Story Project

In 2000, civil society groups were campaigning for both the State and Federal governments to support the nomination of George Town as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Adopting a bottom-up approach, the Penang Heritage Trust and Star Media Group Berhad collaborated and launched the Penang Story Project.

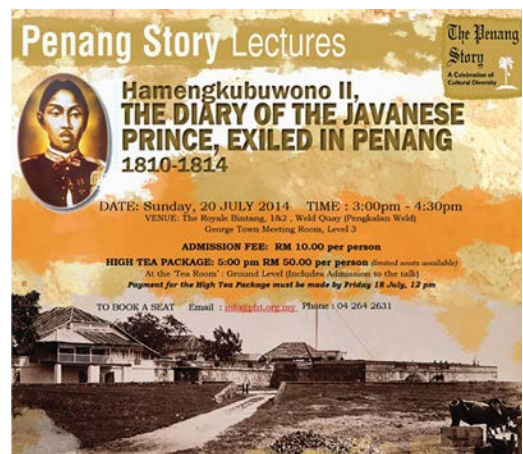
The aim was to collect and document community histories in support of the UNESCO World Heritage Site nomination. Its theme was 'Celebrating Cultural Diversity' which was explored through four colloquiums conducted in the vernacular, an international conference featuring subject experts on Penang's history, and a year-long weekly newspaper column highlighting the historical significance of George Town. This hugely popular project was followed up by a popular publication called *Glimpses of Old Penang* and an academic publication, *Penang and its Region*.

Ten years later, Think City collaborated with the Penang Heritage Trust, George Town World Heritage Inc and the Centre for Policy & International Studies at Universiti Sains Malaysia to relaunch the Penang Story Project.

A decade after the first Penang Story Project, George Town had become a UNESCO World Heritage Site. To celebrate this listing and to create greater awareness of the global accolade, the 2010 Penang Story Project chose to explore the theme 'Penang in Global History'.

This time, community histories were to be explored and shared collectively. This initiative envisaged two kinds of activity. The first was a Penang Story lecture series.

Subject experts were invited to speak about some aspect of Penang's history that was of special significance in world history. The lecture could be about an event that happened in Penang, a contribution by a Penangite, or Penang as a symbol of global trends. The second kind of activity was community-orientated and favoured inclusive, intercultural projects that encouraged local communities to participate in the interpretation of their own histories and heritage.



Sun Yat Sen Heritage Trail

This project involved initial research followed by the creation of a heritage trail with suitable signposts featuring important landmarks associated with Dr Sun Yat Sen. The project created greater awareness of Dr Sun and his connection with Penang. The project mobilised supporters of Dr Sun in Penang and marked the centennial celebrations of the 1910 'Penang Conference' when Dr Sun planned yet another revolution in China. This time, it was ultimately successful.

The trail is very popular with tourists, especially those from Taiwan and mainland China.

The Lecture Series

Professor Wang Gungwu of the National University of Singapore and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong presented the inaugural Penang Story lecture on the topic of Dr Sun Yat Sen and Ku Hung Ming in Penang. At the time of writing, 15 Penang Story public lectures had been given.

The lecture series was complemented by a Penang and the Indian Ocean international conference. It brought together academics from Cambridge University, London University and local community representatives. The conference explored historical links created by trade and migration as well as the present-day relations between the countries bordering the Indian Ocean and their links with Penang.

Communities & Heritage Interpretation

While the Penang Story lecture series celebrated George Town's listing as a UNESCO World Heritage Site through its significance in global history, there was a need for Penang's citizens to understand the implications of the listing. In the case of George Town, it is above all the historic interaction of different communities that makes the place special. In short, the whole of Penang is greater than the sum of its parts.

The importance of heritage interpretation is not only in the findings of research into a community's history but also in the process of interpretation itself. Because the necessary financial input is large and expertise is hard to find, the state generally takes on the role of heritage interpretation, usually through a state-owned and managed museum. Think City took a broader approach. Communities were encouraged to find ways to define themselves within the larger narrative of Penang's and Malaysia's history.

Penang and Yangon Workshop

In 2012, Think City worked with the Yangon Heritage Trust to organise a weekend workshop to explore relations between Penang and Yangon (previously Rangoon). As the financial capital of Myanmar, Yangon continues to have a good relationship with Penang at the people-to-people level. The two cities share a common history as colonial ports with a similar cosmopolitan and multi-cultural heritage.

Penang's Burmese communities, which established themselves in George Town in the early 19th century, joined in the workshop by hosting dinners and staging cultural performances.

More recent migrants from Myanmar are frequently involved in the service industries and have set up retail outlets on a particular floor in KOMTAR (Penang's tallest building located in the heart of George Town). Penang also has a significant Rohingya community, many of them refugees from the ongoing hostilities in the western parts of Myanmar.

The workshop explored not only the historical links between the two cities but Penang's continuing role, both as a sanctuary and a place of economic importance, in the latest phase of Myanmar's development.

More importantly, communities were assisted in documenting, interpreting and visualising their heritage through oral history interviews, community discussions and the engaging of creative talent.

The Wayfinding System

As early as 2010, Think City provided a grant to start a community-led Wayfinding System in Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling, Lebuhraya and Lebuhraya. The grantee, Sympologic Sdn Bhd, developed a documentation project focused on the communities clustered around specific monuments. The resulting narratives focused on the history of the local communities and their role within these historically significant streets. With the aid of a graphic design team, the communities produced brochures and information panels. These told the story from the community's perspective, highlighting what was significant about their site and conveying their understanding of the site's significance within the city as a whole.

The overall design of the system had to be uniform throughout the World Heritage Site, but it was the communities themselves who identified the places they thought were interesting and important. This included such things as religious sites, community centres and food outlets.

The communities were generally positive about the idea of telling their own stories, but there was also a need to balance their perspectives against fact-based historical research. One Chinese clan organisation, for example, insisted that the name of their organisation was not the same as it appeared in the official registry of societies. It was later discovered that throughout its 200-year history it had existed under at least six different names.



Above / Showing the way – a system developed with the community.

At the people-to-people level, different people recalled the same event differently. They also had different views about what was significant. More complex were questions about each community's role in relation to the overall development of the city. Not everyone had the contextual knowledge needed to place community history within the larger canvas of the Penang Story. However, through the process of community engagement, some level of understanding was achieved.

The design of the signposts pointing to heritage spots in George Town was managed by George Town World Heritage Inc, which liaised with the local communities and the local authority on the design and placement of the signposts. A creative design acceptable to all communities was selected. A key consideration was that the materials used were durable and could be replaced at reasonable cost. Signs were put up on existing poles to avoid adding to the general clutter of street furniture.

Meanwhile, maps were drawn up highlighting places of interest within the pilot area. The maps also indicated transport hubs like bus stops and other tourist infrastructure. Working with the local authorities, George Town World Heritage Inc identified suitable public places where the maps could be erected. The local authorities set about removing damaged public infrastructure in the area that got in the way of pedestrians.

About six months after the pilot Wayfinding System was put in place, critical comments from the public were taken into account. Factual errors in the community brochures were corrected. The digital brochures allowed editing and, once these corrections had been made, the wayfinding system was expanded to include Little India and the Swettenham Pier area.



In Little India, the process began with the community. Following recommendations from the New York-based consultancy, Project for Public Spaces, the community applied what they called the 'Power of Ten' strategy. This meant identifying the top ten attractions of Little India and making these the basis for the Wayfinding System.

At Swettenham Pier, the focus was on enhancing the experience of arriving at George Town's waterfront – the gateway to the World Heritage Site. Here, the Wayfinding System guided visitors to the civic quarter with its colonial buildings and Fort Cornwallis, joining up with the Street of Harmony. Starting from the pier, visitors could head south towards the clan jetties or west into the old Central Business District at Lebuh Pantai. From there, visitors could also walk to Little India.

Above Left / Dr Suraya Ismail, Dato' Dr Anwar Fazal and Chief Minister of Penang YAB Lim Guan Eng launching the wayfinding system outside Masjid Melayu Lebuh Acheh.

Right / Cannon Square signage.



The E&O Gallery

The Eastern & Oriental Hotel (the E&O) had constructed a new wing which needed to be linked to the old wing. Think City provided a technical grant to help the E&O gallery team with the research, documentation and designs needed to build an exhibition gallery focusing on this single institution as a landmark Penang heritage hotel. Think City identified and hired museum science specialist and social anthropologist Yvonne Teh. She conducted a survey of heritage interpretation centres in the city and held workshops hosted by the E&O for community leaders interested in the process of heritage interpretation.

The E&O Gallery was completed in August 2013 and features stories and objects directly related to the hotel. It concentrates on its many famous guests, its staff, and the Penangites who held weddings, anniversaries and other celebrations at the hotel. Oral histories were collected in the form of video interviews, all directly related to the objects in the gallery. The gallery also helps hotel guests and visitors understand the E&O's history in relation to Penang's wider development as a port city.

Located at the western 'gateway' to the UNESCO World Heritage Site, it provides a fascinating introduction to a major aspect of George Town's history – the city's cosmopolitan heritage.

The E&O then had to make sure the heritage gallery had the resources it needed after it was completed. Now, the gallery has a full-time staff member who greets visitors and guides them through the exhibits. Programmes in the form of heritage talks and workshops were developed to complement the gallery. The E&O Group, the parent company of the hotel, accepted responsibility for its custodial role, which has ensured the project's sustainability.



Above / Starting with collection management, the E&O Gallery within the landmark E&O Hotel contributes to the wider Penang story.

Source: Eastern & Oriental Berhad



Above / Chinese opera performer during the Meng Eng Soo Festival.

Chinese Clan Histories

Think City encouraged community-based organisations to apply for a grant to expand their cultural heritage programmes, provided these included a strong educational element. Among the most efficient was the Penang Chinese Clan Council, made up of Chinese clan associations in George Town and throughout Penang. Kwoh Shoo Chen, Executive Secretary of the Council, explained how the grant allowed the organisation to develop new and more innovative programmes to build greater public awareness of the role of clan organisations.

“During the years the Penang Chinese Clan Council received funding from Think City, we carried out new activities. We had the confidence to expand our programmes and to implement them as we had envisioned. Removing the problem of fundraising freed us from the usual worries about whether we could run a programme and seek funding simultaneously,” she said.

Some of the projects involved documenting the histories of over 100 clan organisations in Penang. “In the past, some clan halls were hesitant and would even turn us away when we approached them for help. After we started researching the book and speaking to them more, the relationship with these clans and the Penang Chinese Clan Council improved,” Kwoh said.



“Now, they are more willing to open their doors to let us participate in their clan activities [such as rituals associated with paying homage to ancestors] and they participate in the street events we organise. That is a visible change. After the first volume of the *Chinese Clan History* book was published, we began using the money from the book sales to produce the second volume.”

Another major activity organised by Penang Chinese Clan Council is the Meng Eng Soo Street Festival that usually takes place in conjunction with the George Town Festival.

Kwoh described the Meng Eng Soo as a ‘brand’ associated with the Penang Chinese Clan Council that showcases how Chinese clans and culture

can be celebrated. “The festival has given the council a higher recognition in the media. As a result, we have been getting requests for information from various associations and from overseas academic groups conducting research and tracing the histories of the Chinese clans and diaspora.”

“We have become one of their reference points, and we have gladly helped enquirers liaise with the relevant clans for their research. The Meng Eng Soo, a confederation of clan associations, has also increased the membership of its volunteer groups, introducing new blood into the network. This is on top of the volunteers that we attract from the cultural outreach, historical talk and treasure hunt events that we organise with schools,” she said.

Above / Basket weaving during the Meng Eng Soo Festival.

Penang Muslim Culinary Heritage

Penang food is legendary and food is an important part of the shared heritage of George Town. Malay ingredients are a basic element in George Town's cuisines, especially in the cuisine of the various Peranakan communities living in Penang. Peranakan is a Malay word meaning 'to adopt', referring, in this case, to the hybrid ethnic and cultural communities in the city. The ever-popular Peranakan cooking demonstrates this adaptation to multi-cultural local conditions. Peranakan communities also celebrate their mixed heritage enthusiastically through colourful festivals and gatherings that have become tourist attractions. Like George Town, both Melaka and Singapore are former Straits Settlements and have their own version of Peranakan culture.

Dato' Dr Wazir Jahan Karim, an anthropologist and author of several scholarly books, came up with the idea of a book to illustrate the rich Peranakan Muslim heritage. She said that, for a long time, the Chinese Peranakan culture had dominated visitor attention and Peranakan Muslim culture had not received the attention it deserved. Dr Wazir said phrases such as 'Jawi Peranakan' and 'Jawi Pekan' were alien to many Malaysians, including Malays.

She felt that an appealing way to demonstrate the indelible contribution of the Straits Muslims was by research into their culinary heritage. The research process was interactive and participatory, including two workshops with women from the older generation who had knowledge and experience of popular dishes from the past.



Above / Dato' Dr Wazir Jahan Karim (centre), an anthropologist and author.

Below / The spirit of sharing is an underlying feature of Muslim cooking in Penang.



Dr Wazir said many of these recipes would otherwise have become just a nostalgic memory among the younger generation of Straits Muslims. Her aim was to document and demonstrate the culinary heritage of Straits Muslims from the northwest of Peninsular Malaysia, focusing mainly on Penang.

Above / Making *ketupat*, rice cooked inside a woven palm leaf pouch.



“Of all the port cities along the Straits of Malacca, Penang remains the heart of Straits Muslim hybrid communities, which include the urban Malays (Jawi Peranakan, Jawi Pekan and Orang Tanjung), Arabs (Arab Peranakan), Indian Muslims (Mamak), Pakistani Punjabis and Sumatrans. All of them adopted aspects of Malay culture,” said Dr Wazir. Her research was co-funded by Think City and Yayasan Al-Bukhari.

Above / Jawi House, a restaurant that features Peranakan cooking.



She also received a conservation grant from Think City that made it possible for her to restore a shophouse on Lebuhraya Armenian. This enabled her to demonstrate her research in the form of a social enterprise. The retired university professor is now the Managing Director of Jawi House which is home to a Jawi heritage gallery and a café featuring Peranakan Muslim food.

She said that many Malays were just as fascinated by Peranakan Muslims as foreigners were. The world's proto-Malays are outnumbered by exogamous Malays (i.e. those who have married outside the 'tribe'), and exogamous Malays "are proud to say that they have families that go beyond our shores. They are now looking for their background in the Nusantara (Southeast Asian) world."

Apart from the grants for the book and for the restoration of Jawi House, Dr Wazir received a small grant for paintings depicting Malay Town, in which Jawi House is located. The area was described in the 1790 Popham Map as "more like a Malay village when the houses used to be from mangrove wood, mahogany and attap." The paintings now help people understand the history of the neighbourhood.



Right / The interior of Jawi House after restoration.



Raising Heritage Awareness

Heritage education is a major element in ensuring that communities as well as institutions become more involved in the maintenance of a heritage site. Awareness instils a sense of pride and involvement while education ensures that pride of ownership gets translated into positive action.

One civil society organisation with a good track record in heritage education is ArtsEd, which applied to Think City for a grant to support several of its activities in the city. “We’ve had many ideas for heritage awareness programmes – some were about trying new things and others were action-based,” said ArtsEd’s Senior Programme Manager Chen Yoke Pin.

One of the first projects supported by Think City focused on traditional shophouses. ArtsEd offered illustrated and easy-to-follow posters and brochures to help create greater awareness of George Town’s heritage shophouses. It highlighted the distinct features of these ubiquitous terraces, which, in George Town, form a major part of Southeast Asia’s most intact pre-World War II cityscape.

The launch of the Heritage Shophouse project was unusual. Instead of being confined to an office space, the event took the form of a walkabout in the city. Posters were handed out to food outlets and businesses that agreed to put them up for public viewing. Smaller brochures, with compact information about the different kinds of shophouse façades, were also distributed.

Think City also supported ArtsEd in two other heritage education projects. “Our existing programmes precede the George Town Festival and ‘Heritage Heboh’ is a booster to those



programmes. The extra money allowed us to hire additional creative talent and design more programmes for the city's July 7 Heritage Celebrations," said Chen.

"Our focus has always been on education and youth. This is a missing element in many existing programmes which are mostly adult-orientated. We are the back-up resource team for George Town World Heritage Inc to train volunteers for the Friends of George Town Heritage [since 2011]', she said. (The Friends of George Town Heritage volunteers' programme is part of an initiative to increase public understanding of the site and to encourage the public to play an active role in supporting heritage activities in the city.)

Above / School children in a street performance during Heritage Heboh.



Above / ArtsEd Heritage Heboh 2012 street performance.



Above / Art in the service of education, ArtsEd continues to enlighten and create awareness about Penang's heritage through its students activities.

Another ArtsEd initiative is the 'Heritage in Penang' project that involves on-site learning. "We approached this through cultural content games on a social media platform, sharing content through social media. The grant allowed us to experiment, to test whether the boundaries could be pushed where youth participation was concerned," Chen said.

"We were thinking about how to engage youths [15 and above] using social platforms. We didn't have a model to work from that could demonstrate how cultural content could be used and promoted on social media. So we revived some of the on-ground activities attractive to young people and transferred them to the online platform," she said. Not unexpectedly, Heritage in Penang was a hit with young people and gave ArtsEd new insights about engaging a tech-savvy generation.

The Penang Artisans Project

An arts and crafts project that highlights Penang's traditional role as a trading centre is the Penang Artisans Project (dubbed PAPA). The project was initiated by the Penang Heritage Trust and involves research, writing and the creation of panels featuring artisans and Penang's arts and crafts.

The PAPA project documents vulnerable intangible heritage with the aim of designing programmes that involve product development. The project opens up opportunities for many aspiring artisans. It also demonstrates that without innovation, 'heritage products' are ultimately unsustainable. To avoid stagnation, the importance of preserving tradition has to be balanced against the need for development based on new ideas.

Panels featuring artisans and their products, including weaving, beading and other traditional products were set up, representing the first phase of product development and marketing. At the time of writing, the project organisers are working to develop their programme beyond this first phase.

Happily, the physical upgrading needed throughout the city has resulted in a high demand for the traditional skills of joinery, ironwork and furniture restoration. On the other hand, artisans engaged in beading are mostly housewives who are doing it as a hobby, and if it remains confined to the endless repetition of traditional patterns, there will be no product development.

There is support for PAPA as a social enterprise and it is hoped that it will have the organisational capacity to take up offers from corporate sponsors to take the programme in new directions.





Stimulating Creative Industries

However, there is a dark side to all the current vibrancy in George Town. The city is facing challenges related to mass tourism. If not proactively addressed, mass tourism could overwhelm local residents and destroy George Town's unique character. With port operations limited, the city has to find economic solutions apart from tourism.

In response to this need, Think City encouraged a new way of thinking around the 'creative economy' by organising a series of lectures and workshops involving Charles Landry, who is best known for having written the book *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*. The creative city has now become a global movement to rethink the planning, development and management of cities.

Landry, regarded as the father of the creative city initiative, is convinced that George Town could become a city of the creative arts by capitalising on its living multi-cultural and multi-ethnic heritage. He said the city's architecture, its public spaces and unique features could be a canvas for community action.

More importantly, Landry encouraged all stakeholders to go beyond multi-culturalism by organising intercultural activities, inviting all communities to increase their understanding of each other by participating in activities open to everyone. Landry also urged the authorities to draw up an inventory of 'creative economy' businesses, activities and support groups. Based on a roadmap laid out by Landry, Think City began fostering Creative City initiatives.

Above / Charles Landry, who wrote *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*.

Opposite / A shoemaker, a rattan weaver and a goldsmith. PAPA sought to celebrate and highlight the traditional trade of Penang's craftsmen.



Through Think Lab, a creative sector advocate, Think City organised a workshop which brought together creative sector stakeholders in Penang using the George Town heritage site as a place for innovation. The creative sector here refers to companies and institutions involved in advertising, marketing, graphic design, software design, multimedia, performing arts and other creative activities. Also included in the workshop were students from colleges and schools associated with those disciplines. The workshop featured speakers from a wide range of creative industries including social activists, heritage conservationists, creative directors from advertising agencies, and new media practitioners.

Through the George Town Festival office, Think City was able to secure the use of the Town Hall for the workshop. About 250 participants attended. Six colleges in Penang and the Klang Valley were the main supporters of the project, including USM School of Arts, KDU Centre for Design Excellence, Equator Academy of Art, KBU International College, Taylor's College Design School and Saito College.

Think Lab then produced a report recommending that George Town should consider becoming a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy based on its culinary heritage. This, the report said, would be the basis for “the creation of public-private partnerships that help unlock the entrepreneurial and creative potential of different enterprises.”

Think Lab also invited Sali Sasali, a communication designer, writer and public speaker who specialises in design and cultural development, to take part. Sali felt that the Creative City initiative should be developmental in its approach. She agreed with the role and the components of the ‘creative city’ as defined by UNESCO and experienced by industry players.

One other major contribution to the project was the opportunity for young minds to approach an old problem – how to define George Town and how the creative sector could make use of the city’s rich heritage. The result was an interesting list of possible visions for the city’s future. In this case, the participants recommended that George Town should aim to become a Creative City of Gastronomy.

Above / The Dragon Dance was recorded and the digitised image was superimposed on the Suffolk House during the Digital Arts Festival.



Separately, the project also demonstrated how heritage and heritage buildings could be put to new uses relevant to the younger generation. A year earlier, Think City had collaborated with the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra to stage performances in heritage buildings in George Town.

The orchestra raised funds through performances in the Penang Town Hall, Suffolk House (the recently restored home of the early British governors of Penang), and Homestead (now Wawasan Open University). Through Khazanah's PINTAR programme, school children from underprivileged schools also attended these performances. It was a pioneering effort to celebrate built heritage through the arts and it gave the old buildings new uses and younger fans.

In 2011, Laurence Loh, a Think City board member, recommended that Think City support a Digital Arts Festival. This brought digital technology and heritage together. The project recorded the Dragon Dance, digitising the image and superimposing it onto the façade of Suffolk House. There were also other components featuring experimental works and exhibitions displaying digital technology as well as arts and heritage buildings. This approach has since been



expanded to include more heritage buildings in George Town, such as City Hall.

The documentation of the Dragon Dance promoted greater awareness of this particular art form in a manner attractive to younger stakeholders. It was followed a year later by ArtsEd's Heritage in Penang project. The opportunity to participate in creative activities like this attracted a new generation of heritage supporters, some of whom have deepened their involvement as volunteers supporting civil society programmes in the city.

The PINTAR Programme

PINTAR, an acronym for Promoting Intelligence, Nurturing Talent and Advocating Responsibility, is a collaborative social responsibility initiative. The programme is premised on the mutual engagement between companies, the foundation and schools. Through PINTAR, the programme's stakeholders hope to inspire and motivate young Malaysians to excel in education and to groom them to become responsible, well-rounded individuals.



Above / Former Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi launching the STAR Pitt St.

Below / Part of the Penang Story Exhibition located on the ground floor of the STAR Pitt St.

A Centre for Arts, Heritage and Culture

The projects described previously highlight the need for community-led heritage interpretation that helps to create a sense of ownership at the individual level. Equally important is the role of civil society organisations, such as ArtsEd and the Penang Heritage Trust as well as community institutions like the Penang Chinese Clan Council and the Little India Joint Action Committee, in finding innovative and creative means to reach out to their members. Their projects enable wider participation by their members and encourage the fusion of education and the arts in efforts to sustain George Town's intangible heritage.

Related to civil society and private sector efforts is the need for demonstration projects to set a benchmark for creativity, innovation and sustainability. In the case of heritage interpretation, this involves pilot initiatives with local community participation. The E&O Gallery, in contrast, demonstrates the need for institutional support and commitment to design, build and maintain such efforts through programming and promotional efforts.

By establishing a centre for Arts, Heritage and Culture at the Star Media Group Berhad's former office at Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling, Think City provided a basis for linking up all the elements – community participation, innovation, management and programming – relevant to intangible heritage.

The process of turning the half empty building into a community centre began with research and mapping. The building's location in Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling (the Street of Harmony) meant that it was strategically placed within the World Heritage Site.



Having two main entrances, one on Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling and one on Lebuhraya Queen (in Little India), meant that the building lent itself naturally to community activities.

Historically, this three-storey neoclassical structure has always been significant. It was purpose-built as the Penang Opium Distribution Centre, which in the 19th century was a major contributor to the local economy. In the 1960s,

the building came into the possession of the late Tan Sri Loh Boon Siew, who housed Penang's first Honda showroom here. In the 1970s, the building was completely refurbished to meet the needs of Star Publications, which then ran a fledgling daily newspaper. Part of the building served by the Lebuhraya Queen entrance was converted into the paper's distribution centre and housed its printing presses.

Above / A Chingay (flag carrying) celebration marking the launch of the The STAR Pitt St. building.

The building's evolution from opium distribution to a newspaper business happened over the course of a century. In that time, the area around the building had evolved from a collection of ethnic settlements based on trade into a more settled and relatively harmonious multi-cultural community.

When the Star Media Group moved its headquarters and printing operations to Bayan Lepas, only the advertising, distribution and news-gathering operations remained in George Town, leaving parts of the building vacant. This offered an opportunity to turn the empty space into a centre for arts, heritage and culture.

Seizing this opportunity, Think City organised a series of projects that enabled each of the local communities to revisit its history and heritage. The idea was that the building would provide the space for a permanent exhibition that would bring all these stories together.

Unlike the state-managed Penang Museum, the Penang Story exhibition at the Star building was not to be based on official history. It would be designed instead to reflect the evolving and sometimes haphazard nature of Penang's development viewed from the communities' perspectives. Moreover, rather than being organised chronologically, it would take the form of a thoroughfare linking the community settlements of Street of Harmony to the west with the trading spaces of Little India (from which they had developed) to the east.

Research was followed by a workshop in which key stakeholders established high-level objectives for the space and the ways in which it would be used. In particular, the workshop considered how arts, heritage and culture could revitalise

Star Media Group Berhad

Founded in Penang, Star Publications (M) Bhd is an important part of the Penang Story, and especially of George Town's early role in the development of Malaysia's newspapers and publications. *The Prince of Wales Island Gazette* (est. 1805), Malaysia's first English newspaper, and *Kwong Wah Jit Poh* (est. 1910), the oldest continuously published Chinese daily in the world, were both started here.

The Star itself is now Malaysia's top English-language daily newspaper. First published in 1971 as a Penang-based regional newspaper, it went into national circulation in 1976 when Star Publications set up an office in Kuala Lumpur. In 1978, its headquarters were relocated to Kuala Lumpur. It is now known as the Star Media Group Berhad.

the building and how activities housed within the building could have a positive impact on the surrounding communities.

Once these high-level objectives were established, experts were identified to conduct site visits and carry out feasibility studies. A budget was drawn up for the design of the permanent exhibition and the required renovations.

Meanwhile, reliable partners who had the means to implement the projects were invited to take part. These included the Chinese Town Hall, the Kuan Yin Temple, St George's Church, Cathedral of the Assumption, Sri Maha Mariaman Temple, the Kapitan Keling Mosque, the Lebuah Aceh Malay Mosque, the Khoo Kongsi, Yayasan Islam Pulau Pinang and the Little India Joint Action Committee.

The project involved retrofitting the building for a variety of specific uses. Working with heritage interpretation specialist Sue Hodges Productions (SHP), Think City and Star Media Group reorganised the spaces, with SHP designing the Penang Story exhibition as a 'gateway' to a new network of local heritage interpretation centres.

Today, the ground floor contains the Star's own facilities as well as the Penang Story permanent exhibition, thus maintaining a sense of continuity. The first floor houses an exhibition space and a centre for arts, heritage and cultural activities.

During the day, the building is busy serving the paper's customers and business. After work hours, it welcomes students and young people as the top floor is now designated for lectures, workshops and cultural performances. The performance hall on this top floor can seat 200 people under a refitted 'jack roof' and has become the home of the Penang Philharmonic Orchestra. It has training spaces for the musicians. The orchestra hosts guest conductors and musicians from Singapore's Yong Shih Toh Music School to train the players and provide extra stimulus. Monthly jazz jamming sessions also take place here, free-of-charge for citizens.

Finally, to make the entire Star Media Group's building sustainable, parts of it have been rented out to commercial tenants.

Meanwhile, Think City had appointed ArtsEd to create a programme to persuade the various communities involved in the project to use their own buildings as creative heritage sites. These now form the network of heritage interpretation centres mentioned above. The ArtsEd programme helps to enhance the understanding and appreciation of George Town's Outstanding Universal Value as an erstwhile port city and home to many different ethnic and cultural communities.

Supporting civil society is one of the objectives of the George Town Grants Programme. In the past four years, Think City has given out more than 70 grants to support research, publications, workshops, cultural projects, festivals, events and other projects related to intangible heritage. Besides enhancing George Town's listing as a World Heritage Site, these projects encourage both communities and private sector partners to think about their role as the site's custodians.

With a new centre for Arts, Heritage and Culture in the Star building, a space for innovation and creativity has been established. It is envisioned that the STAR Pitt St., as the building is now named, will be a thriving facility that enables George Town's communities to come together to share and celebrate the Penang Story. More importantly, this centre is a hub for a wide network of heritage interpretation centres. Together, these projects represent different levels of community participation in the preservation, innovation and development of George Town's unique intangible heritage.

Quick Take

TO attract a creative and well-qualified population, a city needs a strong, distinctive cultural identity and this often depends on having public spaces where communities can gather and mingle safely.

This chapter looks at some of the George Town Grant Programmes initiatives to enhance cultural identity.

In George Town, good examples are the Penang Story exhibition and the Wayfinding System. To encourage walking and cycling (instead of driving), a greening programme was piloted along Lebuhraya. This involved planting trees, clearing the five-foot ways, upgrading pavements, reopening back lanes and reviving pocket parks.

More complex was the case of Armenian Park, an open space linked to a community hall. It is a tourist destination. Once the site of an informal night market where some traders were suspected of selling stolen goods, it was also a haunt for drug addicts.

Think City hired a local landscape architecture company to evaluate the space and suggest design alterations. Meanwhile, traders were encouraged to self-regulate to keep the area free from crime.

Think City also commissioned a study on ways to make the city safer for women and children. This was fully documented and a successful exhibition was held. However, there was no follow-up because it was not clear who was responsible for implementing the recommendations.

During Penang's traditional festivals, the streets became shared spaces with people coming together as spectators and participants. In 2010, Think City helped launch the non-sectarian George Town Festival which is an annual month-long event that celebrates George Town's listing as a World Heritage Site.

Chapter 7

THE CITY AS A SHARED SPACE

Strengthening Cultural Identity

Cities that thrive and draw investors and the well-qualified often do so through their special cultural identity. Their sense of place usually makes all the difference. Good connectivity, efficient public transport and high levels of public safety are certainly important, but cities also need to be culturally attractive. While some urban planners believe that unregulated development makes for messy cities, there is another school of thought that argues that messy, human-scale cities have a stronger cultural identity and that communities that share public spaces are generally vibrant. And this can make a city more attractive.

Turning a space into a place with a clear identity involves patience and planning. This might appear to be a contradiction, since the ‘messiness’ of the city helps define the identity of George Town – a city where non-compliance often seems to be part of its Outstanding Universal Value! In reality, a balance has to be struck between order and ‘messiness’. Just as we expect our buildings to be human scale, the city should be people-orientated. By planning with people and communities as the central focus, maintaining the balance that has come to define George Town may be possible.

In George Town, the building in Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling occupied by *The Star* newspaper was a case in point. It was an under-utilised space as the company had moved most of its operations elsewhere. That building has been transformed into the home of the Penang Story exhibition and is a lively centre for arts, heritage and culture.

On a larger scale, the communities living in the Street of Harmony came together to establish the Wayfinding System described in Chapter 6. The local communities took part in writing and interpreting their own histories, producing digital brochures that could be downloaded onto smart phones or printed out.

While the Wayfinding System was important to enable visitors to find their way around the city, it was also a way to define the boundaries of the

World Heritage Site. With citizens involved in wayfinding within their own neighbourhoods, the project was a true reflection of how they saw themselves.

But this demarcation did not isolate the historic core from the rest of George Town as communities living in the site understood well. The demarcation exercise was arbitrary and most of the activities within it also involved other parts of George Town.



Right / Armenian Park is now a pleasant and safe place for people to rest and relax.

Greening the City

Another way of demarcating the site involved ‘greening’. Up till then, the comfort of pedestrians was rarely, if ever, considered as it was assumed that most people would use cars. Walking was a habit that had long since been avoided in George Town. It was seen as a health hazard, confined to certain times of the day and requiring special clothing, sunhats, water bottles and sunscreen lotion.

Our ancestors enjoyed a much friendlier environment for walking and would have laughed at such behaviour. Like most cities, George Town now suffers from the ‘urban heat island’ effect, as more of its surfaces are paved over, radiating heat for long periods each day. The paving of streets and the covering of drains also resulted in flash floods as run-off water was poured into clogged drains. Heat, poorly maintained pavements and encroachment by shops and hawkers on the five-foot ways all combined to make walking unpleasant. The deliberate encouragement of walking and cycling was, therefore, an innovation.

To make George Town more liveable, a greening programme was needed. This had to include planting trees in selected areas and clearing obstructions from the five-foot ways. Thus a comprehensive approach had to be taken which involved pavement upgrading, the relocation of street furniture, the reopening of back lanes and the revival of pocket parks (small parks accessible to the general public).

Think City, working with George Town World Heritage Inc, piloted the city’s first greening project along Lebuhraya Carnarvon. This is a main road linking the World Heritage Site to the Lim Chong Eu Expressway and was a street that suffered from flash floods. The Penang Institute was commissioned to conduct a survey of the businesses and communities along Lebuhraya Carnarvon. An overwhelming majority said that they would appreciate better walking facilities, greening to provide shade and measures to deal with the flash floods.





Above / Think City's first public realm project involved planting trees at the median of Lebuh Carnarvon. The planting design, inspired by the street's historic identity as the undertaker's street, was by Ng Sek San.

Think City had supported the Penang Botanical Gardens in publishing a book called *Heritage Trees of Penang* and had access to the authors who provided historical evidence of the different types of trees that the colonial government had planted along Penang's streets.

Armed with this knowledge, Think City secured the services of landscape architect Ng Sek San, who drew up a greening scheme using the central divider of the road. Sek San also helped select trees and gave advice about planting methods. Khazanah Nasional provided the funds to buy reasonably mature trees while the local authorities provided the manpower to plant them.



Meanwhile, the local community was encouraged to 'own a tree' and was invited to participate in tree planting. Chief Minister YAB Lim Guan Eng, who had launched a Cleaner, Greener Penang campaign, also planted a tree in the area. To encourage greater awareness about the greening campaign and to highlight Lebuhraya Carnarvon's unique street heritage, musical group Ombak-Ombak staged a street performance. Public reaction to the greening of Lebuhraya Carnarvon was very positive and the scheme has triggered initiatives at Weld Quay, and more recently, at Jalan Dato' Keramat.

Four Community Gardens

For many people, George Town's back lanes offer a novel way of exploring the city. Although some are blocked by illegal extensions, they offer the public unfamiliar or long-forgotten vistas. As the city was built before the advent of a modern sewerage system, back lanes were made wide enough to accommodate the night-soil carts that went from house-to-house to empty buckets of human waste. The system was still in operation in the city till the 1960s.

An informal economy also operates in some of these back lanes involving migrant workers as well as locals. School children often use the back lanes as short cuts. There is a safety issue, however, as the back lanes are sometimes peopled by drug addicts, the homeless and local gangs.

While social hygiene was not the main objective of cleaning up the back lanes, the initiative provided an opportunity to work with local communities to improve a part of the city that had been neglected and used for a variety of illicit purposes.

Property owners occasionally turned up to find that their land adjoining a particular back lane had been occupied without their knowledge or consent. Itinerant groups established temporary structures to store goods. Locals used the back lanes to prepare food and other products associated with their daily trade. Often, restaurants dumped kitchen waste and that invariably led to rat infestation. Construction waste was also piled indiscriminately in some back lanes, creating artificial mounds that were ideal camouflage for drug addicts.

A pilot greening initiative – locating pocket parks in four back lanes in the Little India area – was unfolded in two phases. The first phase involved trialling the idea through a programme called ‘Secret Gardens of Earthly Delights’. Think City collaborated with the Kuala Lumpur-based Better Cities group and the local community to design and create a back lane garden at Lebuhr Pasar. The concept of a secret garden also highlighted gardens on private land adopted by a community.

Designers had to understand the aspirations of the local community to temper their designs and keep them simple. This first phase established the process of making a communal garden, and provided a learning experience for both Think City and the community. It brought the authorities’ attention to the potential of





back lanes and reassured them that the local community would support such initiatives.

Based on the willingness of the local community to support these pocket parks, a second phase was planned with the aim of creating four more back lane gardens in Little India. This phase was dubbed the Little India Neighbourhood Courtyards Project and the team worked with two landscape architectural firms on the design and implementation.

Think City provided the seed funding to kick start the project, while the Little India Joint Action Committee galvanised the community.

The team made sure that property owners and tenants were brought into the evaluation process along with the local authority. After eight months of consultations, designs and negotiations, the scheme was launched in June 2014. Six months later, all the community gardens were completed. The State Government now intends to expand the project to include more back lanes.

Meanwhile, in 2013, Think City had provided funding for a 'Secret Gardens of Earthly Delights' project which identified ten public spaces that could be turned into gardens. Although the project was not as successful as the team had hoped, it planted the idea among government bodies that turning neighbourhood courtyards into viable public spaces was preferable to leaving them neglected.

Above / The courtyards offer children a safe place to gather and play.





Armenian Park

While community engagement was a useful tool in the Little India Neighbourhood Courtyards project, it was all the more important when tackling the issue of a contested area.

Over time, neighbourhoods change and new users move into a communal space. Normally, communities adjust and accommodate the newcomers, but at other times conflicting interests spill over into arguments, and sometimes, violence.

In the World Heritage Site Draft Special Area Plan, some shared spaces were reserved for recreational use. However, problems arose when informal uses of such spaces were not taken into account. The case of Armenian Park, an open space between Lebu Armenian and Lebu Acheh, highlighted the difficulties of managing and revitalising a shared space.

Left / View of Armenian Park on opening day.

Above / The public open space at Lebu Armenian was once a vibrant neighbourhood park, but was taken over by the 'thieves' market.



This space was formerly a part of a Malay village called Kampung Che Lah. By 1890, George Town had expanded into the area. Wooden kampong houses (the last of them now located in the Lebuh Aceh Malay Mosque compound) were replaced by shophouses and bungalows. An open space between the neat rows of new shophouses came into the possession of the Penang Island City Council. In the 1950s, a building was put up at the eastern end of the open space by the council. The building provided educational facilities and a venue for events as well as meeting the local

community's medical needs. Today, the Rotary Club manages the building, which also has a basketball court.

Yet, the informality of the space is still evident in the form of a night market popularly known as the 'Thieves Market'. Traders set up stalls around the perimeter of the park to sell second-hand goods. At the time of Think City's intervention, the traders were not licensed and were quite disorganised. The police were keeping an eye on some of the traders whom they suspected of selling stolen goods. More worrying for local residents was the presence of drug addicts, making the park unsafe for children. As a result, the Rotary Club building had been fenced off. As the park is located directly outside the George Town World Heritage Inc office, close scrutiny of the regeneration efforts was possible.

Above / Panoramic view of Armenian Park.



As a first step, it was important to understand the entire neighbourhood's evolution through a study of municipal records and historical data. Consultation with the residents and businesses in the area outlined the current uses of the space. This included the traders and the informal economy currently operating in the park. The Rotary Club was also brought into the discussions because the services they provided served the community's needs. The Club's 30-year lease had recently expired, but they were still operating from the building on a year-to-year basis.

A local landscape architecture company was appointed to evaluate the space and design interventions based on a needs analysis. They had to balance the needs of the local residents

against those of the market. Visitors to the area, which is promoted as a tourist destination, also had to be considered.

So, whom should the park serve? This was the most important question. A scheme was drawn up and exhibited at the George Town World Heritage Inc office. It received much criticism as well as support. At the same time, Think City began engaging with the traders and encouraging them to organise themselves and self-regulate. Those carrying out legitimate trading were well-placed to help manage the whole group and transform their unquestionably dubious image. This began with a register of members with a commitment to keeping the area clean. Members were also given T-shirts, badges and other group identification materials. As an organised group, they made a commitment to use the space only at designated times and to keep the area free from crime.

After several discussions involving the City Council, the traders were offered a space in nearby Persiaran Claimant. However, this location, near a police station, was regarded as unsuitable by most of them. A Town Hall meeting was held at George Town World Heritage Inc (GTWHI), led by the local assemblyman and a new location at Padang Brown was found to be more suitable.

In mid-2015, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture partnered Think City to redesign the park. This involved the reorientation and resurfacing of the hard court to turn it into a multi-purpose space. It was also important to provide a resurfaced court that was of international standards for basketball as well as other sporting activities, including sepak takraw. The team also went about turning the rest of the site into a green space with public seating and accessible pathways.

A brand new green space has since been introduced to the area, frequented by residents for exercise, recreation and socialising. In addition, the park is regularly used as an events space, particularly for arts and cultural events such as the George Town Festival. The GTWHI also uses the park and the back lanes for its educational and outreach activities.

Surveys conducted after completion of the project revealed that many of the local residents thought the park had created a closer community bond and enhanced their quality of life. They have also asked for alfresco dining to be allowed in the back lane, some exercise equipment and facilities for children. All have been taken into consideration and included in the guidelines developed jointly with the City Council for the maintenance and management of what locals have dubbed Armenian Park.

Safer Cities

Crime is a major challenge facing cities all over the world. In Malaysia, the police say that the average crime rate is going down but the public feel that it is going up. Newspaper reports and social media highlight violent crime such as the gunning down of individuals in mafia-style killings. Facebook users share videos of road bullies in action, as well as gang attacks. In 2014, the mugging and murder of Sister Julianna, a Jesuit nun in Seremban, made national headlines. Snatch thefts appear to be common, and sometimes lead to death. The Home Ministry has actually told local councils to build barriers separating pedestrians from the possible threat of snatch thieves. People are palpably afraid.

Local councils have tried to ensure public safety. In order to discourage groups of idle youths hanging around, urban infrastructure has been designed to prevent loitering. Benches, for example, have been designed to prevent people from sleeping on them. Similarly, bollards have been installed to stop motorcyclists from mounting the pavements. Despite such measures, urban crime remains a major problem.

However, studies show that communities whose members cooperate and look out for each other make for safer cities. The more watchful eyes there are in a neighbourhood, the lower the crime rate.

The Women's Centre for Change (WCC), a non-governmental organisation based in Penang, has a good track record of working with women and children on domestic violence issues. For this reason, Think City approached the WCC about doing a study on how to make the city



safer for women and children. Established in 1985, the WCC is a registered, tax-exempt, non-profit organisation dedicated to the elimination of violence against women and children, and to the promotion of gender equality. But its primary work is to provide immediate assistance to women who need help in a crisis.

Its council member Dr Prema Jayaraj said that sexual violence and gender-based harassment in public spaces was a problem that was generally disregarded compared to domestic violence, which has received global attention and is widely recognised as a threat to women and children.

“We were confident that we could carry out the study, but we misjudged the amount of work and time it would take to engage the communities. That was because WCC had never worked with communities the way that Think City wanted us to – to tackle a community problem through a community-based, bottom-up approach. It was clear that the safety of women and children within the World Heritage Site, particularly those living in social housing, was an issue,” said Dr Prema.

Above / The Women's Centre For Change promotes a safer city, especially for women and children.

“In the end, we found the work extremely rewarding and interesting.” Dr Prema also said that they were extremely grateful to other partners – ArtsEd, the Kapitan Keling Mosque and the Indian Muslim Community Organisation of Malaysia – for their help during their outreach work with the community.

“We are happy that we took it to a level that brought the community to a point where they could articulate the issues to the local council and other government stakeholders, but we are disappointed that it stopped at that. Safety planning for cities from the council has fallen short.”

The project was fully documented. Materials were produced and a successful exhibition was held. The publicity was excellent, but follow-up within the community was lacking, undermining the sustainability of the project.

“We have created a model that can be replicated, but whose responsibility is it to take it on?” asked Dr Prema.

What became clear during the project was that, in order for the concept to be fully realised, there needed to be multiple partnerships with architects, urban planners, government agencies, landscape architects and the planning agencies.

Dr Prema added that it was essential to educate design professions to build projects that considered women's safety as a key element from the outset. This should set the stage for the psychosocial and cultural changes needed before women and children would be able to enjoy public spaces and engage fully in the civic life of the World Heritage Site.



George Town Festival

As early as August 2008, Think City had commissioned a study of George Town's traditional performing arts. This was the first attempt to engage with the city's intangible heritage through the different festivals of its multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities. During these festivals, the streets became shared spaces as people came together as spectators and participants in various processions, performances and other street activities.

The study mapped the different stakeholders, their bases and processional routes. It also highlighted the challenges faced by the local authorities to ensure public safety, efficient waste disposal and traffic management.



Above / A Ghazal performance.

Below / Chinese opera performance.



George Town's festivals provided good opportunities for people to work together, pool their resources and spend time together. But many traditional organisations, whose very existence depended on these celebrations, were on the wane. They were finding it hard to attract young people to take part in rituals and customs based on religious and family traditions. There was also an economic issue because these age-old traditions needed to adapt to modern standards of presentation.

Even if they succeeded in widening their appeal, traditional festivals might not necessarily be the most suitable way of ensuring the survival of cultural heritage. An idea emerged that

a non-sectarian festival celebrating George Town's Outstanding Universal Value might prove popular. In 2010, this idea was proposed by George Town World Heritage Inc around the time when the George Town Festival (GTF) was initiated. The GTF is an annual month-long event that commemorates and celebrates George Town's listing as a World Heritage Site. It includes theatre, music, dance, film, arts, food, fashion, photography, inspirational talks and visual displays on the streets. The festival has become a focus for both local and international artistic exchange, bringing together different artistic communities, including amateur groups, cultural groups and professional performers.

Above / Traditional Indian dance performers.



Although Think City did not directly support the GTF in 2010, it did so in 2011 and 2012 through grants to various communities. In 2012, Think City provided direct funding to the GTF by sponsoring tickets for local students to attend international performances.

Festival organiser Joe Sidek said: “This certainly made the arts more accessible to students who might not otherwise have had the opportunity to watch a world-class act. GTF’s funding comes primarily from the State. There are only two other main sponsors – Dell and the Penang Turf Club.”

Above / Promoting traditional delicacies at the festival.

When Sidek first heard about Think City back in 2009, he thought its grants were primarily reserved for physical structures. But then he discovered that its sphere of activity was much wider. So he applied for funding for the second George Town Festival.

“Of course I was disappointed when Think City didn’t give us all the funding we needed. But later on, I realised that the seeding intent behind Think City’s sponsorship had a ripple effect within the World Heritage Site. It was like putting together jigsaw pieces. You only see the big picture very much later. It’s the energy generated by those initial projects which actually helped re-energise and rejuvenate the city.

“We rushed into this with little time to develop the project. I am glad we started in the first year. But we need to do better engagement and homework when we embark on phase two of this project. I don’t mind failures, it helps me learn, be better prepared and to improve,” Sidek said.

In 2013, Think City’s support for the festival focused on an objective study by Universiti Sains Malaysia of the George Town Festival and other Penang festivals entitled Connecting Festivals. This included a technical grant to examine the impact of the festival and help Think City chart the festival’s contribution to the economy and consider how it could be developed as a spur to Penang’s creative economy.

The second part of Connecting Festivals was documenting the initial marketing and public relations strategy for the two contemporary festivals in George Town and identifying potential industry partners.

Sidek said that the money promised under this project had given them the confidence to bring in a higher tier of professionals and management staff. “We are grateful to Think City for helping us realise that we needed to build management layers to ensure the GTF’s sustainability.”

On his feelings about the festival’s relationship with Think City, Joe said that “it was a slow, if steady, start. I am comfortable with the relationship that we have now. It has grown over the years and that is the best way to develop a partnership – through respect cultivated over time. I like the way the team thinks. The other government agencies’ thinking process cannot match it in its modernity. They don’t keep up with the times, but Think City has the right elements to keep up with the times.”

The future of the GTF, he says, looks bright. “We had our detractors. But in the last five years, we have managed to brand the festival and inspire the locals. Now the detractors are on board. Think City has also helped to inspire me. Its contribution to the festival is its seal of approval and belief in my work. I hope the partnership between Think City and the GTF grows over time.”

In the future, he would like Think City to have more round-table meetings with people who could attract support in terms of funding, investment, ideas and talent. He also said he would like Think City to help bring together people who can promote creativity and innovation and build on Penang’s existing strengths in order to develop George Town as a creative city.



Above / Wall murals are a common sight in George Town.

Quick Take

FOR historic communities, 'building capacity' meant learning how to ensure that buildings were restored in line with modern conservation requirements. For government servants, it meant managing the World Heritage Site properly. For contractors, it meant adopting the correct conservation techniques. For communities, it meant enhancing organisation and involvement.

This chapter looks at how Think City provided grant applicants with expert assistance to help build capacity. Property owners and tenants were guided through the application and project management process.

Grantees working on cultural mapping projects were shown how their projects contributed to the compiling of a comprehensive account of George Town. Government servants, elected representatives and members of the public attended workshops about the management of a historic city.

Think City also funded heritage management plans for a number of sites, including the 18th century Protestant Cemetery.

Training contractors was a major challenge as few were experienced in conservation techniques and preferred to cut corners by using modern methods and materials that unfortunately damaged the buildings. These challenges were met by holding conservation workshops and by withholding grants from improperly executed projects.

Eventually, a highly skilled contractor, Chor Teik Heng, came out of retirement to become the lead contractor for the restoration of various Cantonese clan halls and temples. This was the catalyst that led to the revitalising of a number of clan associations.

However, all the city's communities had problems engaging the younger generation. The Toishan association, for instance, launched several initiatives. But particularly successful was the Kapitan Keling Mosque community which now has a very active youth group.

Chapter 8

BUILDING CAPACITIES FOR THE FUTURE

Highlighting the Need

For the George Town Grants Programme to succeed, it was crucial that as many people as possible understood why George Town had been nominated by the Malaysian Government and then listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

Achieving UNESCO listing depended largely on demonstrating that a site genuinely had Outstanding Universal Value. Most people living and working in the city were aware of its World



Heritage status, but not many understood the specifics of why Melaka and George Town had been selected or the fact that the two cities constituted a single World Heritage Site.

Nevertheless, those individuals and special interest groups which had been at the forefront of promoting the listing were generally convinced that the city urgently needed greater protection. They pressed for more stringent laws, and better monitoring and regulation of development.

Most people assumed that UNESCO would provide Malaysia with funds and that the grants programme would simply disburse it. In reality, the funds for both Melaka and George Town were a special Malaysian government allocation that was intended to motivate private sector participation and encourage relevant non-governmental organisations to expand their existing programmes.

In short, the George Town Grants Programme was an incentive to stakeholders to join in a wider effort to conserve and celebrate the city's World Heritage status.

The grant applications that were received could be likened to a long train, and Think City had to make sure that incentives were structured to benefit not just those at the front but those at the back as well. The team took into account the full range of activities within the local community. At the same time, it evaluated the consistency and sustainability of the proposed projects. With over 4,000 buildings spread out across 150 acres, providing specialised knowledge, training and demonstration projects was clearly going to be critical for success.

For historic communities, 'building capacity' meant learning how to make sure that the restoration of their buildings fulfilled modern conservation requirements. For government servants, it meant responsibility for managing the World Heritage Site. For contractors, it meant understanding and adopting proper conservation techniques. For communities, it meant better organisation and full involvement in decision-making.

Working closely with George Town World Heritage Inc, Think City needed to bring the principle of capacity-building to the forefront of each project. As a first step, an application form had to be devised that would give Think City an opportunity to meet as many applicants as possible.

Above / Janet Pillai, author of *Cultural Mapping - Understanding Place, Community and Continuity*, presenting a workshop on roof restoration.



The team had the opportunity to meet and explain to applicants that their projects needed to have a positive impact on George Town's Outstanding Universal Value. It was important that applicants, whether successful or not, realised that each of them had a role to play in the making (or un-making) of the city. Most projects were on a small scale and Think City always viewed the whole as being greater than the sum of its parts. Ultimately, some 39 projects received Think City grants totalling RM2.1 million with projects that included publications and events as well as conservation and infill development.

Above / Think City worked with GTWHI and Penang City Hall to provide technical advice for conservation projects. Workshops were held in shophouses and Khazanah Nasional's offices at KWSP building.

Supporting Conservation Initiatives

Grant applicants for physical projects, especially property owners or tenants who wanted to repair or restore their homes or places of business, had to meet subject experts from Think City's Advisory Panel. Here they discussed wider issues such as sustainability, inclusiveness and the catalytic effect the project would have on surrounding developments.

Applicants had to be made aware of the heritage significance of their property, the need to allocate a budget for maintenance and the need to pay special attention to conservation best practices. Subject experts provided an objective and neutral perspective that helped applicants understand Think City's criteria and how the size of the award would be calculated. Engagement between subject experts and applicants allowed the team to gauge the capacity of potential recipients.

The team then had to assist grantees with the management of their projects. This involved a briefing session about building regulations and best conservation practices conducted by George Town World Heritage Inc. Officers from the Heritage Department of the Penang Island City Council explained how permits were obtained for building repairs or conservation.

Each grantee was expected to appoint their own architect and engineer. Think City had to provide those who could not afford professional fees with architectural and engineering expertise. Engagement between subject experts and applicants allowed the team to gauge the capacity of potential recipients.



Left / *Feasts of Penang* publication by Dato' Dr Wazir Jahan Karim.

Right / Selection of books on display at Areca Books located in The STAR Pitt St. building.

Mapping George Town's Culture

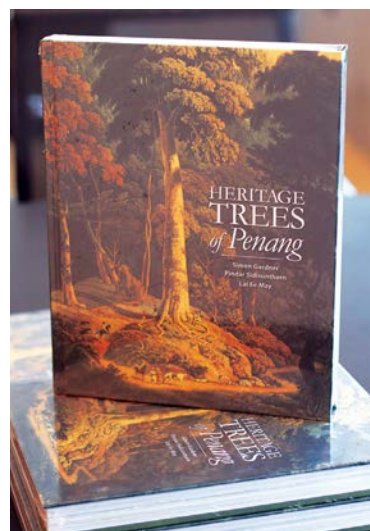
Grantees working on cultural mapping projects were given a different briefing. This included research relevant to a World Heritage Site and the production of the written material required for advocacy. This material was made available through George Town World Heritage Inc and also by the Penang Heritage Trust in the form of archives, workshops and public consultations. The main objective was to ensure that grantees set realistic goals since grants would only be disbursed after specified targets were achieved.

As most of these grants involved the World Heritage Site as a whole, it was important that grantees understood the importance of their project in the larger scheme of things. George Town World Heritage Inc, which recommended these projects, was also involved in the monitoring process. For archival materials such as the *Shophouse Typology*, *Building Materials Guide* and *Kelly Maps* projects, final payment was only processed once George Town World Heritage Inc had endorsed the end product.

To ensure sustainability, Think City also secured joint copyright on the majority of the publications it supported. This meant that information relevant to the World Heritage Site would remain accessible to the public. By supporting publications like *Heritage Trees of Penang*, *Portraits of Penang: Little India*, *Heritage Houses of Penang*, *The Chulia in Penang*, *Mosques & Keramats of Penang Island*, and *Feasts of Penang: Muslim Culinary Heritage*, Think City contributed to the expansion of research about

and interest in the cultural heritage of George Town and Penang. Other than making these books more affordable, support for research and publication helped to develop and build the capacity of local publishers like Areca Books. A range of graphic designers, printers and others involved in the publishing sector also benefited.

As explained in previous chapters, projects devoted to the publication of research played an important part in filling a large knowledge gap. The *Visions of Penang* project, for example, provided information about shophouse styles. The historic images and community-specific research compiled by *Visions of Penang* became an essential aid to the decision-making process. More importantly, Think City ensured that grantees worked closely with the authorities to deliver public access to these materials. Whenever possible, technical reports associated with public space projects were made available through Think City's website www.thinkcity.com.my.



Right / Think City supported a number of research and publication projects.

Managing a Historic City

For Think City, working with the Penang Island City Council was crucial in identifying projects that would benefit the World Heritage Site. Equally important was support for meetings and public seminars that heightened awareness of challenges and management issues. This began with a training workshop that explained how the Baseline Study of land use and population in the site was implemented.

The Baseline Study involved developing a questionnaire, identifying local champions (such as community leaders and other respected individuals connected with well known civil causes), training census takers and conducting a pilot survey. Both government officers and elected representatives such as state councillors participated in the pilot survey as well as fact-checking surveys. Some 93% of residents and businesses participated in the 2009 survey, which incidentally created greater awareness of the actual status of the heritage site.

Another project was organised jointly by George Town World Heritage Inc and the Penang Heritage Trust, with support from Think City, and featured subject experts and members of AusHeritage. Public workshops entitled *Progressing with Heritage* dealt with the challenges associated with historic cities. Australia has strong ties with Malaysia and the two nations share a British colonial heritage and similar heritage legislation. In the case of George Town, there was a particularly strong link with its sister city, Adelaide. William Light, son of Captain Francis Light (founder of the George Town port settlement), was South Australia's first Surveyor General and had laid out Adelaide.

The AusHeritage experts shared their experience of the management challenges and legal issues associated with the introduction of conservation regulations. They went on to explain the incentives, the technical requirements and the economic forces associated with the management of historic cities. This included the protection of historic monuments, transport, infrastructure and managing the impact of tourism. There were also special sessions where the subject experts interacted with government officers and civil society leaders. The main purpose of these sessions was to exchange ideas and share the lessons the Australians had learned.

Getting to know the diverse views and experiences about the management of historic cities gave George Town's stakeholders a better understanding of the need to change the way they did things. While government officers had a full set of duties related to the day-to-day management of the Penang Island City Council, the World Heritage Site needed additional time and attention.

In May 2011, in collaboration with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Think City organised *Planning for Historic Cities*, a two-day workshop for city managers, property owners, community leaders and civil society organisations featuring examples of historic city planning and management in the Islamic world. While Australia and Malaysia have a common British colonial heritage, the Aga Khan Trust could share examples from the Islamic world that involved community-based urban regeneration efforts. They highlighted how legislation, particularly Special Area Plans and Management Plans, have to be socialised and accepted by local communities if they are to work. This was the case, for example, in Egypt's Al-Azhar Park in Cairo and Stone Town in Zanzibar.

Experts from the Aga Khan trust for Culture Francesco Siravo and Stefano Bianca, assisted Dato' Maimunah Shariff, then GTWHI General Manager, to develop the brief for the George Town World Heritage Site Special Area Plan. The plan was finally gazetted in September 2016, providing legislative protection for the heritage site.

Developing Heritage Management Plans

As described in Chapter 4, Think City funded Heritage Management Plans for two demonstration projects: the restoration of the dome of the Kapitan Keling Mosque and the Cheah Kongsi clan temple. Both projects began with a heritage assessment process, community engagement, and a management plan that guided conservation and repair works.

It was not possible, however, to develop a heritage management plan for all projects. Nonetheless, all building works were required to follow a particular process. Before the appropriate materials and conservation techniques could be agreed upon, basic research had to be done to identify the heritage significance of the site, list the priority areas for repair or conservation and fix a budget. Since the majority of Think City projects involved homes or businesses that had to be viable, strict adherence to regulations was not always financially or practically feasible. However, a sound compromise was generally reached.

Working with a consultant from the Penang Heritage Trust, George Town World Heritage Inc successfully applied for a capacity-building grant for the restoration of the 18th century Protestant cemetery.

This Category One heritage site is one of the oldest cemeteries in Penang and once formed George Town's western border. It is the burial place of the city's most prominent early western pioneers and sits adjacent to the equally old and significant Roman Catholic cemetery. The Protestant Cemetery, together with other significant burial grounds, such as the Makam Kapitan Keling, the Makam Syed Hussien Idid, the Makam Shah Wali and the Nagore Shrine at Lebuah Chulia, all represent different layers of George Town's history.

Over the years, the Protestant cemetery had become dilapidated. The Penang Heritage Trust highlighted its significance and collected funds to clear it of debris and weeds. The next phase was to determine the correct conservation methods and to develop a heritage management plan to ensure the cemetery's long-term protection.

The heritage management plan for the cemetery included research into the evolution of the cemetery, the people buried there and the masonry of the tombstones. It was also important to understand how the cemetery had been laid out, the methods used to deal with the high water table and what the current conditions were. The heritage management plan included recommendations for the care and restoration of the graves and the cemetery walls as well as for appropriate building materials and restoration techniques. By the end of 2014, restoration of the tombs was complete and landscaping is now well underway. Most importantly, an ongoing maintenance regime is in place.



Training Contractors

While heritage management plans helped the owners and custodians of heritage sites to set budgets and prioritise interventions, it was the contractors who ultimately carry out conservation works.

Many problems arose when profit-driven contractors tried to reduce costs by cutting corners or by using unsuitable building materials. An even bigger challenge was the loss of skills. Techniques associated with mass production and new building materials had often made craftsmen redundant. The indiscriminate use of cement and concrete has left many heritage buildings scarred or irreparably damaged.

Traditionally, lime plaster was an important building material that was used to cover brickwork. It is not damp-proof. Lime plaster allows water to be absorbed and to evaporate, keeping the bricks in good condition. Replacing lime plaster with cement (as has often happened in recent decades) means that rising damp is trapped and causes the brickwork to decay.

Subsidence is another challenge. Most of George Town was laid out and built in the 19th century. Many buildings were built over a swamp or land reclaimed from the sea and were built floating on bakau wood pylons. As long as the bakau wood was submerged in the city's high water table, it did not decay. Once exposed, it rapidly rotted. This led to the sinking of entire walls, causing cracks in the building. Buildings along Jalan Pintal Tali (Rope Walk), for example, suffered this fate when water was drained during the construction of the nearby Prangin Mall.

These challenges and many others were addressed in conservation workshops organised by the National Heritage Department and George Town World Heritage Inc. The workshops, aimed at both contractors and property owners, were designed to introduce best conservation practices in terms of building materials, conservation techniques and project management skills. The workshops also involved site visits where participants could see and put into practice the knowledge they had gained in the classroom. Contractors who completed the course were given certificates of attendance which they could include in their tendering documents.

Right / Training contractors at conservation workshops.

Opposite / In charming neglect, the Protestant Cemetery is George Town's link to the English East India Company.



Tackling the Challenges of George Town's Cantonese Temples

In 2010 and 2011, a number of Cantonese clan halls and trade associations applied for repayable grants for carrying out restoration and conservation work on their temple buildings. Some had already attended an outreach session organised by the youth wing of Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (the Malaysian People's Movement Party) in Penang. At the outreach session, representatives from Think City presented the goals and objectives of the George Town Grants Programme. They also set out the terms and conditions of the grants.

The first few applications trickled in from Loo Pun Hong on Lorong Love, Sun Wui Wui Koon on Lebuah Bishop and the Toishan Ningyang Wui Kwon on Lebuah King. The first was a Cantonese carpenters' and contractors' guild and the two clan halls represented descendants of George Town's earliest Cantonese migrant communities. Soon after these restoration projects began, enthusiasm spread and other Cantonese clans came knocking on Think City's door seeking similar grants.

At first, the challenges faced by the contractors of such early projects as the Loo Pun Hong and Toishan temples were basic technical issues. The clansmen and building owners promised to carry out conservation and restoration work according to the regulations set by the Penang Island City Council. Technical recommendations and guidance were provided by Think City's independent technical advisor, Prof Madya Dr Yahaya Ahmad of the Faculty of Built Environment, Universiti Malaya. The buildings were classified as Category One, and the Heritage Department attached detailed guidelines in an appendix to the repair permits.

To ensure compliance with Penang Island City Council regulations, Think City decided to withhold the grant for the first stage of each restoration project until the application for a building repair permit from the council was successful. This practice was put in place after early feedback from George Town World Heritage Inc and civil society groups highlighted non-compliant practices by contractors in George Town.

In spite of these measures, the nature of local contractors, accustomed to doing things their own way, began to surface and complaints reached the ears of the Penang Island City Council and George Town World Heritage Inc. These complaints were often submitted by external conservation consultants. Most cases highlighted the incompetence of non-heritage contractors and incorrect construction work that failed to follow the recommended conservation methods, thereby, threatening the cultural value and authenticity of the buildings.

Eye-witness reports to the Penang Island City Council pointed out that cement had been used to render the fencing around the Loo Pun Hong gate, a huge tree had been cut down within the periphery of the same property, and the gable roof of the Toishan temple had been painted the wrong colour.

As there were both verbal and written complaints to the contractors and the authorities, Think City issued warning letters and suspended grant payments to both projects. This persuaded grantees to monitor their contractors more closely. Think City followed up with site inspections and engaged conservation experts to recommend appropriate rectification work.



Above / Cantonese temples –
Chung Shan Wooi Koon and
Toishan Ninyang Wui Kwon.



Above / Master craftsman Chor Teik Heng of Toishan came out of retirement to manage the restoration of the roof and the ancestral hall of his clan association.

Discovering a Restoration Champion

What could have otherwise been an unpleasant confrontation with the clans became a good opportunity for Think City to engage the clans in a more direct manner. Think City took the opportunity to boost their technical knowledge of conservation work and to agree on a method of resolving issues that might arise with future temple restoration projects.

This led to the discovery of a true Renaissance man in Toishanese community builder Chor Teik Heng, who eventually became the lead contractor for Loo Pun Hong, Ng See Kah Miew, Chung Shan Wooi Koon, Sun Wui Wui Kwon and his own clan hall, Toishan Ningyang Wui Kwon. Chor made the decision to come out of both retirement and the less hectic business of antique furniture restoration, to become recognised by Think City and the local Cantonese community as the key contractor for clan halls built following Cantonese temple typology.

Even for a man as experienced as Chor, the challenges of working on heritage buildings were daunting. First, he had to think about the way construction and repair work could be carried out using modern materials and what their effect would be on heritage properties. “Restoration of heritage properties was very difficult. I had to research the old construction materials. I had to go back to the old way of mixing lime and laying roof tiles that I learnt when I was younger,” said Chor.

“I sourced a lot of traditional materials from China, at my own expense. I went to Jiangxi, Foshan and also looked at sources in Thailand and Vietnam. Specific artisanal producers in Foshan (a city in central Guangdong Province) were recommended to me by a Hong Kong architectural researcher.

“She spent a week watching me work at Toishan and asked me questions on the restoration for her research. It was she who helped us identify the correct methods of conservation for this type of Ling Nan-style Cantonese temple. She consulted her professors, and sent me images of similar structures in Hong Kong and China by email,” he said.

In some cases, Chor had to complement his own skill as a craftsman with expert advice. “I wasn’t sure how to restore the internal *cai hui* (wall paintings), which showed scenes and stories of filial piety in Chinese folklore. I went through a few contractors who proposed various types of *cai hui*, but none of them was suitable for our clan hall. We didn’t restore them until 2013, when some mainland Chinese craftsmen visited our clan hall and offered to help us draft the paintings on paper. However, they were reluctant to do the paintings on the wall. They were not confident. In the end, I had to climb up about 25 feet and draw them myself!”

Chor also pointed out that a large percentage of members of Ta Kam Hong (the Goldsmiths’ Association) and of the Ng See Kah Miew, Moei and Loo Pun Hong clans were Toishanese. In the past, Toishanese clansmen were known as skilled craftsmen, artisans and contractors. “But now, it is no longer the case. Not that many Toishanese craftsmen took part in the heritage restoration of the few Cantonese temples in Penang. Most of them were trained as carpenters and woodworkers, which meant they did not have the experience or specialist skills to do heritage restoration.”

The only training that Chor himself has provided was within his own clan, teaching fellow clansman Jee Poon Lep certain techniques, such as gold leaf appliqué and the restoration of decorative room dividers at Loo Pun Hong.

Revitalising the Cantonese Clans

The restoration projects raised the profile of the six Cantonese temples. While there was praise, there were also fears and criticisms from the Cantonese community. Some clansmen even feared that accepting grants would involve ceding control over the use of the building to Think City, which would then take over the property from the clan. It took some time for these fears to subside.

One of the earliest advocates of the George Town Grants Programme was Loo Pun Hong president, Ng Kok Leong, who was Toishanese and sat on the committee of the Ng See Kah Miew. He had been an early applicant for a repayable grant, which was later followed by two further restoration grants awarded between 2010 and 2014. At the time of writing, Chor was still working on the restoration of the first floor of the Ng See Kah Miew building.

Both Ng and Chor had to face internal dissent in their respective clan and guild associations before obtaining buy-in from their committees to extend the restoration work on their buildings. In the case of Toishan, the committee itself changed drastically. Half of its old members were dropped and a new president was elected to lead the clan. The new committee decided to raise the clan’s profile and began organising more activities in the temple. It increased outreach efforts among the clan members and raised awareness of the clan’s existence among the wider George Town community.

After the restoration, Chung Shan Wooi Koon also saw a drastic transformation of their clan temple. In 2011, they had approached the Toishan association for advice about how to apply to Think City and quickly campaigned to host a regional get-together of Chong Shan clansmen in September 2012. They appointed Chor as the restoration contractor and made the crucial decision to restore their ground-floor and open it for clan activities. Till then, for nearly a decade, the property had been rented out to a lady who had used it as her George Town *pied-à-terre*.

The leadership and vision provided by the clan's president Tham Sau Koong also spurred the George Town chapter to forge closer ties with its Chinese mainland counterparts, resulting in the donation of a set of faux antique rosewood chairs by the clan headquarters. Their Chinese clansmen also provided access to the library in Chong Shan City, shared their resources on the life and work of Dr Sun Yat Sen (Chong Shan City's most celebrated son) and helped the Penang association set up a small exhibition during their regional celebrations. For this event, Tham also provided a slide show of photos of the restoration process, specifically acknowledging the work of Chor and the contractors.

The Toishan project was one of the more catalytic interventions undertaken by Think City through the George Town Grants Programme. The community's outreach initiatives culminated in two major events.

First, in September 2013, a nationwide Toishanese gathering was organised, complete with a Toishan singing competition, a Toishan speech competition and a clan dinner attended by over 600 clansmen. It was the first time the Penang association had invited clansmen from other states to come to George Town to celebrate their culture.

Then, during the Chinese New Year celebrations in February 2014, Toishan collaborated with the Penang Chinese Clan Council to organise a number of Cantonese opera performances. Chor said that the festivities attracted over 10,000 people. The clan also ran a recruitment drive among the Toishanese who, though living in Penang, did not know that a clan hall existed in George Town as the clan had been relatively inactive in the island.

Visibly proud, Chor outlined the plans for the Toishan association. "We are now considering new programmes to attract the youth back to the clan hall. We are painfully aware that the relevance of a clan hall is not ingrained as strongly in the minds of our youth today because they do not have the cultural feeling, the deep roots that the previous generation had.

"One of the ideas that we will be proposing to our fellow clansmen will be to hold networking conferences with a business slant to enable our Toishanese youth to connect with the 100-odd clans globally. That's quite a sizeable network. And this opportunity hasn't really been tapped. We will spend RM100,000 of our own money to produce a clan hall magazine as an outreach exercise to our global family, and we will propose the idea of a youth conference at the next global event in Toishan.

"There's an old Chinese saying that states 'the green leaf and yellow branches are not connected'. This is an apt reminder for us clan associations. If we don't continue to innovate and adapt to the needs of the next generation, then we will lose our standing in the future," said Chor.

Galvanising the Kapitan Keling Mosque Youth Group

Intergenerational cooperation remains a major challenge for most of George Town's traditional communities. While the Cantonese clan associations were able to band together to collect resources and renovate clan houses, not many of them were able to generate strong interest among the younger generation. Without the next generation interested in the clan and community, special skills and accumulated knowledge cannot be transmitted. This is the main threat to traditional organisations in Penang who are now facing extinction. This, more than mouldy and cracking walls, is posing a danger to George Town maintaining the city's World Heritage Site status.

Fortunately, one particular community was able to develop good intergenerational cooperation within its ranks. This transformation was made possible by a new way of thinking amongst community elders who knew that unless radical steps were taken, their age-old traditions and way of life would die.

The Indian Muslim community based at the Kapitan Keling Mosque is as old as the city itself. George Town was very much an Indian city before the 1840s' influx of Chinese migrant labour headed for the tin fields of Perak. Many Indian Muslims maintain strong ties to their villages in South India. Some maintain two families, one in India, another in Penang. Over time, a unique community developed around port activities, money changing and the trading of gold and jewellery, as well as restaurants and other food businesses.



Left / Traditional stone grinders and spices.



Right / The longest *roti canai* chain was part of the community's effort during George Town World Heritage Day celebrations.

The Indian Muslim community remains vibrant although its numbers are falling as young people move from the city to the suburbs. As with other Penangites, there are many Indian Muslims in the Klang Valley and further afield in Singapore. They remain closely attached to Penang with many identifying their origins with the Kapitan Keling Mosque. But it is important that the younger generation is encouraged to find new ways to expand community activities.

Happily, there has been some success with this. Think City grants for the restoration of the mosque dome not only brought the elders of the community together but encouraged the mosque's youth group to devise the narrative of the community's history. This involved putting up an exhibition explaining the mosque's development, the evolution of architectural styles as the mosque expanded, and the recent restoration initiative.

On their own, the youth group also decided to organise open-house celebrations in conjunction with the 2012 George Town Festival. They decorated the Makam Nordin, transforming it from a classroom into an exhibition hall. Community history came alive through various programmes. These included a children's art competition inspired by the mosque, guided tours for non-Muslims and a special exhibition featuring photographs of community members 'then' and 'now'.



By 2013, the youth group had taken the lead in organising a similar programme in Kuala Lumpur's Masjid India (Indian Mosque). Additional information featuring stalls displaying Indian Muslim traditional sports and activities brought the community's history to life. Then, in April 2014, the Kapitan Keling Mosque Youth Group screened the movie *Yaadum* with a discussion at the end facilitated by the movie's director about Indian Muslim migration and sojourning. The movie was also screened in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

Above / Left-Right: Tan Sri Yusof Latiff, former Deputy Chairman of Khazanah Nasional Berhad, Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop, TYT Tun Dato' Seri Utama Hj. Abdul Rahman Bin Hj Abbas and Mahani Musa at the launch of *Kramats and Mosques* book.



Above / The Kapitan Keling Mosque
leaders have successfully drawn younger
members into their community activities.

Quick Take

THINK City had to establish effective partnerships with members of civil society, the private and public sector, and international organisations to ensure that the 240 projects under the George Town Grants Programme were successfully implemented in four years. This was no small feat.

Partnerships with the local authorities were crucial. These often started with pilot initiatives where both sides got to know each other's objectives and work cultures. Soon, it was expanded to include capacity-building programmes. Think City also worked with academic institutions in Malaysia and abroad to develop fresh ideas, review existing initiatives and ensure the viability of community-led projects.

These ideas had to be implemented on the ground and the driving force came from communities and individuals. For instance, the Little India Improvement District project saw local stakeholders, the state government and the local council collaborate to enhance the Little India 'experience'.

Meanwhile, the George Town Business Improvement District Scheme (BIDS) sought to rejuvenate the area around KOMTAR. However, ideological differences among key stakeholders and some unforeseen liabilities have delayed implementation.

The Penang Muslim Heritage Project aimed to strengthen the identity, cohesion and self-confidence of a diverse and geographically scattered community. A series of workshops helped to identify problems and aspirations, and offered solutions.

The Penang and the Indian Ocean Programme brought institutions, scholars and local communities together to explore Penang's historical maritime role, strengthening the kind of partnerships essential to Think City's capacity-building initiatives.

Think City also established partnerships with some of the world's leading experts in city-making. Local efforts in George Town were enriched by their invaluable experience.

Chapter 9

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

The Need to Build Partnerships

To implement over 200 projects in George Town of varying sizes and complexities, Think City had to rely on partnerships. This meant forging partnerships with civil society, the private sector and international organisations so that funding could be spread as widely as possible within the limited four-year time frame of the George Town Grants Programme.

With operational expenses restricted to 15% or less of its total allocation, it was not practical for Think City to establish an in-house team with all the necessary core competencies for urban regeneration. So a multi-disciplinary advisory board was set up, consisting of subject experts who provided technical advice.

Before these partnerships could be established, the Think City team had to map out all the key stakeholders and decision makers in the George Town heritage area, especially those most closely associated with a particular community or neighbourhood. The team spent six months getting to know George Town's leaders, explaining to them how partnerships with a public grants programme could be used to fund and regenerate the city.

At the same time, Think City engaged with property owners and the private sector to gauge their appetite for co-investing in the city. Although the heritage parts of George Town in 2008 were clearly in rapid decline, it fast became clear that the city still had ardent fans whose support could be mobilised.

The challenge was finding a way to rally these friends of George Town behind the cause of conservation. Heritage conservation was not something that had much public support at the time and very few private property owners were interested in investing in heritage properties.

Furthermore, the benefits of UNESCO's listing of the city as a World Heritage Site were not immediately apparent. If the historic part of the city was to develop in a balanced fashion, an engine of growth other than tourism had to be established. The team also had to take into account how the city's future development was likely to affect traditional communities and the city's intangible cultural heritage.

Governmental Organisations

While community and civil society organisations were the main recipients of Think City grants, it was the partnership with the local authorities that underpinned the success of the grants programme. Here, respecting the jurisdiction and regulatory role of the Penang Island City Council was the guiding principle for Think City. Only by working closely with the local authorities could Think City support projects that were important for the management and maintenance of the city. This approach also ensured that government policy was translated into practice effectively.

From the start, Think City identified those local partners who were ready to be active partners and recipients in the transfer of knowledge and technical skills. This ensured that projects were sustainable in the longer term.

It was also important for everyone to understand how the city was evolving. Therefore, in late 2009, Think City worked with the local authorities and the Department of Town and Country Planning to carry out the George Town Baseline Study, described earlier. The findings and recommendations of this land-use study and population census formed the basis for the George Town World Heritage Site (Draft) Special Area Plan.

Partnerships often started with pilot initiatives, with both sides getting to know each other's objectives and work culture.

For instance, one pilot project focused on the Chowrasta and Lebu Campbell markets. All the stall-owners and traders, as well as users and visitors to the market, were asked about their views on the functions and uses of the market. The findings of the Social Survey went into



the redesigning of the Chowrasta Market. This included persuading the local council to allow hawking and trading on the roadside, which was a traditional feature around the market. The traders were also concerned about ventilation, and especially about better connectivity with the neighbourhood, which the new design would facilitate.

A controversial but much needed multi-storey car park was added to the scheme, although it was not part of the recommendation of the study. At the time of writing, the Penang Island City Council was carrying out regeneration works at the Chowrasta Market in a manner that did not displace the traders and involved continuous consultation with them.

Above / Chowrasta market with KOMTAR in the background.



Another example of area regeneration involved the revitalisation of the KOMTAR (Komplek Tun Abdul Razak) area. For both of these projects, Think City was able to mobilise the local authority's own George Town Business Improvement District Area Regeneration Plan to upgrade pavements, create gardens where possible, apply traffic calming measures, rig up festive lighting and introduce better waste management.

These pilot projects established a good working relationship between Think City and the local authorities, leading to a better understanding of their aspirations, and most importantly, their limitations. Combining the resources of both parties also enabled better implementation of government policy.

Today, Think City continues to support various state and local government initiatives, including the *Cleaner, Greener Penang* campaign. At the city level, the *Greening George Town* initiative introduced tree-planting along Lebuhraya Carnarvon, the greening of back lanes around Little India, and Zero Waste projects at Prangin Mall, Ivory Times Square and George Town inner city.

To help mark out the World Heritage Site, Think City provided a grant to George Town World Heritage Inc to carry out a *Marking George Town* contest. Then Think City supported a plan for putting up artworks mounted on iron casts to reflect the unique identity of particular neighbourhoods. It also supported the George Town Wayfinding System of signposts identifying various heritage sites. Piloted in 2011 in the Street of Harmony, it has now been extended throughout the city's historic core.

Cooperation with the local authorities was soon increased to include capacity-building programmes covering not just the restoration of buildings but also the broader cultural aspects of a heritage area. As mentioned earlier, at the request of George Town World Heritage Inc, Think City supported conservation workshops aimed at contractors, property owners and professionals. These workshops were conducted by subject experts from the National Heritage Department and focused on the use of building materials such as stone, timber, lime and clay.

George Town World Heritage Inc also worked with AusHeritage on a series of seminars entitled *Progressing with Heritage*. These initiatives helped create greater awareness among the general public about the collective responsibility for the management and maintenance of George Town's heritage status.

Working with the Getty Conservation Institute and the Heritage of Malaysia Trust, Think City was able to expand its urban planning workshops to a national level, with participants including officers of the Penang Island City Council, and the State Town and Country Planning Department. Such programmes would not have been possible without the strong support of the local authorities and the Town and Country Planning Department in Kuala Lumpur.

Above / A survey to assess changes that people want at the Chowrastra Market.

Academic Institutions

To develop fresh ideas, review existing initiatives and ensure the viability of community-led projects, Think City worked with various academic institutions both in Malaysia and overseas.

The School of Housing, Building and Planning at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang was a natural partner. For example, Think City was able to enlist the expertise of academics from the university in the Little India Area Improvement Plan.

The university's architecture students also participated in a summer school in George Town involving Think City and the Architectural Association School of Architecture of London. The latter focused upon the theme of 'Streetware' with teachers from the Architectural Association School of Architecture working with Universiti Sains Malaysia students to find innovative ways to come up with design solutions for the challenges faced by communities living in the World Heritage Site.

In the case of *wakaf* (Muslim endowment land) properties, Think City worked with Penang Island Islamic Foundation to commission local experts from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia to produce an Area Development Plan. The plan included the upgrading and conservation of several buildings, business improvement ideas and a repopulation programme. Besides these, the plan proposed that a branch of the local university should be established in one of the heritage buildings to enhance the focus on conservation. This had the added advantage of bringing students into the area.

To help develop its regeneration plans, Think City enlisted various local experts to evaluate each proposal. Subject experts from the University of Malaya's Built Heritage faculty were appointed, with Professor Ezrin Arbi as an advisor and Dr Yahaya Ahmad as a technical expert. Both were particularly helpful in conducting workshops and site visits.

In the field of Social Sciences, Think City engaged local academics from Universiti Sains Malaysia, the University of Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and the National University of Singapore to evaluate and carry out research projects. This allowed funding for various publications mentioned in Chapter 8, including *Mosques & Keramats of Penang Island*, *Feasts of Penang: Muslim Culinary Heritage*, *Heritage Trees of Penang*, and most recently, *Heritage Houses of Penang*.

Think City also collaborated with academics from the University of London and the University of Cambridge in a project entitled *The Penang Story*, which focused on Penang and its trading connections with the Indian Ocean.

Another important project was the development of a strategic plan for George Town. This included the Armenian Park rehabilitation scheme. Think City collaborated with various international experts, including the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, on this scheme.

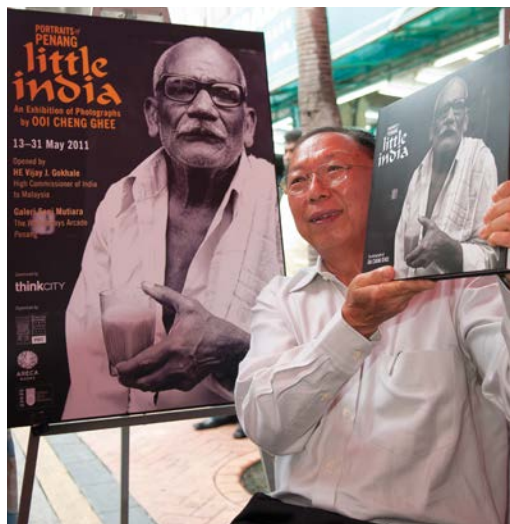
These collaborations still continue and are an important part of the regeneration of George Town, with best practices and ideas from elsewhere being adapted to meet local needs.

The Little India Joint Action Committee

While expert advisors and government regulators played a major part in developing ideas, communities and individuals remained the driving force where implementation was concerned. This was exemplified by the Little India Improvement District project which brought together local stakeholders – the state government and the local council. The plan was to improve the Little India experience by adopting the best practices in placemaking. At a workshop involving the stakeholders, all the participants were keen to make George Town's Little India the most interesting and significant experience of an Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia.

Little India is one of the most vibrant and diverse areas of George Town in terms of both culture and cuisine. However, local traders complained that they were not benefiting from the increase in tourism. Businesses remained profitable but higher rents threatened to make them unsustainable in the long term. Increasing traffic congestion also made it difficult to get to the area and walk around in it. The local community felt that its place-identity was getting lost.

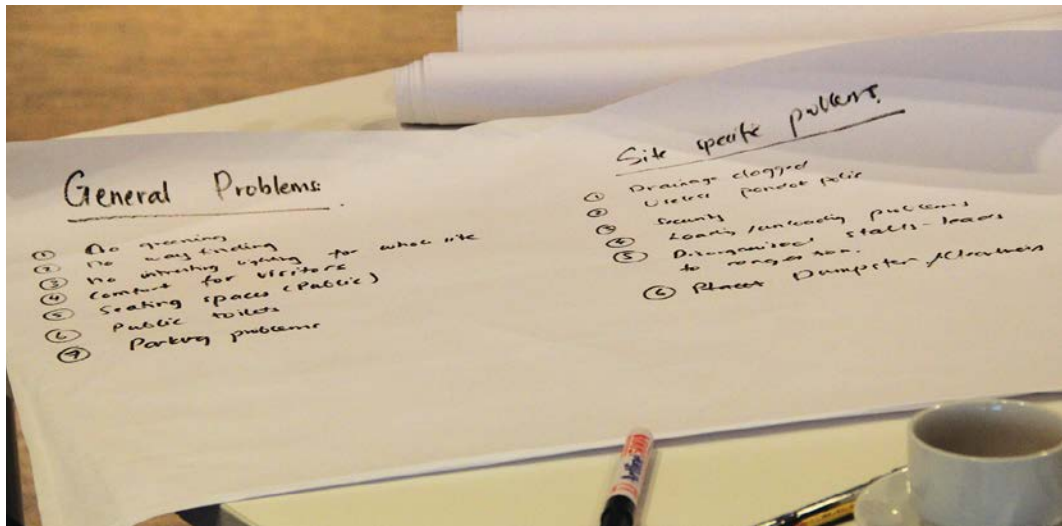
A Little India Joint Action Committee was already in existence. With added input from Think City, the committee started working together again. The local council and the local stakeholders had the clear objective of protecting and enhancing Little India as a cultural heritage area. The Action Committee members represented a variety of bodies, including the Indian Chamber of Commerce, the Muslim



League, representatives of traders working and living in the area, and prominent property owners, some of them being Chinese clan organisations.

The authorities had, in fact, defined the boundaries of Little India before and major upgrades had been carried out ten years earlier. But the repercussions of the wholesale upgrading of the area remained a bad memory for many stakeholders. Many lost their livelihoods during that one year period. The main challenge for Think City was to regain the trust of the traders and the community before working out any new plan.

Above / A photography book by Ooi Cheng Ghee that documents and celebrates Little India with affection and humanity.



Above / Participants spelt out some of the issues and problems that hampered Little India's ability to become a great destination.

Left / YB Teh Lai Heng, the local assembly man for KOMTAR, takes part in the Little India neighbourhood improvement workshop.

The first step was for the community itself to mark out Little India's boundaries, which stretched from Lebu Chulia in the south to Lebu Gereja in the north. To the west it was bounded by Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling and to the east by Lebu Penang. The space thus demarcated was slightly larger than the official version, as it included places and communities that identified themselves with Little India.

Following discussions with the Little India Committee, it was decided to commission an Area Regeneration Plan that would deal with the core issues. This meant not just the preservation of cultural vibrancy, but the management of waste, traffic congestion, heat and various other issues. This time, Universiti Sains Malaysia academics, headed by Professor Ghafar Ahmad (formerly Deputy Heritage Commissioner), put forward an Area Regeneration Plan based on the stated needs and aspirations of the Little India community itself.



Above / Indian sweets and savoury snacks at a stall in Little India.

Little India's stakeholders were generally small traders, so the traditional method of locating public exhibitions in a community hall was not going to be effective. Instead, the team brought its findings out onto the streets, with its recommendations communicated at street level and surveyors going door-to-door to note people's reactions.

The Little India Area Regeneration Plan was completed in November 2013. In April 2014, the partners took the decisive step of incorporating the Little India Joint Action Committee as a Special Purpose Vehicle to implement the Area Regeneration Plan.

The Power of Ten in Little India

The 'Power of Ten' is a formula created by an American non-governmental organisation called Project for Public Spaces. It refers to the ten most important elements identified by the community that encourage them to gather in a public space.

Local stakeholders identify the strengths and weakness of the area by marking key places on a map. This includes both problem spots and places of opportunity. This exercise enabled the Little India Committee to work out a plan that was community-based instead of imposed from above.

Using this workshop 'game', local stakeholders in Little India made an assessment of their area. The workshop, conducted on February 28, 2012, included representatives from the Little India Action Committee, the Penang Island City Council, the police, George Town World Heritage Inc, local communities and the Penang State Executive Council member for Local Government.

The participants considered four main elements in making their choices. These were 'sociability', 'accessibility and linkages', 'comfort and image', and 'uses and activities'. By evaluating these elements, the participants identified what they thought were the best aspects of the place as well as what was lacking.

With the findings set out on a map, the workshop results gave a site-specific picture of strengths and weaknesses. It was then relatively straightforward to come up with short, medium and long-term solutions.

Despite Little India's undoubted attractions, the workshop identified the main problems as 'accessibility and linkages' and 'comfort and image'. These included traffic problems, the physical condition of the area, the lack of visitor-friendly street furniture and amenities such as public toilets and the lack of a performance space.

The workshop proposed that the Little India Action Committee should set out clear targets, using the Power of Ten results, in its long-term planning. It also identified several problems where immediate action could be taken. These were mostly physical issues such as street furniture, amenities and cleanliness. Additionally, the principles of capacity-building were needed to manage both heritage buildings and such intangible aspects as place-programming.

The reactivation of the Little India Joint Action Committee was announced in a press conference held jointly by the committee and the State Executive Council member for Local Government.

The recommendations of the workshop formed the basis for the Little India Area Regeneration Plan, and even while the plan was still being formulated, the committee started implementing initiatives that could be undertaken quickly and easily. They also expanded the George Town Wayfinding System to identify key attractions in Little India.

The committee is now supporting the physical upgrading of shophouses in Lebuhr Queen and Lebuhr King as well.

Keeping Little India Vibrant

While it was important to have an Area Regeneration Plan to enhance the Little India experience, it was crucial that the plan should also give the Little India Joint Action Committee the ability to speak up for the area. To this end, Think City continues to support efforts by the committee to organise programmes, upgrade public spaces and establish a waste management system to keep Little India clean. Working with individual property owners as well as businesses, Think City is also expanding its Sustainable Housing Programme by extending the Community Development Fund to tenants and small businesses keen on remaining in the area.

Food is another important element that makes Little India unique and the committee continues to work with the traders to enhance hygiene and incorporate best cooking practices without compromising on authenticity.



Think City Projects in Little India

- Penang Story Permanent Exhibition at the STAR Pitt St. Building (Lebuh Queen)
- Façade Upgrading Works at Toishan and Cheah Kongs Properties in Lebuh Queen
- Muslim League Demonstration Project
- Cantonese Clan Properties (Toishan, Ng Clan)
- Chan San – Lebuh King); Sun Wui Wooi Koon (Lebuh Gereja)
- Ren I Tang (Boutique Hotel) (Lebuh China)
- Sri Maha Mariamman Temple roof repairs
- Little India Wayfinding System
- Tagore in Penang Project
- Portraits of Penang: Little India Project
- Rabindrath Sangeet Performance
- Ghazal Performance
- Kathak Performance
- Tagore Lectures
- *Chennai Nalla Chennai* Exhibition



Above / Chennai Nalla
Chennai Exhibition.

Opposite / Sri Mahamariamman
Temple roof repair project.

Meanwhile, Think City, together with the Little India Joint Action Committee and the local council, embarked on a back lane improvement project to enhance their use as places for hawker stalls and for people to congregate. Connecting these back lanes are four neighbourhood courtyards, which are important for the 'liveability' of George Town, as places where residents can relax and go about their daily activities with a reasonable sense of security.

One of the key factors that underlies Little India's vibrancy is its density. It is largely because of this that the amenities mentioned above were so important. Semi-pedestrianised areas, public toilets, and a community performance space allowing for cultural activities were all needed to attract visitors.

While the Little India Joint Action Committee does not engage directly with the State Tourism authorities, it has compiled a calendar of events taking place in Little India that has been incorporated into the state tourism events calendar. Several community-related events have been organised jointly with the Indian Cultural Centre, the cultural arm of the Indian High Commission. By working with the Indian Cultural Centre in Kuala Lumpur, the Little India Committee was able to incorporate international standards of programming into its calendar of cultural events.

The Penang and the Indian Ocean Programme

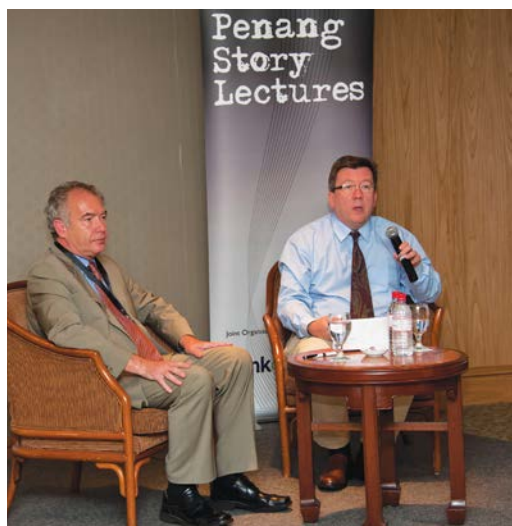
What has become known as the Penang and the Indian Ocean Programme was an initiative by Think City and academics from the Universities of Cambridge and London. Four years in the making, it started with the idea of exploring the maritime role of Penang in the history of the region but expanded to include countries bordering the eastern Indian Ocean, including the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal. One of its key objectives was to highlight George Town's evolution as a historic port on the Straits of Malacca. The initiative brought together institutions, scholars and local communities with shared interests and shared histories.

The programme included two main approaches. Local histories were explored at the community level, often in the vernacular. This built up a lot of social capital and contributed to the strengthening of the communities involved. In particular, it increased their awareness of and interest in their own history, their shared

history, and especially the history of trading, sojourning and settlement. Meanwhile, at a more intellectual level, the programme made Penang the focus of a network of scholars and subject experts, and a hub for arts, culture and performance. These two approaches provided a foundation on which to develop the programme.

Following the success of the Tagore in Penang project in 2011, which included a celebration of the 150th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore in George Town, Think City, together with academics from the Universities of Cambridge and London, organised a 'Penang and the Indian Ocean International Conference'. Some 24 speakers from Penang, Europe, the United States, Australia and other parts of Asia presented papers and conducted workshops. The proceedings of the conference were published in September 2012 when Think City hosted delegates from Yangon at the Penang-Yangon conference. The latter featured a public lecture by Dr Sunil Amrith, author of the book *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*.





The Penang and the Indian Ocean Programme strengthened the kind of people-to-people partnerships that were especially important for Think City's capacity-building initiatives. City managers from Yangon, for example, continue to take part in the Think City and Getty Conservation Foundation Urban Planning Workshops. Thailand and Indonesia also send delegates to these workshops that explore solutions to urban challenges in historic cities. Complementing these visits, Think City representatives have been invited to present and conduct workshops abroad, demonstrating how public grants can be used as a tool to catalyse urban regeneration.

Left / The late Sir Chris Bayly (left) and Professor Tim Harper of Cambridge University.

Right / Cynthia Nikitin of Project for Public Spaces.

Opposite / Indian High Commissioner Vijay Gokhale unveiling a portrait of Rabindranath Tagore during Tagore's 150th birthday anniversary celebration in Penang.



Enhancing Think City's Technical Capacity

Apart from social and cultural linkages, Think City established working partnerships with some of the world's leading experts in city-making. This included Cynthia Nikitin, Senior Vice-President of the New York-based Project for Public Spaces, who has led numerous large-scale multi-sectoral projects during her 25 years with the organisation. A life-long advocate of expanding public spaces, Nikitin conducted several public lectures in George Town, Butterworth, Putrajaya and Kuala Lumpur. She also helped evaluate Think City's proposed public spaces initiatives in Little India.

Think City also signed Memoranda of Understanding with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, AusHeritage and Fundacion Metropoli. The latter, an urban think-tank based in Madrid, partnered with Think City to deliver the Penang Project, which identified strategic intervention points for the future development of the state. Throughout this partnership, both organisations worked very closely with the Malaysian Department for Town and Country Planning, the federal agency responsible for urban development. They also worked with the Economic Planning Unit, which aligns economic and spatial development.



With AusHeritage and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Think City was able to expand its advocacy initiatives while demonstrating solutions to urban challenges. It worked with AusHeritage on the Kapitan Keling Mosque dome restoration project, and with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, it is developing a strategy to assist in the implementation of the George Town Special Area Plan through a demonstration project at Armenian Park. Since March 2014, an Aga Khan Trust for Culture staff member has been on secondment to Think City to help build its technical team, provide advice on selected interventions in George Town, and train team members to develop a building inventory, conservation techniques and project management skills.

Throughout the four-year implementation of the George Town Grants Programme, Think City has been fortunate to establish effective partnerships with many more organisations than are mentioned in this chapter. But our key partners are Think City's grantees and the communities that continue to support our projects.

Without our partners, including our staunchest critics, it would have been impossible to create an impact that promises to continue to benefit George Town in the years to come.

Above / Think City signs an MOU with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. The partners agreed to collaborate on developing the George Town World Heritage Site Strategic Master Plan.

The George Town Business Improvement District

The George Town Business Improvement District Scheme (BIDS) is the culmination of two and a half years of continual engagement with key stakeholders in the area around KOMTAR with the ultimate objective of achieving area rejuvenation on a public-private partnership basis.

As early as March 2010, Khazanah, working together with the British Council, hosted workshops about BIDS. Donald Hyslop, the chairman of the Better Bankside scheme for London's South Bank, visited and participated in workshops organised by the Little India Joint Action Committee, George Town World Heritage Inc and the George Town BIDS pro-tem committee.

A temporary BIDS committee was set up in May 2010 that included the main property owners in the area, such as the Penang Development Corporation, Ivory Times Square, First Avenue, Gama and Heng Lee.

Together, Think City and the BIDS committee were able to engage the Penang Island City Council and the State Government in their proposals for area regeneration.

Three themes were identified by the committee for the area around KOMTAR – improved connectivity, better cleanliness and better security. Together, the stakeholders and the local authorities then drew up the terms of reference that would guide appointed



consultants in compiling an Area Regeneration Plan. The committee members then pooled their individual area regeneration ideas, allowing the appointed consultant to align these proposals and study the viability of the BIDS.

In order to boost awareness of and confidence in the scheme, Think City and the British Council invited Peter Williams, National Chairman of another BIDS in the UK, to visit the KOMTAR area and conduct an assessment after meeting with the committee. The Williams Report described the positive impact a BIDS could have on the area, how it could work and what needed to be done.

In 2011, while the Area Regeneration Plan was being developed, Think City hosted Cynthia Nikitin from the Project for Public Spaces. She conducted a site visit, met members of the BIDS committee and wrote up her recommendations. The Nikitin Report recommended that public consultation should be conducted to identify the people who lived in and visited the KOMTAR area, and how they would like to see the area regenerated. By combining business and public needs, an Area Regeneration Plan became much more sustainable.

Developing a Concept Plan

With the identification by the BIDS committee of the main issues and three main themes, Think City was entrusted with finding suitable consultants to proceed with drawing up a visually-driven Concept Plan.

Winning over stakeholders was a slow and difficult process, as most of them were rival retail-orientated organisations. To ensure a proper level of ownership of the BIDS initiative, the team had to achieve buy-ins from both directors and workers.

Building an effective partnership between BIDS and the Penang Island City Council proved quite difficult too, and involved winning over the council's officers and convincing them that BIDS was there to support and augment their efforts.

Managing expectations was always a continuous effort. Think City played the role of facilitator and funder during the set-up phase. Stakeholders expected Think City to foot most of the costs, and going forward, to play a significant continuing role at board level.

Unexpected complications, including the State Transport Master Plan, ideological differences between shareholders and exposure to unforeseen liabilities, slowed down the process of implementation considerably. No single organisation in Malaysia has the experience of setting up a BIDS. The slow pace of implementation is, therefore, expected to continue until the George Town BIDS finds its feet.

The process of developing such a plan involved syndication work with the BIDS committee members as well as other major landowners in the area. The syndication process began with interviews involving key departments in the local council as well as meetings with the office of the Chief Minister and the State Executive Council member for Local Government.

A Concept Plan was developed based on the findings of this syndication process, and presented to the committee and its key stakeholders. To achieve a wider consensus, a public survey was carried out to elicit public feedback.

Finally, the penultimate version of the Concept Plan was presented to the Penang Chief Minister, the State Executive Council member for Local Government, the President of the Penang Island

City Council, the Board of Directors of Think City and the BIDS committee members. As a final step, the Area Improvement Plan was presented to the Penang Island City Council's Development Committee for endorsement.



Implementing the George Town Business Improvement District Scheme Area Regeneration Plan

Think City needed to set up a Special Purpose Vehicle to manage, monitor and implement the Business Improvement District Scheme Area Regeneration Plan. The BIDS committee decided that this should be a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee and called it George Town BIDS Sdn Bhd.

The process began with syndication at the committee level, presentations to the various boards of directors of partner organisations and securing the services of a company secretary and legal consultant. George Town BIDS Sdn Bhd was formally set up in June 2012 with three founding shareholders – the Penang Development Corporation, Ivory Properties and Heng Lee. In November 2012, the number of shareholders expanded to five, including Gama and 1919 Global Sdn Bhd. The company also had Prangin Mall's Joint Management Body as an associate member, since it could not be a formal shareholder in a company limited by guarantee.

The implementation of the Area Plan, involving multiple stakeholders, remained the greatest challenge for the BIDS initiative. A technical committee was needed to identify projects to be implemented in 2013. These included the previously described Wayfinding System, festive lighting to distinguish the BIDS area, a weekend park project at KOMTAR Phase 5 (which involved the utilisation of undeveloped land by the Prangin Canal), a pilot pavement upgrading project at Jalan Dato' Kramat, a launch event in 2014 and the hiring of a project manager.

The Penang Muslim Heritage Project

Penang Muslim heritage describes the physical and intangible heritage that has been developing in the Penang region for the past three centuries, with strong links to the arrival and spread of Islamic communities in the Malay world. In many ways, it is part of the evolving narrative of Islam in Southeast Asia, with particular reference to the trading and multi-ethnic society that settled and developed its own unique socio-economic and cultural identities in George Town.

Penang Muslim heritage is characterised by its diverse origins, with links and networks to Arabia, the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia and East Asia. In the context of George Town, Muslim communities share some common experiences involving a long history in seafaring and trade, living under British colonial rule, involvement in Asian nationalism and Pan-Islamism, and more recently, responding to the nation-building policies re-casting the Malay Muslim identity as the basis for Malaysian national identity.

In 2009, the Muslim community in the George Town heritage site constituted 401 households or 17.3% of the total population of the historic city. Ethnically, there were 225 Malay households (9.7%) and 382 households whose mother tongue is Malay (16.4%). There was also a significant number of Tamil-speaking households (247 or 10.6%), a proportion of which are Muslim. The 2009 Baseline Study indicated that George Town has an ageing population, including many single household residents, but more studies are required to see if this applies to the Muslim communities.

Opposite / An engagement session to obtain feedback from the public on the BIDS plan.



While Indian Muslims are concentrated in Little India, Lebuah Chulia and Jalan Penang, there is very little concentration of Malay Muslims in any single neighbourhood other than the Malay Village on Lebuah Aceh. This geographical dispersal of Malay households makes it hard for the Malay Muslims to feel a significant collective cultural identity. Moreover, the majority of Muslim businesses occupy *wakaf* properties and there is very little opportunity to purchase shophouses whose prices have tripled in the last decade.

The artificial demarcation of the George Town World Heritage Site has essentially cut the Malay Muslim communities off from traditional village networks, including Kampung (village) Sungai Pinang, Kampung Syed, Kampung Bagan Jermal and Kampung Tanjong Tokong. Rejuvenation programmes that hope to address the problems faced by Muslims in George Town will need to be aware of these historical links and devise a way for them to re-engage with Muslims outside the World Heritage Site.

Above / Lebuah Aceh exhibition.

Continuous Engagement

In order to get the Muslim community more involved, Think City conducted one-to-one interviews with the major stakeholders within the Penang Muslim community. These were coordinated with three workshop displays, namely *Muslims in Singapore*, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture's *Historic Cities of the Islamic World* and a dedicated workshop to identify community problems and aspirations.

All this involved engagement with a long list of key players. These included the Penang State Islamic Council, the Penang Island City Council, the Urban Development Authority, Universiti Sains Malaysia, the Muslim League, the Penang Island Malay Chamber of Commerce, the Penang Island Travel Cooperative, the Lebuh Aceh Heritage Body, the Lebuh Aceh Malay Mosque congregation, the Kapitan Keling Mosque congregation, the Asian Society for Economic Research Association, and other non-governmental agencies.

In 2013, Think City engaged UiTM to help develop a Master Plan for the regeneration of the *wakaf* area in the wider context of George Town World Heritage Site. The Master Plan, developed by Prof Jamalunlaili Abdullah, envisioned a resilient and vibrant urban space based on Islamic traditions, educational facilities and a Muslim heritage inspired tourism plan. The State Government established the Yayasan



Above / The Syed Al-Attas Mansion is a heritage building along Lebuh Armenian where a museum was created to celebrate the role and contribution of Muslim leaders in the development and propagation of Islam in Penang.

Islam Pulau Pinang (YIPP), to help coordinate development programmes involving the Muslim community in 2011. Think City continues to work with YIPP and community leaders in the implementation of the Jamalunlaili Master Plan. This involves a grant for the making of a Haj interpretation gallery, repair works at Masjid Melayu Lebuh Aceh and the restoration of the Syed Al-Attas Mansion.

Think City's initiatives aim to create a more positive self-image for Penang's Muslim by highlighting the progressive aspects of their heritage. It is hoped that this will encourage George Town's Muslim communities to play an even more active role within the larger community.

Problems and Aspirations

The Muslim community in George Town agreed that, owing to their dwindling numbers and lack of economic clout, uniting under one banner as Muslims was a sensible move, provided it did not diminish their varied and distinctive cultural heritages. They also agreed that Penang Muslim heritage could be a source of inspiration and pride, helping to galvanise the community. With better organisation, it was felt that Muslims could tackle the various socio-economic problems faced by the community.

However, there were problems. There was little consensus on what constituted a 'Penang Muslim'. This may seem surprising because Islam is an inclusive religion that transcends ethnic and cultural borders. But these days the highly politicised nature of ethnic and sectarian identities results in Muslims of Malay, Arab and Indian origins each seeing their community as in some way more authentic than the others.

Some groups think of themselves as Malay Muslims, while others insist that a less ethnocentric term should be used, such as Penang Muslims – a more race-neutral umbrella term.

Penang Muslim heritage also gets less attention because research work is mostly in Malay, with little effort made to produce materials in English or other languages. Research is also hampered by a lack of records and an overdependence on anecdotal material.

Addressing these issues, the workshop highlighting the Singaporean Muslim scenario created awareness in the community that socio-economic and cultural resilience could only be built up through better organisation and self-help. The reality is that Penang Muslims in George Town do not have the organisational skill and sophistication of their Singaporean counterparts. Moreover, Singaporean Muslims have developed a self-reliant attitude owing to their minority status.

The Singaporean government also allows each community to organise, collect money and maintain its own mosques. At the mosques, there is also greater freedom to worship in the vernacular, including Tamil and Arabic. In short, Singaporean Muslims have to be self-reliant if they want to maintain their history, heritage and religion.

Although a minority in Penang Island and George Town, Muslims are a majority in Malaysia. Because of this, the institutional framework does not encourage communities to be self-reliant.

Instead, there seems to be a tense and sometimes hostile attitude by certain communities towards the Penang State Islamic Council and other government agencies directly responsible for the management and development of mosques and *wakaf* properties. The workshop highlighted the divisiveness and competing interests of this historically diverse community.

The workshop with the Aga Khan Trust yielded more positive results. Think City organised two workshops. One of these gave the Penang Muslim community the opportunity to meet Rasha Arous, formerly of the Aga Khan Trust in Aleppo, Syria, to focus especially on building community networks. The other involved the Aga Khan Trust's senior historic cities project executives, Stefano Bianca and Francesco Siravo, and focused on the development of *wakaf* properties in the historic George Town context.

These workshops identified the need:

- to research, document and understand the evolution and development of Penang Muslims in the wider context of global Islam;
- to build awareness in the community and among key stakeholders that interventions will have to be comprehensive, with medium- and long-term goals clearly established;
- to draw up programmes targeting women and children so as to encourage the community to be more resilient. The Aga Khan Trust's socio-cultural programmes in Aleppo and Damascus are good models to emulate;
- to undertake a comprehensive study of the community's socio-economic activities and its interaction with the rest of George Town in order for *wakaf* properties to be developed successfully;
- to take into account the Special Area Plan, the Heritage Management Plan and the George Town World Heritage Inc Heritage Action Plan in all strategies formulated by the community or by government agencies.

Quick Take

SO, how did the George Town Grants Programme benefit the city? Was it successful in acting as a catalyst? What were the key lessons learnt and how do they inform Think City's expansion nationwide?

In 2014, Think City commissioned two impact assessments – one by a panel of independent experts and another by the grant recipients themselves. In the same year, a second Population and Land Use Census was carried out. By comparing the 2014 results with those of the first study in 2009, it was possible to figure out the grants' contribution to the city.

A total of RM16.3 million had been given out under the George Town Grants Programme in four years as seed money. Grant recipients rated Think City highly as an innovative platform. They said the grants helped them to build capacity and reduce red tape. This allowed projects to be implemented efficiently. The expert panel said that the George Town Grants Programme was most effective in kick-starting regeneration.

They were not convinced that this had led to a more sustainable living environment. As a result, the panel rated the success of the programme in preserving George Town's Outstanding Universal Value as moderate. It said the least effective aspect of the programme was the preservation of intangible heritage. However, the programme was deemed successful in raising public awareness for the need to preserve the city's unique heritage. The impact of the grants programme is still unfolding and will become clearer in the future. The full Impact Assessment Report 2017 can be found online at www.thinkcity.com.my

Think City's efforts have also drawn international attention and its team has been invited to many regional and international workshops and conferences. In 2014, Think City co-founded the Southeast Asian Creative City Network to replicate best practices learnt from the George Town Grants Programme experience to other historic cities in the region.

Chapter 10

MEASURING IMPACT & OUTCOMES

Objectives and Achievements

Think City has supported 240 projects in George Town through the four-year grants programme. Of the RM16.3 million in grant money disbursed, 49% went to physical restoration projects, 25% to shared spaces, 15% to cultural projects and 11% to capacity-building. These projects and initiatives helped to kick-start the regeneration of the George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Towards the end of the George Town Grants Programme, Think City needed to know what had been achieved and what could have been done better.

Therefore, it commissioned multi-method impact assessments to measure the programme's effectiveness in meeting its strategic goals of triggering the regeneration of the George Town World Heritage Site, supporting civil society development, spurring private sector initiatives, building capacity for the regeneration of the site and promoting a sustainable and liveable environment.

The impact assessments involved examinations of the George Town Grants Programme's strategic goals against the outcomes actually achieved. The full impact study, its framework and outcomes, can be seen online at www.thinkcity.com.my

To ensure objectivity, an independent expert panel made up of government officials, civil society representatives, subject experts and private sector players was formed to assess the programme. The panel members were familiar with the grants programme but had not benefited from it.

A similar process was repeated with grant recipients who all had first-hand experience of implementing a project involving Think City. Also assessed was the effectiveness of the various Think City supported training programmes.

The assessments also took into account the impact the grants programme had on the George Town World Heritage Site. To do this, the results of the Population and Land Use and Census done in 2009 was compared to the one carried out in 2014.

A final ingredient in measuring the impact of the grants programme was media monitoring to see how public perception had changed and how effective Think City's outreach

programmes had been. Media monitoring involved tracing articles about Think City and the grants programme in mainstream print and online media. These allowed analysis of the extent of coverage and financial value of that coverage in terms of advertising.

Unique Formula

During the four years, Think City developed a unique, community-based urban regeneration formula, with projects being selected based both on their effectiveness in creating partnerships and on a set of values - their capacity to be catalytic, developmental, inclusive, sustainable and innovative.

A proposal was considered catalytic if it had a multiplier effect or if it inspired others to innovate. Partnerships, for example, might create efficiencies or enhance social capital through collaborative arrangements. A proposal was regarded as developmental if it built local capacity or skills that could be transferred to the rest of the community. An inclusive proposal was one that benefited or engaged a broad spectrum of the community. A sustainable project was one that led to long-term cultural, economic and environmental outcomes.

Finally, innovation projects were those that sought to resolve issues or communicate ideas in a creative manner.

While not all proposals were equally strong in all these areas, the selection criteria were effective in creating cultural, economic and physical impact.

Culturally, Think City projects triggered changes in behaviour, enhanced relationships, improved community knowledge, brought different people together, contributed to the preservation of intangible heritage and fostered artistic expression.

Economically, they encouraged diversity and clustering. They created jobs and provided opportunities to establish a knowledge economy. In physical terms, these projects enhanced the built environment, encouraged investment from private and public sectors, improved restoration and planning practices, enhanced access to the local landscape, improved amenities and encouraged 'greener' built forms.

Overall, the grants programme contributed positively to the George Town World Heritage Site as a catalyst. Some 8% of the building stock has been restored in some way, vacancy rates are down (in at least 20 cases as a direct result of a Think City grant) and new types of businesses (many in the creative industries) have taken root.

On the flip side, property prices have increased and the resident population has declined from 10,159 to 9,425 between 2009 and 2013.

Assessment by Expert Panel

The expert panel felt that the George Town Grants Programme was most effective in kick-starting regeneration. However, they said it was least effective in creating a more sustainable living environment.

Of the various initiatives and projects, the panel rated the Little India Improvement District project, the various building restorations, and the George Town BIDS as the most effective in stimulating learning and knowledge as well as enhancing social and cultural communities.

Measured against the grant criteria, the same three initiatives and projects ranked at the top. Rated least effective were the Wayfinding and Affordable Housing Programmes, perhaps because these were less publicised, being merely components of the Little India project and the BIDS.

In terms of overall assessment, the expert panel was of the view that the grants programme was successful in its 'strategic goals' but was least effective when achieving its 'intervention aims'.

In short, the grants programme was successful as a catalyst but less so when measured against the specific outcomes it had set for itself.

The grants programme as a whole was rated higher than any of the individual grant areas. Individually, the Little India Improvement District project, the building restorations, and the workshops and training were the most effective components of the programme.

GTGP Likelihood Contribution

GRANT AREA	GTGP LIKELIHOOD CONTRIBUTION (AT THE TIME)	GTGP LIKELIHOOD CONTRIBUTION (SOME TIME IN THE FUTURE)	DIFFERENCE
Building and Amenity Improvements	61%	59%	-2%
Research, Publications and Consultancies	75%	60%	-15%
Workshops	65%	35%	-30%
Wayfinding/Demarcation	100%	100%	0%
Conferences and Lectures	40%	40%	0%
Events and Exhibitions	57%	53%	-4%
Average	66%	58%	-9%

Source: George Town Grants Programme: Impact Assessment 2017

The programme’s impact on preserving George Town’s Outstanding Universal Value was rated as moderate by the expert panel. The effectiveness of the programme was rated as 71/100 for preserving the city as an exceptional example of a multicultural trading town, 76/100 for preserving its living heritage, and 76/100 for preserving its unique architecture.

In terms of Think City as an organisation, the panel felt that it was effective, innovative and catalytic (81/100). The grants programme was rated highest (83/100) in terms of the relationships and partnerships it had developed with the community.

Think City’s light-touch approach when monitoring projects came under criticism as the expert panel felt that more could have been done to influence the grantees’ activities. In future, the panel recommended that better compliance, monitoring and grant acquittal processes be put in place.

The panel also wanted the pool of grant recipients to be expanded and projects better linked to the strategic regeneration framework. It also felt that Think City could have made use of local experts and highlighted success stories better. Finally, it also wanted better engagement and consultation with hard-to-reach communities.

Assessment by Grant Recipients

Grant recipients were asked about the chances of a project getting off the ground without a grant. The response was that Think City's funding increased the likelihood of the projects going ahead by 66%. Think City funding was still more important for the Wayfinding, research and publications projects. While some of the projects would have proceeded sometime in the future, a Think City grant allowed them to proceed earlier. The response confirmed that the grants programme was a catalyst.

When it came to recipients' self-assessment about effectiveness against project objectives, publication and research grantees rated their projects the highest. Most cited 'leaving a lasting legacy' as their main objective, while 'encouraging or inspiring others' was the second highest. When asked to rate the effectiveness of the overall grants programme against selected criteria, the highest rating was the preservation of tangible heritage and built form.

Echoing subject experts, grant recipients felt that the least effective aspect of the grants programme was the preservation of intangible heritage. However, it must be said that it is difficult to measure the impact on intangible heritage as the benefits are not immediately visible and take a longer time to unfold.

What about motivation for establishing new businesses? Only three out of more than 600 respondents indicated that the main reason was 'investments by groups like Think City'. This possibly reflected the fact that the grants programme did not have an economic or business start-up function and that there were a multitude of factors influencing the reasons why businesses commenced. None

of the new residents cited Think City as the main reason for establishing businesses, with the majority indicating proximity (closeness to work) as the main factor.

As for renovations, 20 owners of newly restored buildings cited Think City as the main reason for commencing renovations. This is about 5% of all estimated renovations in the World Heritage Site.

Economic Impact

In terms of economic impact, 'grant recipients' were calculated as the total number of people employed and the total number of days they worked in connection with grant-funded activities.

By taking into account the portion of total project costs actually covered by the grants, these figures were converted to full-time equivalent (FTE) employment. Based on this, it is estimated that 280 jobs were created as a direct result of the George Town Grants Programme, with a further 317 jobs being created indirectly (Over the full grant period, this averages out at 62 jobs created directly and 70 indirectly per annum. Most of the jobs were in construction and publications.

The overall estimated cost of projects involving Think City grants was RM74 million. On average, for every RM1 of grant funds, an additional RM2.25 was contributed by the grant recipient or raised from elsewhere.

For building and amenity improvements, the co-investment was as high as RM5.70 and for workshops nearly RM3.50. Publications and events generated some RM3.2 million in revenue, resulting in 87,000 publications and more than 300,000 event and conference participants.

When an output multiplier is applied, it is estimated that the total economic output associated with grants programme projects was RM137 million.

Media Monitoring

Using selected monitoring data commissioned by Think City, it is estimated that over 820 articles appeared in print and online media about Think City or the grants programme between 2009 and 2014. This is a considerable achievement given that the organisation did not have a budget for communications and publicity. The team also attracted high-quality publishers, with Think City featuring in international media like *The New York Times*, *The Economist*, *Monocle*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and other newspapers.

In total, the grants programme was estimated by media monitors to have elicited a cumulative readership of 83 million and an advertising value of nearly RM6 million.

Advocacy

As the grants programme was rolled out, it attracted international attention and the Think City team was invited to many regional and international workshops and conferences to share lessons learnt and exchange ideas about the urban regeneration process.

These invitations, all of which were sponsored by the organisers, is a key measure of the success of the grants programme.

While advocacy remains a crucial element in testing and refining the Think City community-based urban regeneration formula, it was important that these interactions translated into tangible outcomes in the form of partnerships and projects.

The Think City team presented at international, regional and local advocacy platforms. This included the World Cities Summit (2011), the Global Cities Summit (2014), the ASEAN Business Council (2014), the United Nations World Tourism Conference (2014) and the World Tourism Council Conference (2014), to name a few.

The Think City formula, featuring public grants as a tool for translating government policy into research, remains attractive to many partner organisations. Think City team members have been invited by city managers to share with them the challenges and benefits of a bottom-up urban regeneration programme. Think City team members have also worked with the Yangon Heritage Trust in Myanmar, the Tbilisi City Hall in Georgia.

As competition between cities for talent begins to intensify, city managers are struggling to figure out how to boost their competitive advantage. While capital cities have the advantage of being at the centre of national decision-making, secondary cities like George Town have to rely on their flexibility and niche attractions to remain competitive. A vibrant heritage city is attractive to well-qualified people, as the city is able to use that heritage to distinguish itself from other cities.

The grants programme has been successful in the eyes of the expert panel and grant recipients, above all, for creating greater awareness of the city's heritage. In time, this will help draw more high-value talent to George Town.

In August 2014, Think City, together with Chiangmai Creative City, Bandung Creative City Forum, Creative Cebu City and the George Town Festival, established the Southeast Asian Creative City Network. All five members agreed to work together to develop the creative economy in their respective cities, with each city being an important hub for its local region. The partners also agreed to work together to find innovative ways to align urban regeneration with community-centred development policies to ensure economic resilience.

Lessons Learnt

All in all, the impact assessments clearly show that the George Town Grants Programme was an effective tool in achieving many of Think City's stated aims, especially that of kick-starting the regeneration of the World Heritage Site. Importantly, it was the overall programme, rather than individual grant areas or projects, which had the most impact.

In the course of implementation, the team learnt that it was important to establish a good working partnership with the local government. In the case of George Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, there was an opportunity to assist with the development of the George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI). This was particularly so in the development of the Special Area Plan for the site and other ways of working together supporting GTWHI's core mission of creating awareness and widening public participation in the management of the site.

A close working partnership with the local government was also key to assisting in aligning conservation with development, particularly through improving the public realm. Although outside the remit of the grants programme, Think City invested time and expertise in helping Penang Island City Council with the development of the Greening George Town Master Plan. Going forward, this was also expanded to include a Heritage Interpretation Master Plan and the Marking George Town project involving mural art works.

The team discovered that public private partnerships established on shared values were crucial to the long-term success of any regeneration programme. At the beginning, the gulf between potential partners might be very wide but, step by step, the grants programme fosters understanding and empathy. This becomes the basis for further cooperation involving bigger projects. The bigger projects could range from a single project involving the restoration of a building to an entire precinct plan involving many stakeholders with very different motivations.

Finally, the team learnt to prioritise as there were many worthwhile projects but finite capacity and resources to fulfil promises. While management initiatives were important, they needed to be well articulated and properly resourced as team members did most of the heavy-lifting in an area or with a community that did not have the capacity to do so.

Consequently, the grants programme was found to be a flexible and effective tool for catalysing urban regeneration, particularly when helping communities that were not well-organised. Complexity could be broken down and dealt with in bite-sized issues.

What the George Town Grants Programme has done:

- stimulated further private investment in the George Town World Heritage Site;
- developed closer ties between stakeholders;
- raised awareness of the site, its history and prospects through publications and media attention;
- acted as a useful testing ground for this type of grant programme.

Lessons learnt that can be applied elsewhere:

- link the grants programme to a spatial regeneration framework;
- implement better compliance, monitoring and grant acquittal processes;
- expand the grant pool and take; greater effort to engage hard-to-reach groups;
- focus more on intangible heritage and economic development;
- environmental initiatives;
- focus much earlier on affordable housing and maintaining diversity to counter the negative impacts of gentrification associated with regeneration.



This provided the time to get buy in and win trust because change could be demonstrated. This also encouraged self-reliance.

Beyond the George Town Grants Programme

In addition to the transformations that the grant programme helped to catalyse in the George Town World Heritage Site, the programme has led to significant increase in city-making know-how. This is now being deepened in Penang and being applied to other Malaysian cities.

After the grants programme ended, Think City has deepened its involvement in George Town and has brought in new partners, most notably the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. The team has moved forward on a number of public realm improvement projects that have been appended to and endorsed under the George Town World Heritage Site Special Area Plan.

The most notable are the Lebuah Armenian/Acheh Neighbourhood Improvement Plan, the North Seafront Public Realm Improvement Programme, Gat Lebuah Cina Streetscape Upgrade, and an initiative to develop underutilised cultural assets in Penang through programmes and conservation efforts.

Significant progress has been made in Lebuah Armenian/Acheh neighbourhood with the upgrade to the park and back lanes. Post-construction resident surveys indicated a marked improvement in liveability and greater use of the park by local residents to sit and relax. The streetscape greening aspect of the project has since been replicated elsewhere on the island.

Work on the North Seafront has also commenced, with drainage and resurfacing of the esplanade currently underway. Pre-restoration archaeological work of Fort Cornwallis is ongoing. Think City is also moving forward to develop a network of galleries, cultural spaces and museums.

Think City's efforts to improve walkability have now been replicated elsewhere in Penang, most notably in Pulau Tikus. The local government now has a broader laneway improvement programme, which is directly inspired by the team's efforts in George Town. More recently, they announced plans to clear five-foot ways to enhance the city's overall walkability.

The emulation of Think City projects also extended to conservation, with partnerships now formed with government and community in the restoration of the Makam Dato Koyah, Campbell Street Market and government-owned shophots on Lebuah Kimberley. A public-private partnership effort is also underway with Sun Hung Kai Properties of Hong Kong (which owns some 31 shophouses in the core zone) to develop a master plan involving conservation, streetscape improvement and affordable renting.

Opposite / The Kampong Benggali Pocket Park, also known as the Dewan Ria Park, forms part of an effort by Think City to create a multi-purpose recreation hub in a high density residential area.

Butterworth

The Butterworth programme was an extension of Think City's plans to establish a new city core and alleviate development pressure in George Town. It involved a number of revitalisation initiatives with a focus on the downtown area, the Penang Sentral transport hub, Sungai Prai and the waterfront. Significant progress has been made in the downtown area with establishment of the Butterworth Fringe Festival, a laneway art programme, multiple building restorations and public realm improvements. Investigations have started on the health of Sungai Prai and plans have been prepared for the waterfront and Penang Sentral.

Kuala Lumpur and Klang

Think City established its Kuala Lumpur office in January 2015 with a focus on revitalising the historic core measuring 1 km in radius from Masjid Jamek. This area has been steadily declining as Bukit Bintang and KLCC areas became prominent. The once bustling social and cultural area has become a transitional space during the day and the haunt of homeless people at night.

Further decline is inevitable without a strong economic strategy and foundation. To arrest the decline, Think City is applying the urban revitalisation methodology and lessons from George Town to recreate a cultural and creative district that is relevant to the 21st century while being respectful of its heritage.

A total of 32 crowd-sourced grantees have been funded, so far. This includes creative content, publications, research papers, building restoration, arts programmes and adaptive reuse projects. Major management initiatives include funding art performances and exhibitions in the Masjid Jamek LRT station and the establishment of Ruang – a multi-use community space that provides a platform for activating creative ideas in the downtown area.

The team has been working closely with Kuala Lumpur City Hall on a number of initiatives, such as space activation of Medan Pasar and capacity-building through workshops, seminars and projects. These were led by experts from Kuala Lumpur, New York and Melbourne. Think City also has a public realm improvement programme that included the study and activation of back lanes and open spaces.

In the area of heritage conservation and engagement, the team has prepared conservation management plans for National Museum and National Stadium and has worked on community engagement around the Taman Tugu project.

The Kuala Lumpur team is also involved in the Klang City Rejuvenation Committee – a collaboration between the Klang City Hall, Klang Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Selangor Malay Chamber of Commerce Malaysia and the Klang Indian Chamber of Commerce. The project looks at revitalising two major nodes within the old Klang Town and is driven entirely by the local business communities. Think City has adopted a light touch in Klang, mainly sharing its know-how and offering strategic advice.



Above / Arts on the Move Programme at Masjid Jamek LRT Station in Kuala Lumpur.



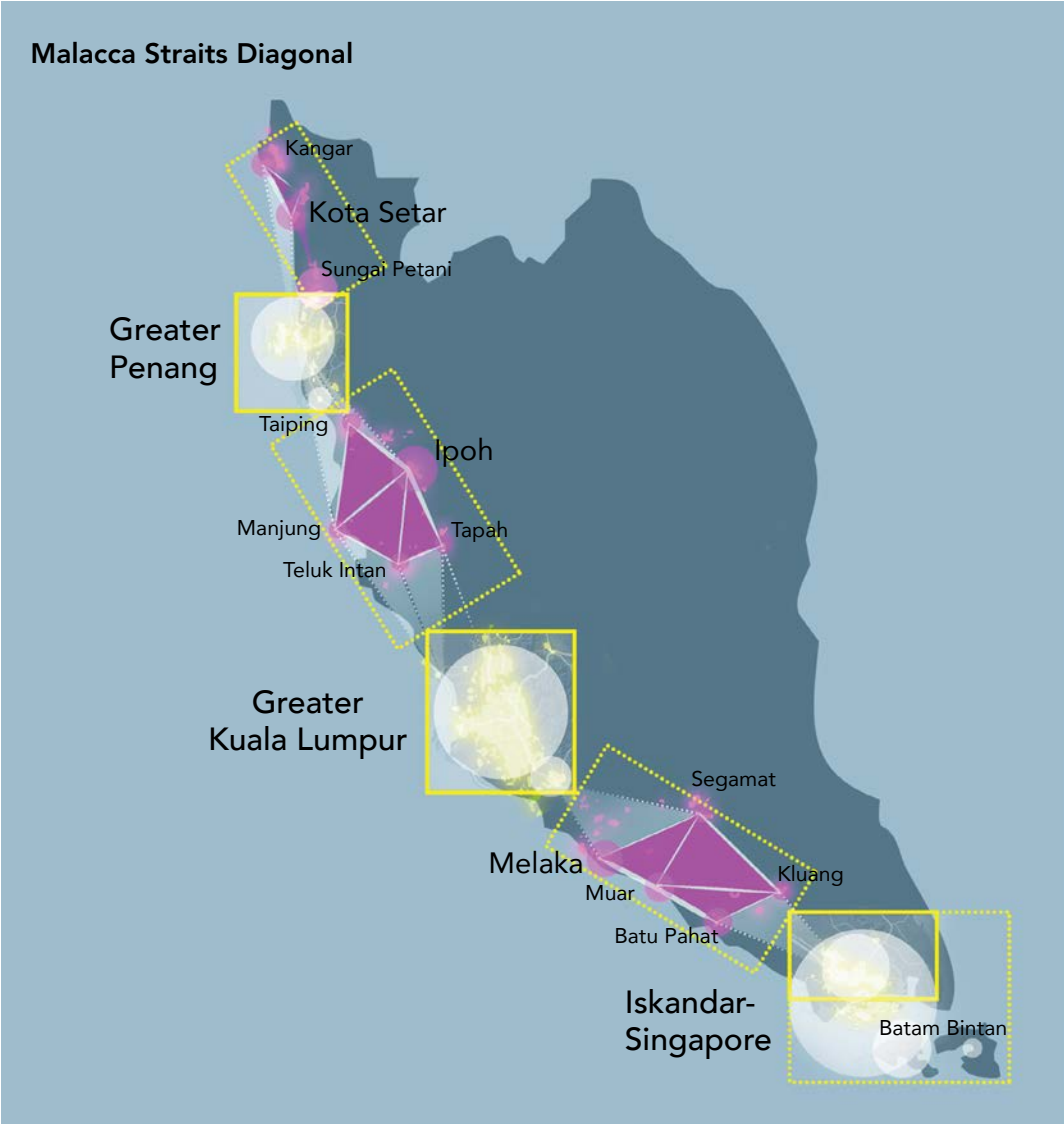
Above / Drawing on the lessons learnt from the George Town Festival, Think City provided grants to community groups to participate in the Johor Bahru Arts Festival 2017.



Johor Bahru

Think City established an office in Johor Bahru in 2016. The strategy there is to enhance the liveability of the historic centre for residents and visitors through demonstration projects and capacity-building for city managers. The mainstay of the team's activities is crowd-sourcing for projects to increase public participation in urban regeneration efforts, and where necessary, the providing of technical help to conserve the city's historic monuments. Current projects include working with local disability community organisations to improve their service capabilities, shophouse restorations, festivals and events, publications and planning for major public realm improvements.

Think City's initial impact and success of its community-based approach is reflected in the official invitation by the Johor Bahru City Council for the team to be part of the Johor Bahru Transformation committee. In addition, the team is now working on territorial scale planning that re-examines the entire Iskandar region and its integration with Singapore.



COMPONENTS

- Supercities
- Metropolitan environment
- Territorial Diamonds
- Middle-sized Cities

National Initiatives

After the George Town Grants Programme began, Think City established a National Initiatives work stream centred on capacity-building for the nation's city managers. It also targeted students in related fields. Programmes included training, seminars and conferences around heritage conservation, future studies, urban design and placemaking. The work stream also involved publications.

The programme has since been expanded and repackaged as 'Urban Knowledge' with ongoing research, knowledge codification, capacity-building and a public outreach programme to create a network of advocates for urban regeneration.

A fellowship has also been established and regional partnerships are being actively pursued through the South-East Asian Creative Cities Network.

The team is also involved in national level planning. It is working collaboratively with Department of Urban and Rural Planning and MyHSR, and other government agencies to undertake a deep dive study into the Malacca Straits Diagonal and the East Coast Rail Corridor. The body of work draws on each party's expertise and subject-specialists to leverage additional social, economic and environmental benefits from planned investments in connectivity infrastructure, as well as development and amenity improvement opportunities in key centres and regions.

From its inception, Think City's objective was to help catalyse the regeneration of George Town and providing the city with a new purpose. This had to do with the city's history, its built heritage and its Outstanding Universal Values as defined by UNESCO. In order to do so, Think City needed to be nimble and innovative, with the ability to advocate, facilitate and demonstrate positive change. It also needed to do so through partnerships while expanding the opportunities for ordinary citizens to participate in the regeneration process.

The grants programme was a key tool in Think City's kit and the pilot programme in George Town has been very successful. In efforts to expand the regeneration programme to different cities, the team continues to use public grants as an incentive and catalyst while looking for the best ideas from the people and communities who make up the city.

It is clear that the impact of the George Town Grants Programme has extended beyond the initial target of 100 small projects to kick-off the regeneration process. In addition to the expansion of the programme to other cities and the deepening efforts in George Town, Think City is now looked upon as a regional leader in urban regeneration. This indicates that, perhaps, the most critical impact of the George Town Grants programme is the demonstration that a community-based urban regeneration programme is possible. It is clear that the sum of its parts are greater than the whole.

AFTERWORD



Hamdan Abdul Majeed

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
THINK CITY

FROM my earliest memory, my family and I grew up in a densely populated neighbourhood of George Town. My home in Kampung Kolam (Buckingham Street), adjacent to the famous Kapitan Keling Mosque and the bustling Street of Harmony, always provided opportunities to be immersed in diverse sights, sounds and aromas. If life was like a moving picture, no two scenes were ever alike. There was never a problem living in a multi-cultural society. Ours was a relatively close-knit traditional Indian Muslim family but, just a few steps outside the door, there were many opportunities to meet and befriend people of different cultures, religions and lifestyles.

Before our small team started Think City, we were quite concerned about how George Town's sophisticated yet parochial communities would receive us. There is a vein of healthy scepticism in every Penangite that whispers "beware of Greeks bearing gifts". So, almost from the very first day, we realised that we needed to keep an open mind. Fundamentally, it was not we or our consultants who had the answers but the people we were going to share projects with whose trust we had to earn.

We knew that without demonstrations of change, we could not implement the many concept plans that we wanted to develop. So, from its inception, Think City was to be both a 'think tank' and a 'do tank'. Today, more than 200 projects later, we are in a better position to assess ourselves as every grantee and project partner can provide testimony to our strengths and weaknesses. It is this openness to very critical appraisals and the ability to experiment with new cutting-edge ideas that continue to inform Think City's expansion nationwide.

The Think City formula begins with a thorough understanding of a city, preferably learning from the people who have been there for generations or citizens who continue to make their homes there. A scientific baseline study, taking into account land use and population census, follows. This helps to describe and inform stakeholders about the city as a collective space. A small grants programme, informed by stakeholder engagement and the findings of the baseline study, can then be implemented to ensure the widest possible participation by communities and individuals in the regeneration process.

Other than crowd sourcing for ideas from the ground, Think City also establishes partnerships with the state and local governments, ensuring that there is alignment with all levels of government. This helps with specific types of urban regeneration work, including improving the public realm. In the case of George Town, we have set up the George Town Conservation and Development Corporation with our partners, the Penang State Government and international subject experts the Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

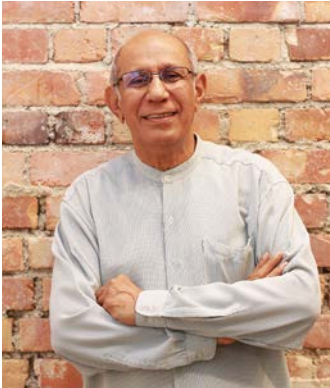
As our mandate expanded to the rest of the nation, we carried with us this same approach to city-making, that is, communities are made an integral part of the decision-making process. We are no longer working in an exclusively historic city context as we have expanded to post-industrial Butterworth, the national capital city of Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru, a city with an international border. We believe that the key ingredient in any urban regeneration effort lies with agency. By this we mean the individual's agency to make change a reality. Only then can we keep our cities unique, preserving their temperament and avoiding a homogenised, dull urban future.

We hope we are able to preserve the threads of childhood memories of culture and diversity and weave it into the creation of new environments for individuals and communities to flourish. We have come a long way, with many more milestones to cross. Together.

FOUNDING MEMBERS

of Think City and Their Present Roles

Board



Dato' Dr Anwar Fazal is now Chair of the board of Think City



Laurence Loh continues as Director



Suryani Senja continues as Director



Hamdan Abdul Majeed is now a Director at Khazanah Nasional Berhad and Executive Director of Think City



Dr Shahridan Faiez Chair (2009)

Team



Dr Neil Khor is now Chief Operations Officer at Think City

Dr Suraya Ismail is now a Director at Khazanah Research Institute

Veronica Liew is now Corporate Communications Manager at Wong and Partners

Agnes James is now an independent consultant

Anuar Fariz is now Special Officer to Tan Sri Mustapha Mohammed, Minister of Trade & Industry (*not in picture*)

Bharathi Nandakumaran is now Programme Manager (Human Resources) at Think City

Daniel Lim is now Programme Manager (Johor Bahru) at Think City

Kartina Mohamed is now Special Officer to the Executive Director at Think City

Think City would like to acknowledge the Khazanah Koridor Utara (Northern Corridor) team who originated and developed the George Town Transformation Programme (GTTP) and for their continued support of Think City during the implementation of the George Town Grants Programme (GTGP).

George Town Grants Programme Projects List

No	Details	Grantee
CAPACITY BUILDING		
1	Capacity building grant involving Mr Peter Watts	Penang Heritage Trust
2	How to Turn a Place Around-Training Programme by Project for Public Spaces	George Town World Heritage Incorporated
3	'Secret Gardens' Space Activation Programme (George Town Festival)	Joe Sidek Productions Sdn Bhd
4	Study to formulate the structure of connecting festivals	Joe Sidek Productions Sdn Bhd
5	Architectural Association (AA) of London Visiting School-Streetware	University Sains Malaysia
6	Architectural Association (AA) of London Summer Programme-Part 2	University Sains Malaysia
7	Architectural Association (AA) of London Summer Programme-Part 1	Persatuan Arkitek Malaysia (PAM)
8	Architecture Symposium by Persatuan Arkitek Malaysia(PAM) & Aga Khan Award for Architecture	Persatuan Arkitek Malaysia (PAM)
9	Baseline Study	Geografia & Rosli Haron
10	Conservation workshop for Pulau Pinang heritage buildings	George Town World Heritage Incorporated
11	Conservation workshop for heritage buildings (Pertengahan)	George Town World Heritage Incorporated
12	Workshop on Urban Development/Redevelopment in Heritage Listed Cities	Helena Hashim
13	Dilapidation report for Penang Road Catholic Cemetery	Catholic Church, George Town
14	Progressing with Heritage Workshop	George Town World Heritage Incorporated
15	George Town Population & Land Use Census & Spatial Strategy	Geografia
16	Capacity building workshop with conservationalist Ms Verena Ong	George Town World Heritage Incorporated
17	Heritage Management Plan Workshop	George Town World Heritage Incorporated
18	Urban Conservation Planning Workshop	Getty Foundation
19	Urban Conservation Planning Workshop-Part 3	Getty Foundation
20	Urban Conservation Planning Workshop-Part 1	Getty Foundation
21	Urban Conservation Planning Workshop-Part 2	Getty Foundation
22	Jeffrey Sachs Public Lecture	Management Initiative
23	Marking George Town Competition	George Town World Heritage Incorporated
24	E-access Guide on George Town's Heritage Properties & Sites	Naziaty Mohd Yaacob
25	Scaffolding for 73A Lebuhraya	Syed Faisal Idid Syed Omar Idid
26	Arts for Youth Programme	ARTS-ED
27	Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied capacity building grant	Dr Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied

No	Details	Grantee
CAPACITY BUILDING		
28	Sri Kunj Bihari Temple (Restoration)	Penang Hindu Endowment Board
29	Sri Mahamariamman Temple (Restoration)	Lembaga Wakaf Hindu Negeri Pulau Pinang
30	Protestant Cemetery (Restoration)	Penang Heritage Trust
31	George Town as a Creative City Workshop	Think Lab
32	Transforming Cities 2030 Workshop	Penang Island City Council
33	Workshop for Penang Chinese Clan Council	Dr Loh Wei Leng
34	Printing of Baseline Study and George Town Conurbation	Geografia
35	Repairs to conserve the Church of Assumption	City Parish
36	Sun Wui Wui Kwon Clan House	Sun Wui Wui Kwon
37	Placemaking workshop and consultancy for BIDS	George Town BIDS Sdn Bhd
38	Getty Foundation	Getty Foundation
39	Khariah Masjid Kapitan Keling	Khariah Masjid Kapitan Keling
BUILT HERITAGE		
1	100 Lebu Cintra (Restoration)	Prof. Dr. Jimmy Lim Cheok Siang
2	28, Kampung Malabar (Restoration) & formation of local enterprise to manufacture heritage building materials	Redcoat Developments Sdn Bhd
3	3, 5 & 7 Lebu Cintra (Restoration)	Paul Thomas Harrison
4	33 & 35 Lebu Queen (Restoration)	Muslim League Pulau Pinang
5	36-38 Lebu King (Restoration)	Persatuan Toi Shan Ningyang Wui Kwon
6	38 Lebu Bishop (Restoration)	Sun Wui Wui Kwon
7	41 Lebu Muntri (Restoration)	Penang Goldsmith Association
8	43 & 45 Kampung Malabar (Restoration)	Lai Yew Chong
9	84 Lebu Gereja (Restoration)	Lio Chee Yeong
10	Archival conservation works	Seh Tek Tong Cheah Kongsi
11	73 Lebu Aceh (Restoration)	Halijah bt Hashim
12	Hock Teik Cheng Sin Affordable Housing City Fund Initiative-Part 1	Hock Teik Cheng Sin
13	Hock Teik Cheng Sin Community Development Fund-Part 2	Hock Teik Cheng Sin
14	100 Lebu Melayu (Conservation and restoration)	Cheah Hooi Giam
15	5 Weld Quay (Conservation and restoration)	Saw Brothers Realty Sdn Bhd

No	Details	Grantee
BUILT HERITAGE		
16	100 Lebuh Armenian (Conservation)	Loh Kam Weng
17	3 storey shophouse at Jalan Pintal Tali (Conservation)	Seah Kok Heng
18	Chinese Gateway to 23 Love Lane (Conservation)	Hartanah Sanjung (M) Sdn Bhd
19	Edelweiss Café at 38 Lebuh Armenian (Conservation)	Teresa Pereira
20	2 Lebuh Penang & 3-23 Lebuh Light (Conservation)	Penang Chinese Chambers of Commerce
21	Dome restoration and upgrade of Masjid Kapitan Keling	Khariah Masjid Kapitan Keling
22	36 Lorong Stewart (Restoration)	Christopher Hartman and Azzarina Basarudin
23	Heritage Management Plan for Cheah Kongs	Seh Tek Tong Cheah Kongs
24	69 Lebuh Melayu (Restoration and conservation)	Stephen Leong
25	94 Lebuh Melayu (Restoration and conservation)	Khoo Lay Har
26	Toishan Temple (Restoration and repair)	Persatuan Toishan Ningyang Wui Kwon
27	30 Lebuh King (Restoration and repair work)	Chung Shan Wooi Koon
28	43 Lorong Pasar (Restoration)	Kader Gani Bin Mohamed
29	10 Lebuh Armenian (Restoration)	Seh Tek Tong Cheah Kongs
30	10 shophouses 39-57 Lebuh Armenian (Restoration)	Hock Teik Cheng Sin
31	11, 11A, 13, 15, 17, 17A, 19 & 21 Lebuh Carnarvon (Restoration)	Lee Eng Hock Co.Sdn Bhd
32	212 Lebuh Pantai (Restoration)	Lee Khai
33	22 Toh Aka Lane (Restoration)	Loh Choon Kueng
34	27 Lebuh Melayu (Restoration)	Lee Sze Yiang
35	29 Lorong Carnarvon (Restoration)	Wong Koh voon
36	397 Lebuh Pantai (Restoration)	Cheng Hoe Seah
37	42 Lebuh Muntri (Restoration)	Penang Sao Lim Athletic Association (PSLAA)
38	42 Toh Aka Lane (Restoration)	Liyana Pillai/Ms Khaw
39	49 Lebuh Muntri (Restoration)	Tan Shih Thoe
40	4A Lebuh Armenian (Restoration)	Seh Tek Tong Cheah Kongs
41	75B Lebuh Acheh (Restoration)	Syed Omar Idid
42	82A-B-C Lebuh Penang (Restoration)	Green Building Sdn Bhd
43	94 Lebuh Armenian (Restoration)	Siew Ewe Gai

No	Details	Grantee
BUILT HERITAGE		
44	96 Lebu Melayu (Restoration)	Saw Lock Eng
45	Boon San Tong Khoo Kongs (Restoration)	Boon San Tong Khoo Kongs
46	Cheah Kongs-Annexe Building (Restoration)	Seh Tek Tong Cheah Kongs
47	Cheah Kongs-Main Temple (Restoration)	Seh Tek Tong Cheah Kongs
48	25 Lebu China (Restoration of decorative details of frontage)	Rebecca Dorothy Duckett
49	Entrance archway (Restoration)	Seh Tek Tong Cheah Kongs
50	Ng Clan façade (Restoration)	Ng See Kah Miew
51	Ng Clan façade-additional grant (Restoration)	Ng See Kah Miew
52	85 Lebu Armenian (Restoration of house façade and sidewalk)	Dr Wazir Jahan Karim
53	2 Halaman S'eh Tan (Restoration)	Tan Si Chong Ghee Seah
54	20 Halaman S'eh Tan (Restoration)	Eng Chuan Tong Tan Kongs
55	3, 5 & 7 Lebu Queen (Restoration)	Eng Chuan Tong Tan Kongs
56	122 Lebu Armenian conversion into Teochew Heritage Centre	Mor Hun Club-C
57	Refurbishment of the Penang Road Catholic Cemetery	Church of St. Francis Xavier
58	Restoration of Loke Thye Kee building 2A, 2B & 2C Jalan Burma	Loke Thye Kee Sdn Bhd
59	Restoration and upgrade of the Madrasah and Surau	Anjuman Himayatul Islam
60	Sri Mahamariamman Temple, 54 Lebu Queen (Restoration)	Sri Mahamariamman Temple
61	Stewart Terraces, 2-14 Lorong Stewart (Restoration)	Baiduri 99 Sdn. Bhd
62	Sun Yat Sen Penang Base, 120 Lebu Armenian (Restoration)	Ch'ng Cheng Ee
63	Temple roof (Restoration)	Persatuan Toishan Ningyang Wui Kwon
64	19 & 21 Halaman S'eh Tan (Restoration)	Eng Chuan Tong Tan Kongs
65	33 & 35 Lebu Farquhar (Restoration)	Bausum Assets Sdn Bhd
66	34 & 36 Lebu Bishop (Restoration)	Cheah Chin Huat
67	7 Love Lane (Restoration)	Leong See Kit
68	Roof ridge and 1st floor restoration of the Carpenter's Guild at Love Lane	Loo Pun Hong
69	WYCE and UAB buildings restoration and adaptive reuse of interior for boutique/training hotel of WOU	Malihom Sdn Bhd
70	WYCE and UAB buildings restoration and adaptive reuse of interior for boutique/training hotel of WOU	Renowned Holdings Sdn Bhd
71	8 Muda Lane (Restoration)	Sham Oay Leng

No	Details	Grantee
BUILT HERITAGE		
72	Restoration work for the roof of Loo Pun Hing, Love Lane	Loo Pun Hong
73	St.George's Church (Restoration)	St.George's Penang
74	Pipe Organ of the Church of Assumption (Restoration and conservation)	City Parish
75	Masjid Kapitan Keling roof restoration (additional work)	Khariah Masjid Kapitan Keling
76	Goddess of Mercy Temple roof restoration	Kong Hock Keong Penang
77	Sustainable Housing-43 Church Street	Persatuan Toishan Ningyang Wui Kwon
78	The 1929 Concrete Godown conservation project	Asian Global Business Sdn Bhd
79	9 Weld Quay Conservation Project	Asian Global Business Sdn Bhd
80	34C Lorong Pasar (Renovation)	Leow Kwong Choon
INTANGIBLE HERITAGE		
1	101 Stories of Old Penang (Publication)	A. Shukor Rahman
2	24th Baba and Nyonya Convention 2011	State Penang Chinese Association
3	4 Booklets on building materials	George Town World Heritage Incorporated
4	Biographical Dictionary of Penang Mercantile Personalities-Phase 2	Loh Wei Leng
5	Penang Indian Ocean: Yangon Penang Interactions Workshop	Loh Wei Leng
6	Consultant services to research, prepare, produce and curate the World War II Museum	Prof Ooi Keat Gin
7	Shophouse Typology Book	Tan Yeow Wooi
8	Mosques and Kramats-Exhibition, workshop and book publishing	Mahani Musa
9	Feasts of Penang-Partial funding for printing	Intersocietal and Scientific Sdn Bhd (INAS)
10	Digital Art and Cultural Festival	Badan Warisan Malaysia
11	George Town Festival 2011-Celebrating George Town Heritage Day at Lebuah Acheh	Badan Warisan Masjid Melayu
12	George Town Festival 2011-Essay Writing Competition by All Clans	Penang Chinese Clan Council
13	George Town Festival 2011-Indian Muslim Culture Exhibition	Khariah Masjid Kapitan Keling
14	George Town Festival 2011-Indian Muslim Islamic Song competition and concert	Muslim League Pulau Pinang
15	George Town Festival 2011-Meng Eng Soo Open day-Costume and props of early Penang	Penang Chinese Clan Council
16	George Town Festival 2011-'River Meets Light' performance at Prangin Canal	Ombak-Ombak Arts Studio
17	George Town Festival 2011-Production and publicity for 'Heritage Trees of Penang' book-Exhibition	George Town Festival

No	Details	Grantee
INTANGIBLE HERITAGE		
18	George Town Festival 2011-Sponsorship of Eric Peiris Photoography Exhibition	Suriana Sdn Bhd
19	George Town Festival 2012-Exhibition and lectures on the history and conservation of St.George's Church at Jalan Farquhar	Suriana Sdn Bhd
20	George Town Festival 2012-Raising Awareness of the origins and present status of Chinese Clans in Penang	Penang Chinese Clan Council
21	George Town Festival 2012-Heritage Heboh Children's Festival	Persatuan Pendidikan Seni Pulau Pinang (ARTS-ED)
22	George Town Festival 2012-Indian Muslim cultural and heritage celebration	Indian Muslim Community Organization Malaysia
23	George Town Festival 2012-Indian Muslim Islamic Song competition & Indian Muslim Islamic song and Qawali concert	Muslim League Pulau Pinang
24	George Town Festival 2012-Kathak Performance	Temple of Fine Arts Malaysia
25	George Town Festival 2012-Melodious evening of Hindi Ghazal & bhangra songs	Persatuan Sikh Pulau Pinang
26	George Town Festival 2012-Sambutan Hari Warisan George Town by Masjid Melayu Lebuah Aceh	Badan Warisan Masjid Melayu
27	George Town Festival 2012-YES Broadway & Hip Hop Penang	George Town Festival
28	George Town Festival 2014-Cahaya at Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling and adjacent areas	Joe Sidek Productions
29	George Town Festival 2014-Lecture Demo and workshop : Asian Traditional Theatre	Joe Sidek Productions
30	George Town Festival 2014-Magnificent Evening Bollywood with Traditional Ghazal & Qawalli Songs	Penang Sikh Association
31	George Town Festival 2014-Makmal Series	Think Lab
32	George Town Festival 2014-Boria Fest	Dato Dr Wazir
33	George Town Festival 2014-The Pinhole Camera Project	Ecocentric Transitions
34	George Town Festival 2014-Euroasian Fiesta-Moral uplifting society	Persatuan Warisan Makam Dato' Koyah
35	George Town Festival 2014-Conduct Me at Lebuah Victoria and Lebuah Armenian	Joe Sidek Productions
36	George Town World Heritage Site Public Realm Study	George Town World Heritage Incorporated
37	Heritage Cultural Identities and Asian Dynamism Symposium	Penang Heritage Trust
38	Production of creative works of Straits muslims of George Town	Intersocietal and Scientific Sdn Bhd (INAS)
39	Promoting Safety in George Town	Women's Centre For Change
40	Protestant Cemetery interpretation panel	George Town World Heritage Incorporate
41	Publication of Masjid Kapitan Keling book	Areca Books
42	Historical Archive and Documentation Project for St George's Church	St. George's Church Penang

No	Details	Grantee
INTANGIBLE HERITAGE		
43	Historical survey of the Mosques and Kramats on Penang Island-Revisited	Prof Mahani Musa
44	3D interpretive model of core and buffer zone for George Town World Heritage Site	George Town World Heritage Incorporated
45	Sali Sasaki (The role of Design in Sustaining Heritage) Workshop	Penang Heritage Trust
46	Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO) Chamber Tour Northern leg	George Town Festival
47	Marcus Langdon (The Fourth Presidency of Penang) Publication	Areca Books
48	Kelly Maps first collection of archived material on website	George Town World Heritage Incorporated
49	Feasts of Penang Book-Additional funding for printing	Intersocietal and Scientific Sdn Bhd (INAS)
50	Penang Apprenticeship Programme for Artisans	Penang Heritage Trust
51	Chinese Clan History (research, editing and translation work)	Penang Chinese Clan Council
52	Penang Indian Ocean Conference 2012	University of Cambridge
53	Penang Malay Heritage Booklet	CENPRIS Universiti Sains Malaysia
54	Penang Mercantile Biographies	Loh Wei Leng
55	Penang Music Heritage project for the production of a coffee table book	The Capricorn Connection
56	Penang Music Heritage Project-The 1960s	The Capricorn Connection
57	Penang Story Lecture 2015	Penang Heritage Trust
58	Penang Story Lectures and Penang Indian Ocean 2013	Penang Heritage Trust
59	Penang Story Lectures and Penang Indian Ocean 2014	Penang Heritage Trust
60	Penang Story Lectures and Penang Indian Ocean 2015	Penang Heritage Trust
61	Penang Story Project Exhibition	Star Media Group and Penang Heritage Trust
62	Penang Story Project Lectures 2012	Penang Heritage Trust
63	Penang's Living Trades: Artisans, processes and products	Chin Yoon Khen
64	The Straits Architect & The Penang House(1887-1987) and beyond	Jon Lim
65	Reprint of JMBRAS articles (Special Penang Issue)	Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
66	Sun Yat Sen Heritage Trail	Penang Heritage Trust
67	Traditional Arts Festival	Penang Heritage Trust
68	Visions of Penang-Part 2	George Town World Heritage Incorporated
69	Wayfinding System	Sympologic Sdn Bhd
70	Printing of the Heritage Trees of Penang	Penang Botanical Garden

No	Details	Grantee
INTANGIBLE HERITAGE		
71	Research of Histories of Chinese Clan Associations in Penang	Penang Chinese Clan Council
72	85 Lebu Armenian-Malay Heritage Gallery Materials (Restoration of house façade and sidewalk)	Dr Wazir Jahan Karim
73	Portraits of Little India	Areca Books
74	Translation of Special Area Plan (RKK) into Bahasa Malaysia	JPBD Negeri Pulau Pinang
TECHNICAL GRANT/SHARED SPACES		
1	Advisory services and seed funding for BIDS company	George Town BIDS Sdn Bhd
2	Khat Academy	Yayasan Islam Pulau Pinang
3	Design and Commissioning of Kuan Yin Temple courtyard	Kwong Hock Keong Temple Committee
4	Consultancy service to conduct data survey for Lebu Pantai and Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling	Penang Island City Council
5	Greening George Town Exhibition for Lebu Pantai and Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling	Penang Island City Council
6	Cultural and Community Interpretation Centre: Syed Al-Attas Mansion	Dewan Perniagaan Melayu Pulau Pinang
7	Design fee for Lebu Carnarvon / Lebu Aceh, Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling, Lebu Light and Lebu Pantai	Walker & Jensen
8	Design service for Greening of George Town on streetscape (Lebu Armenian, Lebu Aceh and Armenian Park)	Walker & Jensen
9	Facade treatment of Toishan Clan property 41, 43 & 45 Lebu Queen	Persatuan Toishan Ningyang Wui Kwon
10	Khat Gallery	Yayasan Islam Pulau Pinang
11	George Town Business Improvement District (BIDS)	Neuformation
12	George Town Business Improvement District (BIDS)	George Town BIDS Sdn Bhd
13	Greening George Town Project	George Town BIDS Sdn Bhd
14	Greening four neighbourhood courtyards and two back lanes	George Town BIDS Sdn Bhd
15	George Town World Heritage Site Intrepretation Master Plan	Sue Hodges
16	Haj Gallery, 87 Lebu Aceh	Yayasan Islam Pulau Pinang
17	Heritage Management Plan for 67 Lebu Aceh and Syed Al-Attas Mansion	Penang Island City Council
18	Heritage Management Plan for Makam Dato Koyah	Penang Island City Council
19	Hock Teik Cheng Sin Interpretation Centre	Hock Teik Cheng Sin
20	ICC Exhibition-Chennai Nalla Chennai Photography Exhibition	Indian Cultural Centre, High Commission of India

No	Details	Grantee
TECHNICAL GRANT/SHARED SPACES		
21	Little India Joint Action Committee incorporation fee	LIJAC
22	Khat Competition	Yayasan Islam Pulau Pinang
23	Lebuh Aceh Oral History	LIJAC
24	Penang Resource Centre at The STAR Pitt St. building, Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling	Star Media Group
25	Phase 1-Lebuh Carnarvon (improving the connectivity of the site and introduction of mechanical maintenance provisions)	Walker & Jensen
26	Pilot Greening Project	Penang Island City Council
27	Curatorial support for the pilot Social History Gallery E&O	E&O Group
28	Produce wayfinding signages	Penang Island City Council
29	Producing and delivering the Kapitan Keling Mosque booklet and exhibition	Areca Books
30	Little India "Clean, pest control, composting and recycle" Public Campaign	LIJAC
31	Reinforce scaffolding in 73A Lebuh Aceh	Syed Omar Idid
32	Research on Urban Regeneration Special Action Plan for Little India	Universiti Sains Malaysia
33	Kuan Yin Temple-Research and curation of 3 interpretation panels	Kuah Li Feng
34	Makam Dato Koyah (Restoration)	Khariah Makam Dato Koyah
35	Special Action Plan on Muslim Enclave, George Town World Heritage Site	Yayasan Islam Pulau Pinang
36	Street of Harmony Interpretation and Interventions project	Persatuan Pendidikan Seni Pulau Pinang (ARTS-ED)
37	Permanent exhibition of the Penang Story	Sue Hodges
38	Technical grant for The STAR Pitt St. Building	Ooi Bok Kim
39	The Provision of Social-Economic Special Action Plan for the Muslim Enclave in UNESCO	Prof Jamalunlaili
40	Tree pruning, fertilizing, climber maintenance at Lebuh Carnarvon	Walker & Jensen
41	Urban market survey and master plan for Chowrasta Market and Campbell Street Market	Badan Warisan Malaysia
42	Urban Market-Pool	Penang Island City Council
43	Wayfinding System Project-Phase 1	Penang Island City Council
44	Wayfinding System Project-Phase 2	Penang Island City Council
45	Workshops on Museums by Yvonne T'eh	Dewan Perniagaan Melayu Pulau Pinang
46	Little India Improvement District (LIID)	LIJAC

UNESCO described Melaka and George Town as “the most complete, surviving historic city centres on the Straits of Malacca with a multicultural living originating from the trade routes from Great Britain and Europe through the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent and the Malay Archipelago to China.” In 2008, it granted the two towns a joint heritage listing as Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca, saying they have “a unique architectural and cultural townscape without parallel anywhere in East and Southeast Asia”.

Malaysia did not take this honour lightly. To preserve this heritage, Parliament allocated funds and channelled it through Khazanah, the national sovereign fund. Khazanah established a special purpose vehicle called Think City and George Town was chosen as a laboratory experiment to see if a sustainable regeneration initiative could be kick-started through a grants programme.

In four years, the George Town Grants Programme has disbursed RM16.3 million to almost 240 projects involving local communities, government agencies, and local and international experts. The challenges, successes and shortcomings of this four-year journey, led by a passionate and dedicated team are laid out in this book even as transformations continue to unfold.

Most of all, the greatest gain has been the depth of heritage know-how that is now being shared with other cities in Malaysia. In time, it is hoped that this knowledge can also be used to help transform other historic cities in the world.

