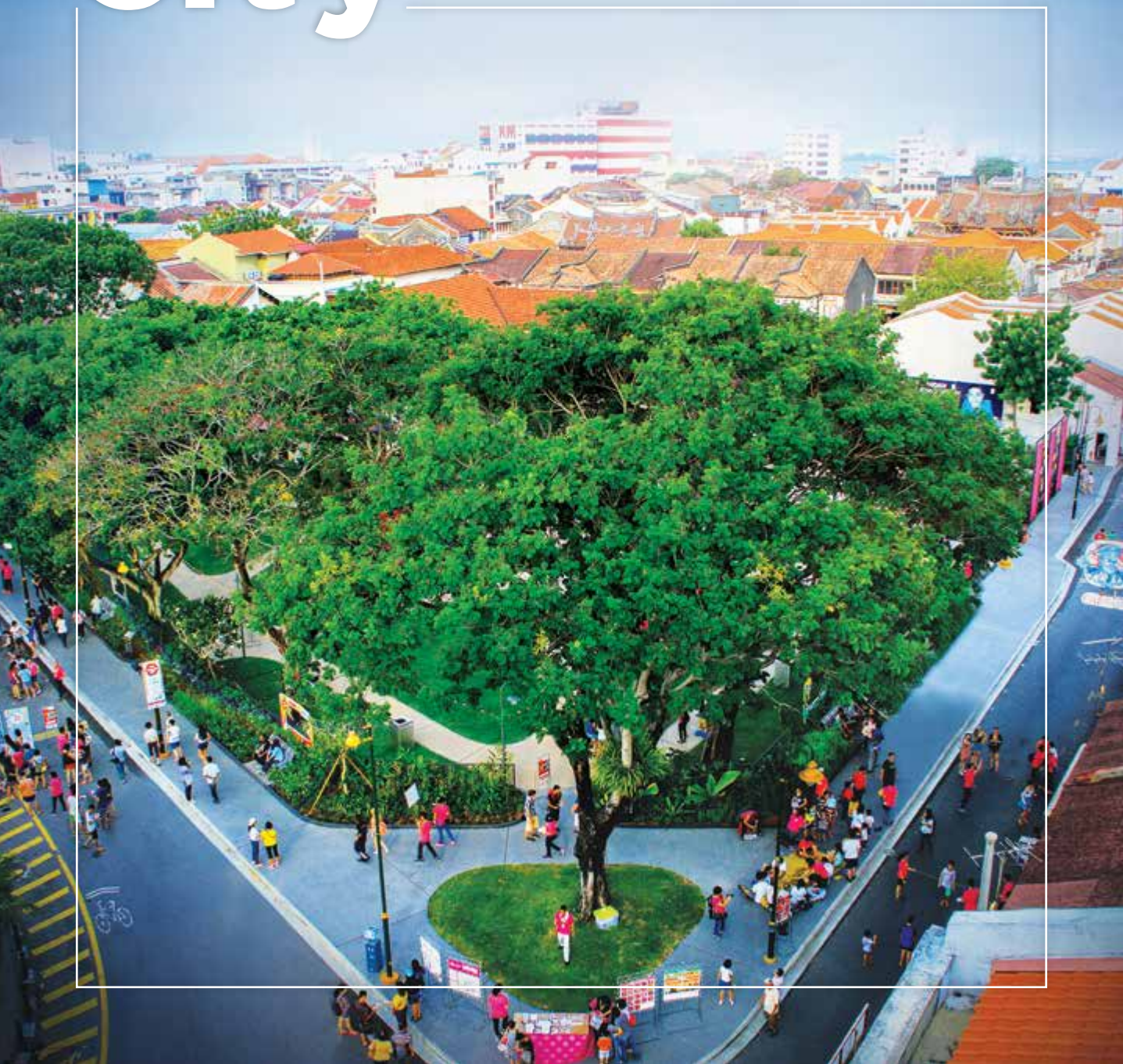


think city

VOLUME 3





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On the cover: Pocket park on the corner of Armenian Street and Acheen Street. Full story on page 18.

REJUVENATING
THE CITY TOGETHER

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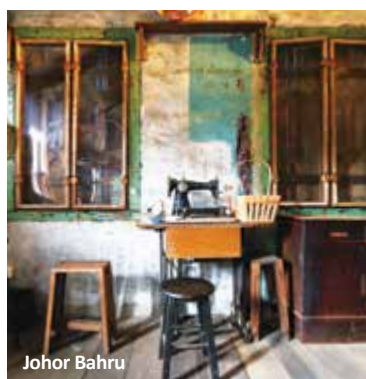
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**BOARD OF
DIRECTORS**

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Chair



Hamdan Abdul Majeed
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Ar. Laurence Loh Kwong Yu
Director



Shahira Ahmed Bazari
Director



Suryani Senja Alias
Director



MANAGEMENT TEAM



Hamdan Abdul Majeed
Executive Director



Dr. Neil Khor
*COO cum Programme
Director for George Town
and Johor Bahru*



Dr. Matt Benson
*Urban Solutions
Programme Director*



Murali Ram
*Butterworth
Programme Director*



Lee Jia Ping
*Kuala Lumpur
Programme Director*

THINK CITY ACHIEVEMENTS

(JAN 2015 - MAY 2017)



Total number of projects
(Completed & Ongoing)

271 PROJECTS

encompassing Placemaking, Arts,
Heritage & Culture, Advocacy, Capacity
Building and Inclusive Spaces

RM20.9 MILLION



TOTAL AMOUNT COMMITTED

RM46.4 million

Total Co-investment*



72 Grants Awarded

7 Baseline Studies Completed



3 AWARDS WON

MIP Planning Excellence Awards
ILAM Malaysia Landscape
Architecture Awards

2 Conservation Management Plans Completed

FORT CORNWALLIS



MUZIUM NEGARA



1 Urban Regeneration Plan Completed:
Pekan Lama Regeneration Plan

* Indicative figures

A portrait of Hamdan Abdul Majeed, a man with dark hair and a beard, smiling. He is wearing a light blue blazer over a white shirt. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a chain-link fence and bright lights. The portrait is framed by a thin white border.

- LOOKING BACK ON 2016 WITH -

HAMDAN ABDUL MAJEED

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THINK CITY

REFLECTING ON A YEAR OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Hamdan Abdul Majeed, Executive Director of Think City

Over the past two years we have been expanding rapidly. From a single office in George Town, we now have a presence in Kuala Lumpur, Butterworth and Johor Bahru. We began with a team of four in 2009 and today we have 37. From a small grants manager we have become a multi-stakeholder facilitator of urban regeneration with a nationwide agenda.

Our public grants programme continues, except it is now offered to all Malaysian citizens, and in addition to managing projects in these four cities, we have nascent activities in Klang and Kuching.

With growth comes challenges and opportunities, and I am grateful that the team managed to turn these opportunities into projects.

OPPORTUNITIES

As our skills and experience increase, so do the scale of our projects, many of which you will read about in these pages. Not only have we expanded our work in different geographic locations, we have taken on a wider spectrum of projects to meet the needs of the cities and we hope to leave a lasting positive impact.

With a proven track record, our network of partners continues to grow from the public, private and social sectors. These partners, from local authorities to industry experts, help ensure that we keep to our shared values and that projects are implemented to world class standards.

Naturally, as with any ambitious learning organisation, there are hurdles.

PERPETUATING THE THINK CITY DNA

As we expand, there is a need to optimise our increasing diversity of experience and knowledge through a unified set of values and way of working.

With the clock ticking on project delivery, we need to ensure that these values are upheld and practised each day and in all our interactions – with each other, with stakeholders and the communities we serve. This involves continuously sharing learnings and experiences across the organisation, as well as enhancing existing skills and capabilities.

More importantly, we continue to advocate the “Power of Small” – encouraging Malaysians to participate in rejuvenating the city together, doing small things strategically, which over time will leave a lasting impact.

The risk of working in silos also arises when there are different geographic locations, and we’ve worked to break that trend by building a sense of community and belonging within the organisation, driven by our collective goal to leave a positive impression on the cities.



INSTITUTIONALISING THINK CITY

In our haste to deliver on projects, at times we have been guilty of not codifying the knowledge and experience we have accumulated during the formative years.

To address this, we have set up a unit called Urban Solutions, which comprises two sub-units. The first, Urban Knowledge, deals with codifying our work for internal and external consumption, encouraging new research, and prototyping innovations to address urban challenges in Malaysia. This will help key partners and the public on issues and practices surrounding urbanism.

The second, Urban Design and Planning, manages the technical aspects of our projects. This enables us to use the experience gained over the past few years to do more technical work in-house, and provide better support and guidance to our delivery partners.

To enhance performance and develop our teams professionally, we've worked to increase skill sets and almost 50% of the team now have technical backgrounds. Other initiatives include cross-city postings and project-based work to widen their experience and help them develop skills appropriate for the tasks ahead.

IMPACT

Going forward, we believe that Think City will be best remembered for advocacy of a bottom-up, people-centric approach to urban rejuvenation. A project has impact when there is a meeting of minds between city managers and the communities they serve. Change has to be sustainable and we are working hard with Yayasan Hasanah to ensure that Think City not only facilitates community involvement in the process but actually delivers positive impact in the medium and long term. We've also taken steps to track outcomes and impact in a consistent way.

LOOKING AHEAD: MAKING CITIES WORK, TOGETHER

Think City believes that urban rejuvenation begins with a conversation between the city, its managers and its citizens. We have to get all stakeholders to agree on what kind of city they want their children to inherit. If cities are to be places for all, then citizens need to have the opportunity to participate in making their city a better place to live in. Not just to have a voice, but to be empowered and encouraged to lend a hand in making that happen.

It is our mission to widen opportunities for citizens to do just that. To maintain our goal of being a catalyst for positive change, we continue to support projects that bring everyone together on the same journey.

We believe that the value of a project lies not only in the sum of its direct output but the spillover effects it creates. As we continue to catalyse the rejuvenation of cities in Malaysia, we hope to create such momentum that we are able to pass the baton, and let the people take ownership to shape their city.

Much of what we have achieved would not have been possible without the support and guidance of our Board of Directors, our holding company Khazanah Nasional Berhad, our principal funder Yayasan Hasanah, city partners and grantees.

We are grateful to be entrusted with championing the cause and through this publication, we hope to illustrate the ever-increasing need for a holistic, people-centric approach to planning, managing and sustaining cities.

In 2017 and beyond, we expect to maintain our current momentum and move forward with planned initiatives while scaling up our efforts to engage with different communities in the cities where we have our offices. We will continue to evolve as an organisation, hone our skills and develop urban regeneration into a profession.

MESSAGE FROM YAYASAN HASANAH

Shahira Ahmed Bazari, Managing Director of Yayasan Hasanah



A little over ten years ago, George Town was on the precipice of an impending decline. Soon after, it received the UNESCO World Heritage Site status together with Melaka. In the years that followed, it underwent a transformation that continues to this day.

Think City contributed to this positive transformation. Through the George Town Grants Programme, it built upon the city's vibrant community spirit, providing wider opportunities for community participation in urban regeneration. This helped make George Town what it is today, a city that celebrates its culture and history, strengthening its place identity.

As a principal funder, we have seen Think City grow and are proud to be able to support an organisation that is truly impacting the way we view and live in our cities. Its expansion, both team wise and in three other cities, is a bold effort to say the least. We are confident that the community-based approach will catch on and that in each new location, its

presence will encourage local citizens to play a more active role in making our cities more liveable.

Think City also brings a unique set of expertise, through its network of local and international subject experts to support local government and communities at the forefront of urban development. Small teams based in their city of operations are nimble enough to adjust to the challenges faced by each city.

As the corporate responsibility foundation of Khazanah Nasional, Yayasan Hasanah focuses on the country's pressing community and social issues, working through our network of partners and civil society organisations and playing a catalytic role in enhancing our social sector ecosystem.

Think City's work cuts across all our pillars – education; community development; environment; arts, heritage and culture; and knowledge. It operates within the urban context, which also includes the city and its hinterland. Thus the impact of its work, given enough support, will have a positive rippling effect across all our pillars.

We look forward to Think City's next growth trajectory and believe the best is yet to come. Not very long from now, its impact will be seen, felt and experienced in our cities throughout Malaysia.

ABOUT YAYASAN HASANAH

Yayasan Hasanah's (Hasanah) vision is to become the leading foundation promoting Malaysia's global sustainability through solutions that empower communities, encourage social inclusivity and improve the environment.

As a grant-making foundation, Hasanah currently works with close to 30 partners to deliver meaningful and innovative solutions to community issues.

HIGHLIGHTS

OCTOBER 2015 -
FEBRUARY 2016**George Town Conservation
& Development Corporation**

A special purpose vehicle set up to ensure that public realm upgrading projects in George Town are implemented effectively, efficiently and to international standards.

The Corporation is made up of Chief Minister Incorporated, Aga Khan Trust for Culture, and Think City.

Makam Dato Koyah

The 177 year-old tomb of Dato Koyah, a symbol of the early settlement of the Indian Muslim community in Penang, undergoes restoration after years of exposure to the elements.

**Butterworth Baharu
Programme (BBP)**

Think City and MPSP continue efforts to implement the BBP with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding. The parties are collaborating on the improvement and upgrade of Pekan Lama, Sungai Perai, Penang Sentral and the waterfront.



Partnership with Jabatan Warisan Negara



MyButterworth Mapping Project

**Urban Thinkers Campus
In Kuching**

Think City partners with EAROPH and United Nations University – International Institute for Global Health to host this global event. It seeks to reimagine sustainable urban development in the interest of human and environmental health and wellbeing. The conclusion of this event results in the Kuching Agenda, covering health and wellbeing, and shaping The City We Need global partners' position for Habitat III.



Makam Dato Koyah

Partnership with Jabatan Warisan Negara

The National Heritage Department (JWN), Think City and Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) sign a Memorandum of Understanding for the development of the heritage conservation and preservation sector in the country.

Butterworth Discovery Walk

Close to 200 participants join the walk to discover forgotten laneways, traditional houses and untold stories of old town Butterworth.

MyButterworth Mapping Project

An alternative learning programme for children to map, discover, document and interpret the cultural assets in Butterworth through a place-based learning programme combining mapping and photography. A project by Arts-Ed, supported by Think City.



Butterworth Discovery Walk



Urban Thinkers Campus In Kuching

Think Squad Programme

In its second year, the Think Squad programme offers university students hands-on experience in Think City projects and exposure to community engagements to prepare them as advocates of urban rejuvenation.

Butterworth Urban Garden Schools (BUGS)

Think City kicks off an urban garden programme in schools.

Pocket Park at Armenian and Acheen Streets

A key highlight for 2016, the pocket park was a labour of love four years in the making, and almost never came to be. Since the launch, the park and surrounding upgraded facilities have played host to many families and residents looking for some respite from the elements.

Upgrading of the pocket park is part of a wider effort to improve the neighbourhood, focusing on underutilised spaces such as back lanes.

HIGHLIGHTS

MARCH 2016 -
JUNE 2016



Think City expands to Johor Bahru

Capire Workshop on Community Engagement

Think City invites the Capire Consulting Group, a specialist community engagement company, to train partners on engagement, building understanding, creating local ownership, and informing sustainable decision-making.

Think City Penang moves to UAB Building in George Town

Khazanah Nasional and Think City make a new home in the UAB building in George Town.

Launch of Arts On The Move (AOTM)

AOTM, an ongoing placemaking initiative in partnership with Prasarana Malaysia, is launched to bring visual and performing arts to Kuala Lumpur's rail network.

Twice a week Masjid Jamek LRT station plays host to performances by up-and-coming as well as established artists. This is part of a concerted effort to activate spaces within KL's heritage core.



Launch of Arts On The Move (AOTM)



Butterworth Urban Garden Schools (BUGS)



Capire Workshop on Community Engagement

Think City expands to Johor Bahru

Think City sets up its fourth office in the heritage quarter of Johor Bahru.

HIGHLIGHTS

JULY 2016 -
OCTOBER 2016**Fort Cornwallis Conservation Programme**

Fort Cornwallis and its surrounding areas will get a facelift, with public spaces improved for residents and tourists, allowing the natural beauty of the seafront to be enjoyed.

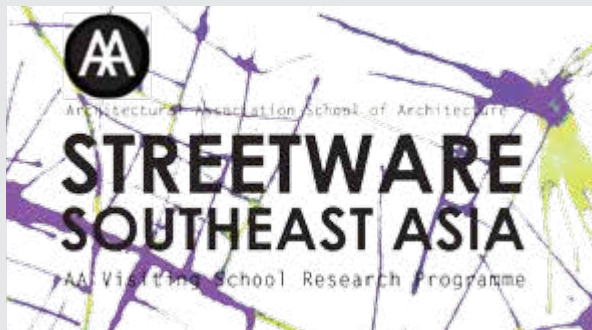
Restoration and conservation works are being conducted in four stages. The first, the development of the conservation management plan, is complete.

AA Streetware Programme in Cebu, Philippines

In partnership with London's Architectural Association, this programme invites architecture students to re-examine the streetscapes in cities, identify gaps and provide design solutions.

Butterworth Fringe Festival

Following its success last year, the Butterworth Fringe Festival (BFF) returns with one-of-a-kind local and international showcases.



AA Streetware Programme in Cebu, Philippines



Think City Talks

Persatuan Akitek Malaysia (PAM) KL Architecture Festival

Executive Director Hamdan Abdul Majeed presents at the International Architecture and Design Conference DATUM-KL.

Transforming the Malaysian Urban Environment Talk in New York

KL Programme Director Lee Jia Ping and Programme Manager Joanne Mun hold a joint talk to share Think City's philosophy of the Power of Small and community-focused approach to urban rejuvenation. Hosted by Project for Public Spaces (PPS).

URA Speaker Series: Public Lecture by Stefano Musso and Laurence Loh

Singapore's Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) invites Think City's Director Laurence Loh to discuss 'The Aura of Places'.

Taman Tugu Engagement Sessions

Enlisted by Khazanah Nasional Bhd, Think City organises several engagement sessions in different locations within Kuala Lumpur to share plans for the Taman Tugu project and gain insights into the thoughts and sentiments of the public.

13th JB Arts Festival

Think City supports several community groups participating in the Festival. This includes the creation of a pop-up back lane venue for street theatre performances.

Think City Talks

The start of free monthly talks held at APW Kuala Lumpur to share and highlight urban issues and developments happening in our cities.

The inaugural talk features three prominent speakers from the UK; Amanda Levete of AI_A, Ben Evans of the London Design Festival and Charles Leadbeater, author and former advisor to Tony Blair. The talk was entitled 'The Importance of Innovation, Collaboration and Craftsmanship in Creative Cities'.

Butterworth My Best Buy

Start of a farmers market selling fresh goods from local farmers.



13th JB Arts Festival



Butterworth My Best Buy

Launch of Penangpedia

Dato' Dr. Anwar Fazal, Chair of the Board of Think City, launches a new initiative: Penangpedia, a digital documentation project comprising the stories of Penang, past and present, including stories the living community can continuously contribute to.

Opening of RUANG By Think City

A new multipurpose space, RUANG By Think City, offers the community an avenue for placemaking activities and bonding in the heart of Kuala Lumpur.



Opening of RUANG By Think City

Persiaran Muafakat Bangsa Johor

The launch of a pilot streetscape improvement project under the Johor Bahru Transformation plan.

Announcement of Klang City Rejuvenation (KCR)

Klang's residents initiate a community-led effort to rejuvenate the historic township in collaboration with Klang Municipal Council and Think City.

Aside from aiming to boost local businesses, KCR will also look into promoting the protection and development of living heritage, culture and architecture in Klang.



Announcement of Klang City Rejuvenation

HIGHLIGHTS

NOVEMBER 2016 -
MARCH 2017



Completion of Kampung Benggali Pocket Park

Completion of Kampung Benggali Pocket Park

Part of Butterworth's Kampung Benggali Recreational Hub, the pocket park was untended, overgrown and fenced up for many years. After confirming the residents' needs, the park is upgraded to create more recreational space.

Announcement of Jeli Lama Rain Garden & Butterworth Art Walk

Penang's first rain garden in a carpark will be created in Butterworth as part of the Butterworth Baharu Programme. Meanwhile, a back lane is beautified with nine murals along a 400-metre stretch of walls.

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EVOLUTION IN GEORGE TOWN CREATION OF GEORGE TOWN CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (GTCDC)



George Town is now a step ahead in retaining and repurposing heritage buildings.

George Town has had a head start in urban rejuvenation with Think City's George Town Grants Programme. While the grants programme has ended, Think City continues with efforts under the George Town Transformation Programme.



In November 2013, witnessed by YAB Lim Guan Eng, the Chief Minister of Penang, Think City entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC). The main purpose was to develop a plan to align conservation and development in the George Town UNESCO World Heritage (WHS).

The recommendations in the plan for improving the public realm were exhibited and after two public briefing sessions, it was adopted as an addendum to the George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site Special Area Plan and named the Planning and Design Guide for the Public Realm.

THE PLANNING & DESIGN GUIDE FOR THE PUBLIC REALM

In September 2016, the Penang State Government gazetted the George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site Special Area Plan (SAP). The Planning and Design Guide for the Public Realm — which envisions concept plans for the redevelopment of the northern and eastern seafronts, the upgrading of Fort Cornwallis, and improvements to the streetscape at Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling — was also gazetted. This provides local authorities as well as private developers a set of guidelines when considering development projects in the city.

To ensure that George Town's public realm is developed in alignment with conservation practices, Think City and the AKTC recommended that a set of demonstration projects be carried out. This would include improving public open spaces, streetscapes and upgrading back lanes. A key demonstration project involves



Engagement sessions with the clan jetties community.

creating a contiguous seafront for the enjoyment of the people.

To catalyse a new economy based on culture, the Guide identified monuments, buildings and intangible cultural heritage as focus areas for sustainable development. This includes proposals to upgrade the Penang State Museum, rethinking the use of the city's public buildings including the Town Hall and City Hall, as well as the reactivation of national monuments such as Fort Cornwallis.

THE GEORGE TOWN CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (GTCDC)

To ensure the implementation of projects associated with the Planning and Design Guide for the Public Realm, the GTCDC was set up.

In October 2015, Think City entered into a partnership with Chief Minister Incorporated (CMI) and the AKTC. In March 2016, the GTCDC was officially incorporated with the State Government being the majority shareholder.

The main objective of the GTCDC is to ensure that public realm projects in the city are implemented effectively and efficiently, and that they meet international standards. The GTCDC also plays a facilitation role, bringing in the best talents to assist in the adaptive re-use of key public buildings to catalyse a new economy based on culture.

Think City's George Town Grants Programme had its original mandate in the George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site. A lot of the urban regeneration work associated with the WHS is now parked under the GTCDC.

This allows Think City to adopt a more nimble and creative approach when implementing urban regeneration programmes in the rest of Penang.



THE AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE
Historic Cities Programme

Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) is the cultural agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). Through its Aga Khan Historic Cities Support Programme, it undertakes projects involving urban regeneration, conservation, and physical and social revitalisation of communities in historic cities and settlements in developing countries. It operates in tandem, where appropriate, with other AKDN agencies such as the Aga Khan Foundation in an integrated manner to bring the required expertise to multi-sector, urban area development projects.

THE GEORGE TOWN TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME (GTTP)

Launched by Khazanah Nasional, the GTTP aims 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.

A GREEN SPACE IN THE HERITAGE ZONE



The pocket park on launch day.

Think City's high note in 2016 was the launch of the pocket park at Armenian and Acheen Streets – a labour of love four years in the making.

Since then, the park and the surrounding upgraded facilities have played host to many families and residents looking for some respite. However, the project almost never came to be. What were the challenges faced and how did Think City and its partners turn the project into a shining example of urban rejuvenation?

The small open space at the junction of Armenian Street and Acheen Street was formerly an unkempt pocket park where an informal flea market had made its base. These stalls, splayed haphazardly throughout the space, had been trading every evening for many years. Greenery was sparse except for the mature trees providing shade for the park, and the adjoining hard court needed an upgrade.

The upgrading initiative was set in motion by Think City in 2012 under the Greening George Town project. It was crucial to ensure the project was executed with all stakeholders in mind, and with an aim to eventually strengthen community ties. However, the original improvement plans proposed by the working committee lacked diversity of use and did not encourage cross-cultural interactions between communities, so work came to a temporary standstill.

The formalisation of Think City's partnership with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) helped open up new possibilities for the upgrading project. With learnings from AKTC, the team identified additional opportunities for improvement in the original design. This eventually resulted in the bold, albeit tough move to scrap the existing proposal and make way for a design that would reflect greater community input and stronger connections with its surroundings.



Francesco Siravo, Aga Khan Trust for Culture Planning Consultant

“

Projects such as the Armenian Street pocket park upgrade tend to have a positive impact that goes well beyond conservation by promoting good governance, the growth of civil society, a rise in income and economic opportunities, as well as better stewardship of the environment.

”

A MULTIPURPOSE COMMUNITY HUB

Strategically located in the heart of the heritage enclave and flanked by sites of historical and cultural value, the park had to align itself with the needs of the community and the surroundings, to ensure it would be able to sustain itself for many years to come. Transforming the existing barren plot into a multipurpose community hub effectively demonstrated the positive multiplier effects the project had.

“Projects such as the Armenian Street pocket park upgrade tend to have a positive impact that goes well beyond conservation by promoting good governance, the growth of civil society, a rise in income and economic opportunities, as well as better stewardship of the environment,” said AKTC planning consultant, Francesco

Siravo, who was actively involved in the project.

CHALLENGES

One would assume that introducing more green space and enhancing facilities would be welcomed with open arms, but in the case of the open space at Armenian Street, it was quite the opposite. Convincing different stakeholders from the local authority to the resident communities was an uphill battle. Sceptics questioned each and every aspect of the proposals and numerous engagement sessions with various interest groups were held to ensure where possible, the final designs would meet their needs and that their concerns would be addressed.

Another key challenge was to address the issue of the current users and

occupants of the space – namely the flea market traders. In order for the project to be implemented, it was important to relocate the traders, who had crowded out families and children, making the area feel unsafe.

The relocation was met with strong objections, delaying the project by three months as negotiations and dialogue sessions were held.

It was initially suggested that the traders (numbering more than 100) be relocated to Pesara Claimant, another lane near the Armenian Street site. The traders were reluctant to move, some voicing concerns that they would be trading right outside a police station, and many of them did not have permits.

With help from the Penang Island City Council (MBPP), the traders were finally relocated to a new site but soon enough, they organised protests to oppose the upgrading project while demanding to be allowed to go back to the old site to trade.

After several discussions and negotiations, both parties were able to come to an amicable agreement. The traders relocated a few times before they finally agreed to be based at a site near the Dato Keramat Police station.

CONTINUOUS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Once the dust had settled, hoardings were finally erected and the first phase of the project commenced in July 2015. This involved the reorientation and resurfacing of the hard court in order to transform it into a multipurpose space, as well as turning the site into a green space with public seating and accessible pathways.



The pocket park before upgrading efforts.

Community engagement was conducted throughout the project to keep up a constant dialogue with stakeholders. Even the hoardings around the park displayed full plans of the project to keep the public informed. A pop-up park was created as a sneak preview to the final plans. Apart from that, one-to-one sessions and group discussions were held with the surrounding communities.

“The keyword was ‘balance’. Yes, there were many people who were excited about the park coming up, but there were those who felt as though we were taking away the livelihood of the traders. The reality was that the area was formerly a park, but as time went by, it was being monopolised by a single group of people. We wanted to return it to its former purpose,” said Programme Manager, Daniel Lim.

After the completion of the first phase, a brand new green space was introduced to the area. Residents now use the park 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.

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.

STORIES IN THE DESIGN

All the materials used in the creation of the park had a story to tell, right down to the selection of indigenous plants reflecting a more local tone. The surrounding perimeter fence was inspired by a local rattan-weaving workshop nearby and the ‘Heaven and Earth’ feature wall between the green space and the multipurpose court paid homage to the original Malay settlement at the site.

“The park was never designed to stand out or shout for attention, but rather to serve as a backdrop for the surrounding heritage buildings – to bring out the beauty of the heritage buildings and to surround them with life,” said landscape architect Teng Pe Yang of Permata Architects.

During construction, the layout of the walkway had to be adjusted to ensure the existing large trees were retained. Additional trees were introduced with a simple criterion; that they were culturally significant, or of local or Southeast Asian origin.

The combined use of tactile elements and Braille Maps for Universal Design

access was the first of its kind to be introduced in Penang, following extensive consultation with the National Council for the Blind and the Penang Accessibility Action Group.

PHASE TWO

In October 2016, phase two began, which aimed to augment the social benefits of the first phase by upgrading the existing community centre, improving the back lanes in the area and restoring the adjacent Syed Al-Attas Mansion.

This phase kicked off with the upgrade of back lanes to offer residents and visitors greater accessibility. A custom porous floor slab was specifically created together with a master mason from AKTC to comply with the requirements of the George Town Special Area Plan. The material allowed for better rainwater absorption and breathability of the ground and surrounding buildings.

Extensive herb gardens were introduced to encourage the local community to build and maintain edible gardens, while inviting them to help themselves to the harvest.



The open space planning process that can be replicated elsewhere.



Existing large trees were retained and Universal Design (UD) features implemented were the first to be introduced in Penang.



Master mason Laurino Saccucci applying the custom porous floor slab at the Aménian Street back lane.

“

The park was never designed to stand out or shout for attention, but rather to serve as a backdrop for the surrounding heritage buildings – to bring out the beauty of the heritage buildings and to surround them with life.

”

Landscape architect Teng Pe Yang of Permata Architects

LOOKING FORWARD

The project has had a positive impact on the local community and the surrounding areas. It has improved the walkability of the area and provided a space for more community events to be held.

At a broader level, the project enabled Think City to introduce planning practices within the heritage zone that take into account the character of the area while enhancing quality of life for the residents.

“By making the best of what is already there and responding to the wishes and suggestions of the residents, this can really preserve the context and introduce, gradually but surely, significant improvements in the daily lives of the residents,” said Francesco of the AKTC.

Phase Two of the project continues to be rolled out. Once completed, Syed Al-Attas Mansion will be converted into a community centre and cultural space within the framework of the ongoing Museum and Gallery Network (MAGNET) initiative to build, develop and operate an open network of cultural

and community spaces in Penang that will encourage public participation. At the same time, a management and maintenance plan is being drawn up with MBPP to ensure regular maintenance and long-term sustainability of the project after its completion.

“Success for us is the continued use of this park, not just the delivery of the design. Ten years from now, will people still be enjoying it? Will it have served its purpose in bringing people together? We’re trying to ensure positive answers to these questions,” said Daniel.

MAKAM DATO KOYAH

A CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION PROJECT



The arched facade to the west of Makam Dato Koyah in 2015, prior to the start of the conservation and restoration project.

The 177 year-old tomb of Dato Koyah, a symbol of the Indian Muslim community's early settlement in Penang, undergoes restoration after years of dangerous exposure to the elements.

SYMBOL OF THE INDIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITY

In the early 19th century, a healer and spiritual teacher from the Malabar coast in southern India arrived in Penang. Having led an honourable life of healing the sick and being a spiritual leader, he was forced to migrate when he was accused of a crime he did not commit. Legend has it that he settled down under a tree in the heart of George Town and took up work as a labourer, thus marking the early settlement of the South Indian Muslim community in Penang.

Syed Mustapha Idris was highly regarded and known as a leader who fought against injustice, and helped the Indian Muslim community prosper. Due to his influence and contributions to the community, he was called 'Dato Koyah', *koyah* meaning master, guru or a person commanding respect. Upon his death in 1840, his followers built a tomb in his memory at what is known today as Transfer Road, by the tree where he was said to have first settled. The British East India Company donated the land where the tomb was built and named one of the roads leading to the building after him.

Now known as Makam Dato Koyah, the tomb has been classified as a Category I heritage building, requiring the most urgent and highest level of protection. By contrast, the majority of heritage buildings in Penang have been classified as Category II, where the conservation and recognition of the building's significance is encouraged. This puts Makam Dato Koyah as a priority on the list of heritage sites.

THE HERITAGE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The importance of Makam Dato Koyah is emphasised by the fact that over the years, it has continued to be a central meeting point for the local community, particularly those of South Indian Muslim descent. The tomb had become the site for local Indian Muslims to gather during festivals and till today, some from the community continue to visit the tomb every Thursday to ask for blessings.

Recently, the Heritage Association of Dato Koyah was formed to take over custodial care of the building which is on *wakaf* land, belonging to the Religious Council of Penang (MAIPP). *Wakaf* land refers to land or properties bequeathed for the benefit of the community and which exist in perpetuity, meaning that no changes can be made to the purpose or to the ownership.

Members of the Association met with Think City back in 2014 to conceptualise a plan to restore and conserve the building. Together with George Town World Heritage Incorporated, set up by the Penang state government to oversee heritage matters, the project was set in motion.

A study team was established, headed by Think City Programme Manager, Aufa Abdul Rahman, and architectural and cultural anthropology consultant Dr. Gwynn Jenkins. The team conducted an in-depth study on the cultural significance of the site, its tangible and intangible heritage and strategies to safeguard it. A heritage management plan was then drawn up to restore, preserve and safeguard the Makam.

RESTORATION WORKS

No images or drawings could be found to give evidence of how the building has evolved over the years. The only evidence of change had to be obtained from the building itself and comparisons with other buildings of a similar period, function and cultural styling.

An early painting of the Southern Indian Kapitan Keling Mosque (1848) around the time the Makam was built, gave some idea of the form and style of the building. Similar corner towers topped with large central domes surrounded by a ring of smaller ones could be seen on both the Mosque and the Makam.



The arched facade is propped with metal to limit movement during roof removal and a temporary roof is erected to protect the site during works.

“

Our hope is for the Makam to be an interpretive gallery, showcasing this community's culture and heritage, and to continue to be a gathering place for them especially during festive seasons.

”

Aufa Abdul Rahman,
Programme Manager



DAMAGE

The Makam was once surrounded by a lot of open space allowing for good ventilation and evaporation; however the site has since been compromised. A double-storey concrete building constructed inches away from the Makam has taken away the natural ventilation and evaporation areas that had once kept the building in a stable condition.

The many extensions and renovations over the years have also damaged the building. While physical conservation works on the Makam began in late December 2015 after being approved by the Penang Island City Council (MBPP), complications due to past renovations have caused delays.

According to Dr. Jenkins, the whole building was encased in cement render and the damage to the building and four structural columns was quite extensive.

“Once the cement plaster was removed from the walls, it was very clear the building was in a much worse condition than anticipated and the original time schedule could not be met,” Dr. Jenkins said.

She explained that repairs on the building over the decades had further compounded damages to the structure and a lot of remedial work to prevent further damage had to be done.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

This project rates high in community involvement as the two main contractors undertaking the restoration works, Abdul Rashid Masooth and Adam Malik Shahul Hamid, are both members of the Heritage Association of Dato Koyah.

Aufa said, “This project was also a means of building capacity amongst the local community. Abdul Rashid and Adam Malik were involved from the



The interior of Makam Dato' Koyah.

initial stages of planning and research to the current restoration, right up to future plans for the site.”

It was a new learning curve for the contractors, who were used to working with cement render rather than the traditional lime mortar and bricks.

“It was painstaking work having to identify and replace the damaged bricks in the outer wall and the four structural columns. We learnt a lot in this project, and it was a great learning process for us,” said Adam.

THE FUTURE OF THE MAKAM

The restoration of the Makam is expected to be completed by June 2017, with the support of YAB Lim Guan Eng, the Chief Minister of Penang and YB Chow Kon Yeow, Minister of Local Government, Traffic Management and Flood Mitigation both of whom contributed significantly to the community fund connected to this project.

Following that, landscaping work will be undertaken along the narrow side paths and the back courtyard where the double-storey building is located now. If the green light is given for the demolition of that building, the back courtyard will serve as an additional

space for the community to hold events and gatherings.

“Our hope is for the Makam to be an interpretive gallery, showcasing this community's culture and heritage, and to continue to be a gathering place for them especially during festive seasons,” said Aufa.

According to Adam, the value of preserving the Makam is immense. The site would continue to promote and safeguard the intrinsic values of the South Indian Muslim community.

“This will bring our community back to its roots, and educate future generations about our heritage – about the fashion our great-grandmothers used to wear – and our unique food heritage,” Adam said.

“The local community has tried to preserve the tomb over the years. We did minor repairs and paint jobs but the entire building was never fully restored for all these years, so this project will finally return it to its former glory.”

Upon completion, the Association will continue to be the custodian of the Makam, while events such as weekly gatherings on Thursdays, to give respect to Dato Koyah and to distribute food to the poor, will continue as they have for the past 177 years.

“

This will bring our community back to its roots, and educate future generations about our heritage – about the fashion our great-grandmothers used to wear – and our unique food heritage.

”

Adam Malik Shahul Hamid, a member of the Heritage Association of Dato Koyah



REBUILDING THE COLUMN



Cleaning out the old mortar to ensure the new mortar can bond to the bricks.



Finding brick pieces that fit into the empty spaces, and checking for size and alignment.



Deep areas are filled in with small broken brick pieces and lime mortar, and allowed to dry slowly, spraying with lime water every few days.

FORT CORNWALLIS AND THE NORTH SEAFRONT MASTER PLAN



Fort Cornwallis is a key focal point within the wider rejuvenation plans for the north seafront.

Fort Cornwallis and its surrounding public areas get a facelift, with public spaces improved for residents and tourists.

THE NORTH SEAFRONT MASTER PLAN

The North Seafront Master Plan envisions a much improved public promenade starting from Dewan Sri Pinang (in the west) down to Fort Cornwallis and the entrance to Swettenham Pier (in the east). This project will expand the city's limited public spaces and improve the public amenities in the area.

In the project proposal, the George Town Conservation and Development Corporation (GTCDC) will coordinate efforts by the State Government and other related agencies to improve the public buildings and national heritage monuments in the area. This includes a possible upgrading of Dewan Sri Pinang, new uses for the Town Hall and City Hall, whilst Fort Cornwallis will be gradually conserved. The entire promenade, including the sea wall, will be repaired and upgraded into a landscaped public space for pedestrians and cyclists.

The GTCDC will be working with key stakeholders to ensure alignment between conservation and development. This means working with both federal and state government agencies especially National Heritage Department (JWN) when it comes to the conservation and use of Fort Cornwallis. There are also private sector players like the Fort's concessionaire, Ewein Group. In all these cases, the GTCDC provides technical advisory and monitoring services with regard to upgrading works carried out in the designated North Seafront.

THE FORT CORNWALLIS CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

Under an agreement with JWN, Think City working with Chief Minister Incorporated successfully developed the Fort Cornwallis Conservation Management Plan (CMP), which provides guidelines for restoration works. The CMP also guides stakeholders in managing the property.

The Padang

The CMP includes the open space between the Fort and the civic buildings (Town Hall and City Hall), popularly known as the Padang. The upgrading of the Padang, which was suffering

from water ponding issues, began in January 2017. This began with a brief archaeological survey, followed by further investigation works on the historic drainage system.

Based on the findings and recommendations of the survey, a new improved system was installed, inspired by the old 'herringbone' method, with new features including storm water tanks to help alleviate drainage problems arising from climate change. A new stage and utilities around the Padang were also installed to ensure more efficient use in the long run.

The Padang, which will be ready for use in the last quarter of 2017, is the kick-off project for the North Seafront improvement programme. A public archaeology programme involving the restoration of the moat at Fort

Cornwallis is underway, followed by improvements to the sea wall opposite the Padang.

Fort Cornwallis

Central to the whole North Seafront Master Plan is the 18th century Fort Cornwallis, a Category I National Heritage Monument. Restoration and conservation works are being conducted in four stages.

The current stage involves archaeological works and the preparation of a dilapidation report for the barracks.

The stages to follow include the creation of a Conservation and Museological programme for the long term and the final stage of actual physical conservation works on the fort.

STAGE 1

Preparation of the Fort Cornwallis Conservation Management Plan (Completed and endorsed by JWN).

STAGE 2

Archaeological works and production of a dilapidation report for the barracks.

STAGE 3

Preparation of a conservation and Museological programme.

STAGE 4

Physical conservation works on the fort.



Planned Improvements from the North Seafront Master Plan

1. Rehabilitation of existing Padang with improved drainage system
2. Reinforcement of the Sea Wall and Promenade
3. Reinstatement of moat as per Kelly map boundary
4. Development of square and re-establishment of the Quadrangle building footprint
5. Re-establishment of circular garden feature as an open plaza
6. Re-configuration of traffic flow and carpark

DR. NEIL KHOR
Chief Operating Officer



ON THE NORTH SEAFRONT PROJECT

This public realm improvement project will not only benefit visitors to the area but also the community of George Town as the plan proposes the expansion of public spaces and sets a high standard of public realm solutions in a world heritage site.

Getting key stakeholders to agree and invest in the project is vital to the successful execution of the plan. We will expect to face challenges like securing co-investment from key stakeholders for the conservation works on the fort. There is also a lack of technical skills to carry out detailed documentation. However, as always, we will keep tapping into our networks to produce solutions to these challenges.

Additionally, there are foreseeable challenges in creating programming for the activation of the spaces within and around the public buildings. The development of a

public realm improvement committee headed by YB Chow Kon Yeow, Chairman of the Local Government, Traffic Management & Environment committee, is a move in the right direction. It will ensure that public programmes planned for the site are appropriate and carried out ethically.

There are very few wide open spaces within the heritage zone and the North Seafront is the only one with a large public space. Improving this space and opening it up will serve to enhance the whole area for the community. The community will have access to a world class restored national heritage monument (Fort Cornwallis), and there will be different opportunities for public participation in heritage-making, which is extremely important for instilling a culture of heritage appreciation and protection.

In the case of Fort Cornwallis, an equitable concession agreement, will enable the continuous protection and maintenance of the whole space, keeping it green and conducive for public use. It will also be a catalyst for other similar public, private and community projects in the state. All these efforts are based on the firm belief in and commitment to World Heritage values. This has got to be good for the rest of Penang.



USM team led by Dr. Goh Hsiao Mei working on the Fort Cornwallis archaeological dig.



Students from SMK Hutchings enjoying a first-hand experience at uncovering George Town's past.



Archaeologists digging the trench just outside Fort Cornwallis in search for the bottom of the moat.

Fort Cornwallis Public Archaeology Programme

The Fort Cornwallis Public Archaeology Programme is an initiative to promote public participation in the conservation and preservation of our heritage. School students are invited to take part in the ongoing archaeological works at the site, where they learn about the history of Fort Cornwallis through hands-on excavation, discovery documentation and artefact conservation.

This first-hand experience on a Category I National Monument is a rare treat for the students, which Think City hopes will foster a deeper appreciation for our shared history and heritage.



The Penang Free School.

WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT THE PENANG STORY?

A:

The great writer, Rudyard Kipling, once said, “if history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten”. The concept of “story” is a powerful one and a part of all cultures. When history is told in that format, it gets remembered and repeated.

Penang, which the adventurer and travel writer Isabella Bird, called, “a truly brilliant place under a brilliant sky,” is full of stories. We need to articulate them, spread them, celebrate them and people will then feel the legacy of Penang in a dynamic way that will inform and inspire them, and even ignite action to make this place vibrant. It will gear them to proactively work to make it more liveable, more caring. People feel the soul of the special place where stories of courage, culture and competence are told.

WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT PENANG?

A:

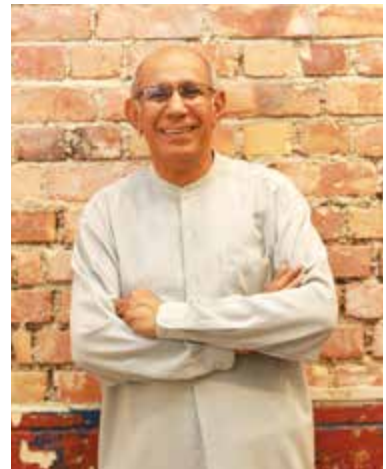
The story of Penang has:

- **Adventurers** – There was the Batu Uban legacy, the Dato’ Keramat, Datuk Jannatun story. About half a century later, Captain Francis Light, an illegitimate child from Suffolk, England, was sent out to become a seafaring merchant. An adventurer who hoisted the British flag on this island in 1786, he subsequently cohabited with a Catholic of multiple ethnicities named Martina Rozells, who contributed to the strong Catholic tradition and community in Penang. This is a magnificent story on its own.
- **Recognition** – We were privileged to have an entry on George Town comprising two full pages in the Encyclopedia Britannica in 1817.
- **Legal Activism** – James Robertson Logan, producer of the Journal of the Eastern Archipelago & Eastern Asia, lawyer, newspaper editor, and public interest and environmental activist par excellence. The Logan Memorial Monument was built with funds from the people of Penang. It is located next to the courthouse and has four statues of women on it representing Wisdom, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude.

THE SPIRIT OF PENANG INFORMING, INSPIRING AND IGNITING CHANGE

“The Spirit of Penang – Informing, Inspiring and Igniting Change”. That was the title of the inaugural lecture launching the Penang Story 3.0 and a pioneering new initiative called Penangpedia by DATO’ DR. ANWAR FAZAL, Chair of the Board of Think City.

We talk to him about his new initiative.



- **Health Activism** – Dr. Wu Lien-Teh, a medical legend, and founder of the Anti-Opium and the Anti-Racism Society (The Dr. Wu Lien-Teh Society). He was nominated for a Nobel Prize in 1938 and saved China from a devastating pneumonic plague. He has a museum and institute named after him in Harbin, China.
- **Education** – The Penang Free School (1816) – The oldest school of its kind which recently celebrated 200 years. The “Free” in the name, not many people know, was part of the free school movement that opened up to people of all religions, and was a great civilisational leap in education.
- **Information** – The Penang Library – 200 years old, the oldest of its kind in the country and probably the region.
- **Branding** – Penang had the first global consumer brand, Lingham’s Chili Sauce. It developed over a century ago and was packed in recycled Lea & Perrins bottles.
- **Innovators** – Buckminster Fuller – The “Leonardo Da Vinci of the last century” made Penang his second home and worked on one of his last projects here, a geodesic dome in the Komtar complex. It was the symbol of science at its best – creating the greatest space with the least use of materials (Komtar is named after Tun Razak & the Geodesic Dome is named after Tunku Abdul Rahman, our first Prime Minister).
- **Politics** – The political party that won the first experiment in local democratic elections in Malaysia (1953 in Penang) was called “The Radical Party” – a very challenging name indeed!
- **Diversity** – Magnificent and continuously rich in religion, food and customs, music and festivals.

There is the Queen Victoria Diamond Jubilee Tower which represents the architecture of the four civilisations. We had once the tallest building and among the longest bridges in Asia.

- **Adversity** – Penang continues to be home to multiple refugees – we have a long history of migration and refugees. The people involved in the struggle against the Dutch – Acheh, Sun Yat Sen and his republicans, and Thailand’s royal family once sought refuge here. Now we have the Rohingya.
- **Speaking Out** – Every Chief Minister of Penang (three of them), has been “de-elected”, i.e. forced out of office by the voters in their constituency. Penangites are not afraid to speak out.
- **Vibrant Civil Society** – There is a vibrant civil society locally, especially in the Penang Forum, as well as globally. We are the headquarters of several global organisations including the Third World Network (TWN) and the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA).

HOW DO WE CONTINUE THIS PENANG SPIRIT?

A:

The power of memory, the power of stories, and the power of proliferating them can now be done in new ways in the digital age. So, I conceived the idea of ‘Penangpedia’ – a digital recording of the stories of Penang in ways that can be shared and celebrated by anyone, anytime, anywhere. My dream is to have three major components:

- A digital archive of publications, books and magazines relating to Penang that can be accessed easily.
- A video channel that collects all films and photos about Penang.

- An outreach programme that tells the story of “This Day in Penang’s History” which will make us remember like never before. The most important element is that we want it to creatively engage the community. Schools, societies, families, individuals and institutions can be encouraged to participate with contributions.

Some of the things that Penangpedia will do are:

- Create a digital platform for sharing; a community archive that will comprise visual, oral and written histories, memories and stories.
- Provide opportunities for communities to partake in the making of exhibitions, educational programmes and cultural activities based on the shared archive platform.
- Develop new chapters in the Penang Story around our built heritage including the activation of the Farquhar Street Museum, Fort Cornwallis, Town Hall, City Hall, India House, Syed Al-Attas Mansion, Chinese Chamber of Commerce, selected Clan houses and other landmarks.
- Encourage ‘history from below’; documenting and animating cultural and historical sites through community activities.

Think City itself has invested in many projects that can contribute to the platform:

- Biographical Dictionary project
- Chinese Clans of Penang project
- Mosques & Kramats Book project
- Shipping in the Harbour research project
- Visions of Penang project (maps & photographs)
- Shophouse Guide Book

- My George Town Strategic Master Plan (with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture)
- Sustainable Penang Initiative II
- Cities, People & the Economy
- Building Survey Project (with Majlis Bandaraya Pulau Penang, George Town World Heritage Incorporated, Jabatan Perancangan Bandar dan Desa)

HOW DO YOU ENGAGE WITH OTHERS WHO ARE DOING SIMILAR WORK?

A:

Linking and networking locally and globally will be an integral part of Penangpedia. Among the links that can be made are the following:

- Star's Penang in Pictures Project
- Singapore National Library's Newspaper archive
- Project Gutenberg (which has digital copies of Red Spot books on Penang)
- Google Books (on Logan's journals etc)
- SOAS (on Captain Light's letters)
- Penang State Museum (early paintings)

HOW DO YOU HOPE TO SUSTAIN THIS INITIATIVE?

A:

We will nurture a culture of active partnerships, to promote sharing and support. Universities, research institutes, government agencies and libraries all over the world are very important and most of all, a network of people passionate about Penang and about the heritage of information and wisdom. We also plan to crowd-fund – a central part of the initiative of small sums of money by large numbers is the new way of community financing. We want this project to belong to everyone.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS YOU SPECIFICALLY WANT TO SEE HAPPEN IN PENANG TO SUPPORT THIS INITIATIVE?

A:

A dream of at least five more initiatives in Penang:

- A systematic documentation of the social activist movements in Penang done as part of Penangpedia, especially a bibliography and the scanning of publications.
- An annual festival of books on Penang and published in Penang to be held as part of the George Town Literary Festival.
- A more universal Penang. Every major United Nations Day to be celebrated systematically every year with a special grant given. These could include World Happiness Day, World Migrants Day, World Human Rights Day, World Anti-Corruption Day, World Biodiversity Day, World Environment Day, World Non-Violence Day and World Peace Day.
- A capacity building institution for learning sustainable living based on the model of the Schumacher College (<https://www.schumachercollege.org.uk>). This could be a new role for the Relau Agricultural Station and be called the Penang International Right Livelihood Centre/College. We can be a model for the world.
- An annual festival of Ideas in Penang where people present their best ideas. 21 awards could be given to the 21 best ideas for the 21st Century.

WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE TO PENANG?

A:

Let us work together to foster the magic of cosmopolitanism, the magic of Penang, the magic of the "Seven C's"; Colours, Creeds, Customs, Courage, Compassion, Creativity, Conscience.

Let the culture of "Glo-cal", the magic of the Yin and Yang of local and global, continue to be the beacon of Penang so that it continues to be full of civic consciousness and activism locally and globally.

I'd like to end by reminding everyone about what the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has said about heritage:

"Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today and what we pass on to future generations. Our cultural and natural heritage are both irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration".

Let's make Penang a role model of this for everyone!

Dato' Dr. Anwar Fazal is also Director of the Right Livelihood College (RLC) and Citizens International and also Chairman of the Penang Gandhi Peace Centre (PGPC). He is a recipient of the Right Livelihood Award, popularly known as the "Alternative Nobel Prize" and the Global 500 Award of the United Nations Environment Programme. He served for seven years in the City Council of George Town, 12 years leading the Asia-Pacific Urban Governance Initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and three years as a visiting Professor at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). He played a key role in founding the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP), Transparency International Malaysia, World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) and over a dozen other local, national and global initiatives.

For more information, see <http://www.anwarfazal.net> and <http://www.penangtrails.com.my/dato-dr-anwar-fazal>.

OTHER HAPPENINGS



CHINA STREET GHAUT STREETScape UPGRADE – PUBLIC EXHIBITION LAUNCH

The China Street Ghaut Streetscape Upgrade project was launched with a public exhibition to encourage feedback on the proposal, in partnership with Asian Global Business (AGB) – a private developer who is funding the project. The project aims to upgrade the infrastructure, enhance the quality of the streetscape, promote walking and cycling, and reduce traffic speeds within the East Seafront.

PULAU TIKUS NEIGHBOURHOOD IMPROVEMENT

The Pulau Tikus Neighbourhood Improvement project proposes urban landscaping to reduce traffic and improve walkability in the area. Championed by YB Yap Soo Huey of Pusat Khidmat KADUN Pulau Tikus and co-funded by Think City, the project aims to address and mitigate the impact of the underpass plan recently approved by MBPP between Jalan Mt Erskine to Jalan Burma (located before Jalan Brown) by integrating green landscaping, street furniture and placemaking elements into existing plots.



ARTISAN WORKSHOPS AT STAR PITT STREET

As part of the activation programme of Star Pitt Street, Think City hosted a bi-monthly Artisan Market, bringing together traditional and contemporary artisans to showcase Penang's diverse crafts such as batik printing, pottery, traditional lantern making and rattan weaving. This platform aimed to revive the interest of local residents and tourists in traditional crafts, whilst improving the visibility of contemporary artisans.

CAMPBELL STREET MARKET PUBLIC EXHIBITION

Following several rounds of consultation with vendors and stakeholders hosted by MBPP, a plan to re-configure and repurpose the market site was developed by Arkitek Zalena and exhibited to the public for further feedback. Think City is currently developing the heritage management plan to assist in the conservation, protection and maintenance of the heritage site and its structures.



THINK CITY'S NEW HOME IN UAB BUILDING

In 2016, Think City and Khazanah Nasional moved into the UAB building, a Category II-listed historic building that sits majestically along China Street Ghaut. Aside from an office site, the building is also a venue for events and activities.

ARMENIAN STREET AND ACHEEN STREET AREAS

The upgrading of the pocket park is part of a wider neighbourhood revitalisation project in the area. Think City continues to work with community partners including the Cheah Kongs, the Khariah Masjid Melayu Lebuh Acheh and the Khariah Masjid Kapitan Keling to provide and improve housing, mosques and cultural centres. Several shophouses have been conserved, while ten have come under the Affordable Renting Scheme and a Haj Gallery has been established.



PULAU TIKUS AFFORDABLE RENTING PROGRAMME

The programme involves a partnership between the Cheah Family Trust, Think City and YB Yap Soo Huey, the State Assembly person of Pulau Tikus. The programme saw facade improvements to 11 shophouses belonging to the Trust, fronting Jalan Burma. In exchange for the grant provided by Think City and the office of YB Yap, the Trust agreed to co-invest in the facade improvement programme as well as to fix rental rates for their tenants for five years. This enabled the tenants to co-invest in the internal works.

The partnership between owner and tenant is one example of how to moderate the rapidly rising rental rates in the area. The tenants also worked with Think City to standardise the signage to conform to local government regulations.



KIMBERLEY STREET SHOPHOUSE UPGRADE

Six century-old shophouses on the brink of decay are being restored as part of Think City's ongoing efforts to preserve and protect the tangible and intangible heritage assets of the city. Owned by MBPP, the shophouses are intended to be used by traditional tradesman as a base to continue their valuable work.

MUSEUM AND GALLERY NETWORK

Working with Dr. Richard Engelhardt, former UNESCO Regional Advisor for Culture, Asia Pacific, the GTCDC is developing The Museum and Gallery Network (MAGNET), an initiative to link state-owned historic buildings and moveable cultural properties into a network of institutions and programmes.





BUTTERWORTH

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PLANNING FOR CHANGE PEKAN LAMA REGENERATION PLAN

The Pekan Lama Regeneration Plan is the first of four plans to reverse the decline of the old town by repopulating it and bringing back a thriving economy.



Pekan Lama lies in the heart of Butterworth, spreading out over 23 hectares, encompassing Jalan Jeti Lama, Jalan Telaga Air, Jalan Pasar, Dataran Pemuda Merdeka, Taman Pantai and Rope Walk. The decline of Butterworth as a whole including Pekan Lama, due to various factors, has spurred the creation of the Pekan Lama Regeneration Plan.

One of the main issues in Pekan Lama was the inefficient use of land, and the high number of vacant lots. There was a need to introduce a strategy for more efficient land use that would help reverse the decline of the old town.

The Regeneration Plan is the first under the Butterworth Baharu Programme (BBP), a programme overseen by the Seberang Perai Municipal Council (MPSP) to transform the town of Butterworth. Its success will set the tone for the next three action plans that will soon follow.

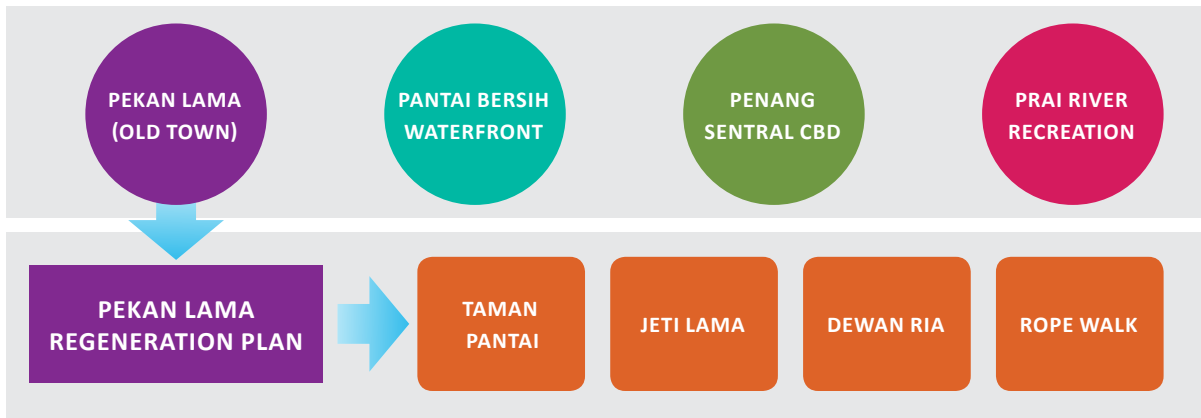
REGENERATION INITIATIVES

Pekan Lama is divided into four different districts — Taman Pantai, Jeti Lama, Dewan Ria and Rope Walk. Specific urban regeneration plans have been drawn out for each district to improve public spaces and better realise its land use potential, while retaining the townscape scale and character.

“Pekan Lama is where the old jetty used to be, where people used to travel by tongkang (boat) to Penang island. The historic centre is here and it used to be the civic centre before the government offices were shifted to other areas,” says Murali Ram, Butterworth Programme Director.

“The basic concept of this regeneration initiative is to revitalise the area, attract new families and youth, and see how derelict spaces here can be improved for better liveability,” he said.

BUTTERWORTH BAHARU PROGRAMME



The plan will attempt to leverage on the old town's historical assets to transform the space, aiming for little changes that will have a large impact. He noted that the availability of empty plots of land and vacant godowns (warehouses) were opportunities that could be used for various purposes and activities to repopulate the old town.

Implementation of the plans for the four districts in the Pekan Lama Regeneration Plan is now underway. Projects to improve the spaces in Dewan Ria have already begun while work in Jeti Lama, Taman Pantai and Rope Walk are also in various stages of implementation.

COLLABORATION

As a collaborative effort between MPSP and Think City, a grants programme has been created specifically for the Pekan Lama Regeneration Plan. Many of the regeneration and space activation proposals presented by Think City have been met positively.

"This project will be a catalyst for growth in Butterworth and we hope that with the implementation of the rest of the action plans, we will have formed a Butterworth Baharu in 10 to 20 years'

time," said council president, YDP Dato' Maimunah Mohd Sharif.

The local government is also actively supporting the various urban regeneration processes being rolled out under the first action plan. Other than approving applications for these projects, the council is tasked with sustaining and maintaining the new amenities and facilities built under the project. For example, in the Kampung Benggali Recreational Hub, the council will be fully in charge of transforming the Ria basketball court into a multipurpose open court. It is also involved in upgrading the Jeti Lama Market, amongst others.

MOVING FORWARD

"The whole plan is to inject new vigour into Butterworth so that the town, together with George Town on the island, can function as one bigger city, similar to Kowloon and Hong Kong," said Murali.

The desired result of the project is ultimately a culturally vibrant and liveable city where its significant historical and heritage values are preserved and protected, becoming

a community focal point. With the introduction of arts, heritage and culture related activities in the area, the aim is that it will also become a creative district to draw in youth to reenergise the city.

“

The basic concept of this regeneration initiative is to revitalise the area, attract new families and youth, and see how derelict spaces here can be improved for better liveability.

”

Murali Ram,
Butterworth Programme Director



GREEN SPACES FOR BUTTERWORTH



The recently completed Kampung Benggali Pocket Park.

In 2015, Think City announced a grant of RM1 million dedicated to rejuvenating the Butterworth Old Town. A baseline study showed several areas of great potential for reviving activity and commerce and an action plan was developed. Here's what's been happening.

KAMPUNG BENGGALI RECREATIONAL HUB

Surrounded by four high-rise apartments, the Lebuhraya Kampung Benggali square consists of the Kampung Benggali pocket park, Dewan Ria (a multi-purpose hall), Kampung Benggali Public Swimming Pool and Kampung Benggali Hard Court. These amenities were meant to cater to those living in the surrounding high-rise residences but were not being maintained. Overgrown with vegetation and broken-down facilities, the spaces were not being used and some were even fenced and locked to the public.

The area was in need of repair works and activation to ensure facilities will be used well and taken care of.

KAMPUNG BENGGALI POCKET PARK

The pocket park at Kampung Benggali, was initially left untended, overgrown with weeds and fenced up for many years. After several meetings with MPSP, it was agreed that the park be upgraded for the residents in the area.

Works to upgrade and improve the park commenced in December 2016. The first phase included the installation of a large feature swing, walking paths, landscaping with plants around the park, and outdoor exercise equipment. Efforts were also made to ensure that the park was sufficiently well-lit. These works were completed in February 2017.

Phase Two, which involves installing sheltered seating and a hedge of murrays to protect the privacy of the surau next to it, begins in the second quarter of 2017.

“It was not easy to engage the residents in the apartment blocks. When we first started this project, we sent out survey forms to every resident in the four apartment blocks. Out of more than 1,000 forms sent out, we only received 20 forms in response,” said Nicole Thum, Programme Executive.

“It took a few more attempts before the residents opened up to reveal a consensus in wanting more recreational spaces and a place to relax,” she continued.

JETI LAMA RAIN GARDEN

Old Jetty Road (or Jalan Jeti Lama) is a minor road in Butterworth which used to lead to an old jetty, now no longer existent due to area reclamation for the

Butterworth Outer Ring Road and the expansion of the North Butterworth Container Terminal.

Predominantly a South Indian settlement anchored by the Sree Maha Mariamman Devasthanam Temple, several traditional businesses continue to survive including eyewear shops, a jewellery store, a Chinese acupuncturist and shops offering Hindu prayer items. What used to be a bustling area has grown quiet over the years. Many shophouses are left vacant and rubbish is strewn in every drain and sidewalk. At the end of Jalan Jeti Lama is a grey, vacant plot of land used as a parking lot facing the Sree Maha Mariamman Temple.

After conducting a baseline study, Think City saw the opportunity to rejuvenate the area with recreational spaces and the Jeti Lama Rain Garden concept was created.

“

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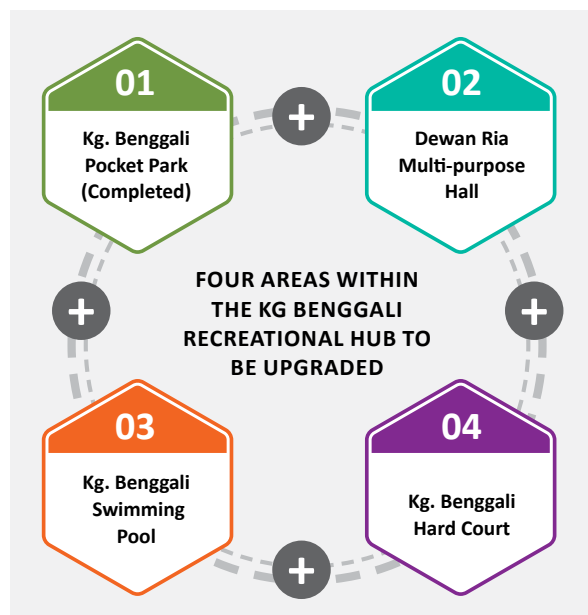
It took a few more attempts before the residents opened up to reveal a consensus in wanting more recreational spaces and a place to relax.

”

Nicole Thum, Programme Executive



The Kampung Benggali pocket park before upgrading works were carried out.



The aim of the concept is to transform the site and uplift the spirit of the area, beginning with converting the 810 square metres of tarmac and adjoining 210 square metres of concrete into a park with parking facilities.

“By bringing positive change to the area, we hope that investments and developments in the area will follow suit,” said Nicole.

“This will in turn spur repopulation and economic growth, bringing life and vibrancy back to this forgotten part of Butterworth,” she added.

THE CONCEPT

The 810 square metres of plain tarmac is to be converted into a proper parking lot with spaces allocated to cars, motorcycles and bicycles, including bays for disabled drivers.

However, this will be no ordinary carpark. It will be the first of its kind in Penang where a rain garden is incorporated around the rectangular piece of land and also on the concrete square beside it.

“Trees will be planted around the carpark and we will be digging into the earth to access underground water for a pump that can be used as a source for an interactive children’s water play feature,” said Nicole.

Apart from the children’s water play feature, a timber deck will also be built across the rain garden for easy access to the nearby Jeti Lama Market. The parking lot also has alternative uses, doubling as an open space for events where stalls can be set up in rows, and possibilities for a stage set up for performances.



The open tarmac which will eventually be turned into the Jeti Lama Rain Garden.



Students of SMK Convent Butterworth preparing the plot for their new garden.

BUTTERWORTH URBAN GARDEN SCHOOLS (BUGS)

Urban gardens, particularly edible ones, are a key feature of a green city and are an exemplary way of making cities greener as they increase the amount of vegetation and contribute to the food security of local communities. Food miles are reduced drastically and chemicals used on the plants can be controlled.

Community urban gardens can also be particularly effective in fostering closer ties within the community and building a stronger connection with nature and its appreciation. The Butterworth Urban Garden Schools (BUGS) project was set up to cultivate all the benefits of urban gardening as part of the Butterworth greening programme.

A GREEN INITIATIVE

Think City was keen to amplify their greening efforts in Butterworth in 2016 but had neither the capacity nor experience to do so. A partnership with the Consumer Association of Penang (CAP) proved to be the best way forward as they were keen on expanding their organic farming programme to schools in the mainland. With that, the BUGS programme was launched to expose school children to the benefits and pleasures of urban gardening.

While Think City researched the schools and managed the relationships, CAP was to conduct the workshops, supervise the gardening processes, and monitor the overall health of the gardens.

Initially, reactions from the schools were mixed. While many saw the potential of developing an urban garden co-curriculum, there was concern regarding the funding of the programme. And so, Think City Butterworth allocated RM20,000 towards the groundwork, gardening equipment, soil preparation and other necessary materials.

In an effort to cultivate a culture of urban gardening, Think City kicks off an urban garden programme in schools.

Urban gardens were set up in Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan (SMK) Convent Butterworth, SMK St. Mark, SMK Taman Indrawasih and SMK Mak Mandin. Workshops by CAP took place during co-curricular hours, training the students in the different techniques of preparing soil, planting and how to handle gardening tools. For many students, it had been their first time holding a rake!

SCHOOLS THAT HAVE ADOPTED BUGS

01 SMK Convent Butterworth

02 SMK St. Mark

03 SMK Taman Indrawasih

04 SMK Mak Mandin

Seeds and materials for planting were supplied by CAP, while students were introduced to over 20 types of vegetables and herbs such as cat's whiskers, basil, king of bitters, eggplant, turmeric and many more.

The size of the gardens varied according to the amount of space provided by the school. For instance, SMK Convent Butterworth had little land available, thus a small section of a wall was devoted for vertical gardening to complement the natural garden bed.

HARVESTS AND BUYERS

Both students and teachers were excited upon seeing the results of their labour, particularly during the harvest period, as they hadn't anticipated that there would be ready buyers for their produce! Teaching staff and canteen operators were happy to buy the vegetables and herbs from the students.

"The reactions from students, teachers and even parents were most pleasing. When we first started this programme, we noticed there was a clear disconnect

between people and their natural environment. By being outdoors and learning how to plant produce that the students themselves would eventually eat, we hoped that students would be more conscious of the relationships and cycles between human beings and nature," said Daniel Lee, Programme Executive and project owner of BUGS.

Students also learnt the dangers of using chemical pesticides and fertilisers, and how these substances are detrimental to both human wellbeing and the planet's health. They were made aware of food security issues and how this can be addressed by growing produce.

WHAT'S NEXT

"We hope that the programme will continue to run sustainably in all participating schools, and that the garden will become embedded in the DNA of the school and keep running long after Think City Butterworth's work is done. We also hope that more schools will adopt similar programmes which we hope are inspired by our ideas."



Students of SMK Convent Butterworth preparing the plot for their new garden.

“We hope that the programme will continue to run in all participating schools, and that more schools will adopt similar programmes.”

Daniel Lee,
Programme Executive



*Participants mapping their neighbourhood by collecting data through interviews and observations.
Photo credit: Goh Choon Ean.*

MYBUTTERWORTH MAPPING PROJECT

MyButterworth is a community asset mapping project involving students, cameras and the old town of Bagan. This place-based project was a collaborative effort between Think City and Arts-ED Penang, a non-profit organisation running community-based educational programmes on the theme of arts, culture and heritage.

Supported by the Think City Grants Programme, groundwork for the project began in February 2016 culminating in a final presentation and exhibition of the students' exploration with the camera in June.

The aim of the project was to encourage students to explore the cultural assets surrounding their schools such as historical buildings, landmarks or businesses typically found in their vicinity.

Two schools in the Bagan area – Maktab Wan Jah and Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina Chung Hwa Pusat – were identified and after the initial briefings, 31 students spanning primary and secondary school were selected to participate.

Loo Que Lin, Programmer and Facilitator at Arts-ED, who managed the MyButterworth Mapping Project said, "Even though the schools were in Bagan, we found that a lot of the students were not familiar with the area. We saw a need to create a platform for them to go on-site and learn about the place – to explore cultural assets in the area, and to interact with the local community."

Students explore the old town of Bagan with their cameras resulting in a heartwarming photo exhibition and new appreciation for the cultural assets and heritage of their neighbourhoods.

“Through this place-based learning project, the students were given an opportunity to be on the ground, using their five senses to explore and engage with people,” she added.

CREATIVE LEARNING METHODS

Fun learning methods were deployed to engage the students including a treasure hunt to familiarise themselves with the neighbourhood. The next step was to map the buildings and shophouses in the area, noting who the occupants were and their vocations. When this was complete, the students were then able to fully survey the cultural assets in the area and select the subject matter for their photo essays.

Skills-building was a big part of the project and the students were taught the foundations of photography – working the camera, learning the terminology and framing shots, among other aspects. They were also taught

interviewing skills with role-play exercises before they embarked on the data collection phase where they actively visited the cultural assets of their choice for interviews, photos and information.

From the work accumulated, the students then began creating their photo essays in groups, which resulted in the exhibition at the end of the six months.

NEW PERSPECTIVES

“MyButterworth was an opportunity to understand and explore the tangible and intangible cultural heritage that surrounds the students. It was our hope that they would learn to appreciate the importance of preserving culture at a young age so that they can bring this attitude with them and advocate it throughout life,” said Nicole Thum, Programme Executive.

“The students enjoyed the process very much as they were able to express their creativity through photography and learn about their town, discovering places they had never seen before and even trying some different food for the first time,” she said.

Nicole added that the reaction from the students was initially a surprise. The project puzzled them at first but after they learnt about the history and significance of each site, their enthusiasm kicked in.

“We were quite sceptical with the idea of students getting excited about the programme. We expected them to say, ‘It’s heritage – it’s going to be very boring.’ So the level of enthusiasm and commitment shown to the project was very surprising and inspiring,” said Nicole.



Students showcasing their photos during the exhibition.



Facilitators guiding the students in photo selection and editing skills. Photo credit: Arts-Ed.

“The students developed an appreciation and deeper understanding of the history of the place after interviewing some of the old traders in the area, such as the Loh Mee stall, the dry goods supplier at the godowns on Jalan Jeti Lama, and also a mini market on Jalan Pasar.

“They were excited to be out and about, and there were ‘oohs’ and ‘aahs’ whenever they found out the vendors they interviewed had been running their businesses even before they were born,” Nicole added.

“They learnt that there are things out there beyond the classroom – local

history that is not taught to them in school or by their parents.”

Many of the students also came away with knowledge of how different businesses were conducted, from running a hardware store, to making bamboo blinds or operating a food stall.

COMMUNITY TIES

Meanwhile, the business owners felt a sense of pride in sharing the history of their businesses and were more than willing to share their knowledge with the students. Some students, having forged new friendships, even went back with their parents to patronise the local stores and coffee shops that they had interviewed.

“

On the whole, though it is billed as a cultural mapping exercise, the intangible rewards of this project are not just the sense of pride and appreciation for the cultural assets, but also the new bonds created among the community's kids, the vendors, the teachers and the parents.

”

Nicole Thum,
Programme Executive

Feedback from the teachers, parents and students was also encouraging, with the schools requesting for the programme to be run annually, and to even be officially included as an extra-curricular programme.

“On the whole, though it is billed as a cultural mapping exercise, the intangible rewards of this project are not just the sense of pride and appreciation for the cultural assets, but also the new bonds created among the community's kids, the vendors, the teachers and the parents,” added Nicole.

“It is relationships like these that ultimately give a city soul and make it liveable.”

A BUTTERWORTH ART SCENE? IT'S ALREADY HERE

Originally Published in Malay Mail Online on
2 February 2017



Mural by Martin Ron on the side of a shoplot along Jalan Raja Uda. Photo credit: KE Ooi.

As part of wider efforts to optimise underutilised spaces in Butterworth, Think City has introduced the Butterworth Art Walk, a series of nine murals depicting the history of Butterworth painted on the walls of a back alley in Jalan Bagan Luar.

While Zacharevic's works are mainly on the island, he inspired many others to follow suit and before long, the street art scene in Penang grew.

Even quiet Butterworth on the mainland got into the act with Urban Xchange Festival 2015 – an international public art festival – which included several large-scale public murals and a 12-sided star art installation.

Prior to that, the Different Strokes Street Art Festival also saw a large impressive mural of a man and turtles by Martin Ron painted on the side of a shoplot along Jalan Raja Uda.

In that same year, the Butterworth Fringe Festival (BFF) debuted as part of the George Town Festival (GTF) in collaboration with Seberang Perai Municipal Council and Think City to bring part of the GTF crowd over to the mainland.

BFF was successfully held again in 2016 with more public murals introduced on the mainland. It is expected to be back again at this year's annual GTF.

The art festivals highlighted the growing art scene in Butterworth and, leveraging on the momentum created, Think City embarked on more events and collaborative efforts to further enhance the growing art scene here.

MURALS? WE'LL GIVE YOU MURALS... AND MORE

Martin Ron's painting of a man sitting cross-legged with one hand extended and turtles swimming around him is an impressive piece that captures the attention of anyone walking past.

The 3D effect of it, as if the man's hand is really sticking out of the side of the building, lends an air of surrealism to the whole scene.

This was the first of the large-scale public murals to make an appearance in Butterworth. It is located on the side of a row of shoplots along the busy commercial district of Jalan Raja Uda. Just across from this row of shoplots, at the side of another row of shops, Spanish artist Sabek painted a mystical piece of a woman with an eel around her.

These two murals were part of the Different Strokes Art Festival 2015.

Later in the same year, during the Urban Xchange Festival 2015, more murals were added. Sabek came back and painted on the same site, replacing the woman with the eel with a woman holding a blue apple.

Not far from it is the impressive four-storey star installation by local architect and artist, Ong Jun Hao; the star appears lodged into the bare, incomplete structure of a building.

A few hundred metres from there, right at the junction of Jalan Raja Uda, a large abstract piece by Iranian artist Nafir faces the traffic.

Near the ferry terminal, along the Butterworth Outer Ring Road, on the side of a very old building, world-famous street artist Vhils from Portugal created the portrait of a woman on the wall.

Vhils, whose real name is Alexandre Farto, does not use paint but a drill to create works of art that will never fade. Last year, during the BFF, British artist Thomas Powell was commissioned to create a series of works titled Bounties of the Sea and Doorway to Penang.

Powell turned the crumbling ruins of an old building into an outdoor art gallery that depicted the culture and history of the area which used to be a fisherman's village.

Paintings of fishes are all over the cement floor while busy fishermen – hauling in the catch to cleaning the fish – were painted all over the wall. In his Doorway to Penang series, Powell painted two old wooden doors; one showed a fishmonger while the other, a lantern maker. Both doors are now displayed outside the Lodge 18 Hotel along Lorong Bagan Luar Satu.

BUTTERWORTH ART WALK... YES, ART IS EVERYWHERE

This is a collaboration between Think City and architect Zaini Zainul to turn the narrow 400-metre-long alleyway starting from the side of Lodge 18 Hotel to Kompleks Bagan into an art alley. Zaini led a team of six other artists to paint murals on the walls flanking the alleyway; the paintings tell the story of Butterworth from the origins of its name to the many cash crops it used to have over time.

The six other artists who contributed to the project are Shazwan Jalil, Syamsul Addenno, Suhaimi Ali, Hadi Ramli, Nazmi Jamarudin, Amir Andha and Azmi Husin.

The wire-mesh monkey sculpture by Shahidan Muhamad that Zaini helped curate for BFF 2016 was relocated and now sits perched on top of the alley while colourful plastic colanders and baskets are strung up like umbrellas across the alley.

Murals of sugarcane plants, elephants, even a stall selling sugarcane juice, tell the story of how sugar was once the main agriculture product in Butterworth.

The origin of the town's name is remembered with a painting of William John Butterworth who was the governor of the Straits Settlements between 1843 and 1855.



The Butterworth Art Alley.

The project started in December 2016 and phase one will be completed soon. The group of artists, all from Shah Alam, save for Azmi and Shahidan from Penang, will then start work on the second phase which is down the same alley, across the road.

THE MAKING OF ART SPACES AND GROWING OF EVENTS

With these positive developments, Think City has a few other projects that will turn some buildings and shoplots into spaces for designers, artists and makers.

One such space is the Lokalhous Event Space by Hafidz Adnan. Lokalhous is a row of three bright yellow wooden shophouses along Jalan Pantai very near the ferry terminal.

Almost hidden from the main road and located right at the end of the road after a long row of shops selling a variety of local snacks and jeruk, this place is perfect for artsy workshops and events due to the ample space.

Right next to the row of shophouses is a large grassy plot of land used mostly as a parking space but Hafidz says he has already leased the land to use for future events.

The shophouses are still being restored by Hafidz and his team. Only one is completed while they are still working on an event hall.

“I’ve been searching for such a space along with a vacant piece of land so that we can have events and now every



Artists Shazwan Jalil and Syamsul Addeno (left) painting the murals along the art gallery.

month we have a programme here, in collaboration with Think City, called Pagi-pagi Butterworth,” Hafidz said.

It may be called Pagi-pagi Butterworth but the event is a whole-day affair that starts at 9am and stretches on till 11pm at night. It is held at the vacant lot every second Sunday of the month and there’s busking by local performers, various performances, live music, handicraft and art stalls, food stalls and even a street library where you can sit down and read any of the books there free of charge. This is just the beginning as more programmes are being lined up; soon the art scene in Butterworth will be just as lively as the one on the island.

“Butterworth has a raw art scene that is slowly emerging out of the shadows. These are part of our efforts to encourage art expressions and uncover local talent,” said Think City Butterworth Programme Director Murali Ram.

He believes BFF has been an effective catalyst for the building up of a vibrant local art scene.

Think City is also currently identifying available spaces to be restored and converted into art and public spaces in Butterworth.

“

Butterworth has a raw art scene that is slowly emerging out of the shadows. These are part of our efforts to encourage art expressions and uncover local talent.

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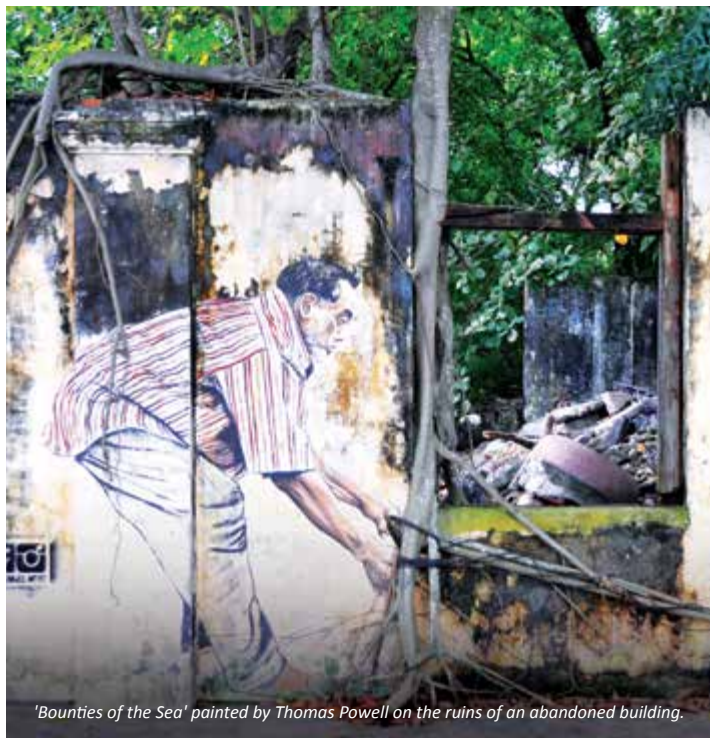
Murali Ram,
Butterworth Programme Director



A mural by Sabek along Jalan Raja Uda.



'Doorway to Penang' by Thomas Powell.



'Bounties of the Sea' painted by Thomas Powell on the ruins of an abandoned building.

PLACEMAKING **WAKING UP A SLEEPY TOWN**

Throughout 2016, Think City supported a number of initiatives to activate the sleepy town, ranging from markets to walks.

▶ **TEMPATAN FEST**

Local independent artists come together to showcase their talents through performances, art and design.



◀ **ROOTS ARTS FEST**

Roots Fest is a touring festival featuring young local creative entrepreneurs and local bands.

▶ **PASAR PERCUMA**

A free market at Masjid Abdul Kader in Butterworth where people exchange goods for free.



◀ **NIGHT ZUMBA**

Despite the heavy rain, the first Night Zumba event in Butterworth is attended by close to 500 people, including YDP Dato' Maimunah.





MY BEST BUY

An outdoor market selling fresh local produce from farmers on the outskirts of Butterworth.



BUTTERWORTH DISCOVERY WALK

A chance to discover the forgotten laneways, traditional houses and untold stories of the old town of Butterworth.



BUTTERWORTH FRINGE FESTIVAL

An annual festival of the arts, showcasing local and international performances, including film screenings, bazaars and exhibitions.





KUALA LUMPUR

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THE MAKING OF DOWNTOWN KUALA LUMPUR



Masjid Jamek, the oldest mosque in Kuala Lumpur.

Two years into setting up office in the capital city, the task of rejuvenating downtown KL is proving to be equal parts challenging and exciting. LEE JIA PING, Programme Director for Kuala Lumpur elaborates.



Going into the capital city was seen as a big challenge but we were up for it. As one of the fastest growing cities in the region with an expected population of 10 million by 2020¹ you can imagine the issues that a city of this scale grapples with on a daily basis.

VISION

There are multiple social and economic issues in downtown Kuala Lumpur (KL). Our baseline study in 2015 shows that there is low population density in the area and a large transient population comprising migrants, tourists and itinerants. Safety is a major concern, compounded by poorly lit spaces and limited police presence. There is also a growing number of homeless people making the city sidewalks and five-foot their home.

On the economic front, the shift of the local population to the suburbs has resulted in the decline of traditional trades and a reduction of night-time activity and this void has been filled with an influx of migrant-related business which has greatly reduced the diversity and appeal of the area.

Therefore, if downtown KL were to be rejuvenated, it would need a new vision. Our vision for downtown KL is to be:

¹ Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) Handbook by PEMANDU

A network of creative, inclusive and authentic spaces that resonates with Malaysians and visitors.

To achieve this vision, Think City will adopt a three-point strategy:

1. Build KL's Cultural and Creative District – by seeding and catalysing new spaces and the connections between them. These new spaces which comprise rejuvenated cultural assets or icons are targeted to attract a younger local and international audience, and given life by the cultural and creative class.
2. Establish and grow networks with others to develop, manage and sustain KL's Cultural and Creative District. To do this we will engage experts, new knowledge and methodologies. In this, our network of support with partners such as The Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Project for Public Spaces and Citi Foundation is crucial as we help disseminate and share knowledge and expertise with our strategic partners in City Hall and other city stakeholders.
3. Build the identity, spirit and soul of KL's Cultural and Creative District through engagement, co-investment and urban provocations.

To meet our vision, our work is divided into four general initiatives: Grants, Research Publications, Public Realm Improvements and Place Activation.

THINK CITY INITIATIVES IN KUALA LUMPUR



Our first priority: transforming downtown KL into a young, creative and energised area. For this to happen, we need to enhance the overall experience of the people who work and live there. It has to become not just a place but a desired destination – one that's exciting for locals, while attractive enough to draw international visitors. If this is to be achieved, the area needs to have more variety of offerings.

GRANTS

In 2016, we developed a two-pronged approach, targeting property owners and entrepreneurs. We advocated the value of restoration to property owners and encouraged them to re-imagine the use of their spaces.

At the same time, we reached out to entrepreneurs to be the next generation pioneers of the downtown area. Many of these young, enthusiastic and aspiring entrepreneurs appreciate heritage and want to reinvest into the heritage area.

We then brought both owners and entrepreneurs to APW Bangsar (one of Think City's grantees) to introduce a successful business and adaptive re-use model. (Full story on page 71)

Since then, we have had a number of enquiries and hope to turn these conversations into actual projects which will encourage other businesses to invest in the area.

RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

Kuala Lumpur is experiencing the death of many traditional trades. Unlike cities such as Penang or Melaka, with over five centuries of trade, commerce and culture – Kuala Lumpur is an infant by comparison having begun around 160 years ago as a mining and trading town. Over the last decade, a large number of residents and traditional trades have been replaced by new businesses catering solely to migrants and the lower income group.

While we want to introduce new types of economic activity into the area, we want to help preserve some of the old trades too as these are the intangible heritage of the area. To that end, a cultural mapping study was carried out in collaboration with International Islamic University Malaysia. The study researched the social, economic and physical factors and mapped it against the needs of current businesses.

“

We are currently engaging with all the traders to determine the best way forward in addressing issues of hygiene and sanitation, waste management, safety and security, pedestrian connectivity, accessibility and wayfinding.

”

The exercise revealed that much of the decline was caused by a combination of the lack of succession planning, the growth of suburbs and the drastic reduction of customers in the area. The businesses that continue to thrive are those who have evolved beyond the brick and mortar, expanding into e-commerce.

PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENT

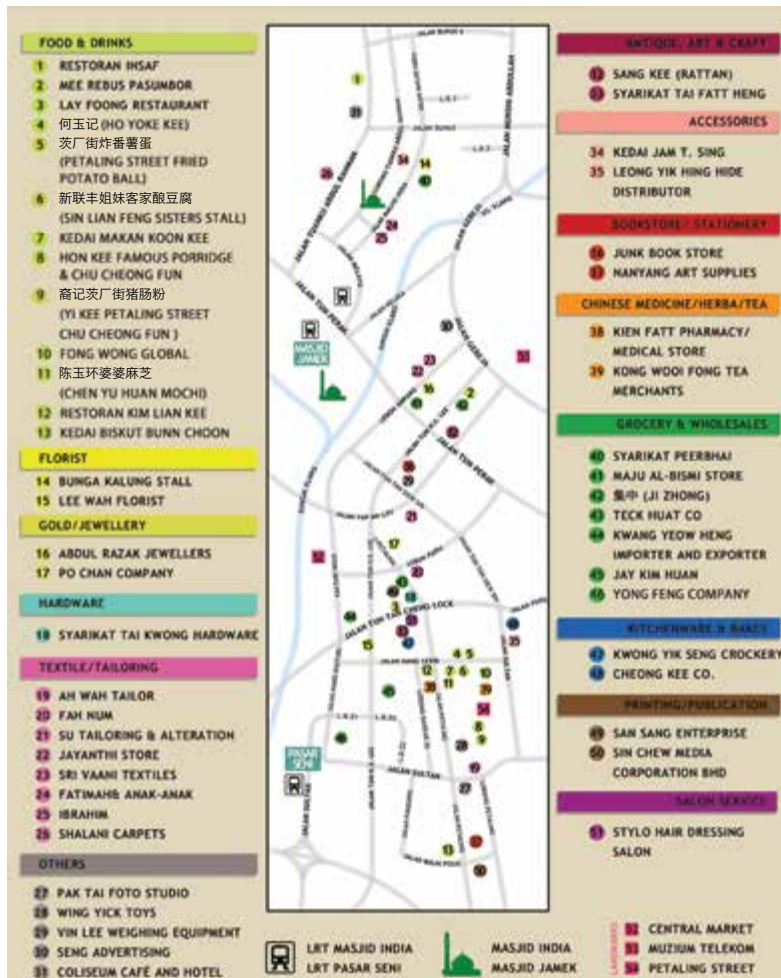
One of the recommendations from our baseline study was to address the issue of underutilised space. The KL

team has taken on the challenge to reimagine spaces such as back lanes and abandoned open spaces. To our delight, this exercise has uncovered a treasure trove filled with traders and food stalls that have been hidden to all but the local businesses and inhabitants. We are currently engaging with all the traders to determine the best way forward in addressing issues of hygiene and sanitation, waste management, safety and security, pedestrian connectivity, accessibility and wayfinding.

We also looked at redesigning three pocket parks in the Imbi area. Though the park land has been reinstated for development and the park rejuvenation was never realised, the engagement sessions and cultural learnings from this exercise were invaluable and helped us as we worked on our next project. (See full story on page 75)

The second park that we looked at was the Tun Perak Pocket Park, which is strategically located at the intersection of Jalan Tun Perak and Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman (Jalan TAR). This park marks the entrance to the renowned Jalan TAR shopping district and will complement the wider River of Life revitalisation initiative in the area.

The park designed by Seksan Design, will adopt a biophilic philosophy, where the importance of nature and the deep-seated need for humans to connect with it become the fundamental inspiration of the design. The park hopes to mimic a small jungle trail right in the heart of the city. In order to reduce cost and demonstrate an innovative build, Seksan Design decided not to demolish the existing wall fountain and pond, opting instead to build around it and reroute the water on the existing wall fountain into a meandering brook.



Cultural mapping of heritage trades and traditional businesses in downtown KL.



An artist impression of the design for the Tun Perak Pocket Park.

When completed, it is hoped that the park will become not just a place of respite for city dwellers but also a habitat for urban wildlife.

The design was approved by Datuk Bandar on 31 March 2017 and together with DBKL we conducted two on-site community engagement sessions. Construction of the park is underway with completion slated for early August in time for the SEA Games 2017.

PLACE ACTIVATION

For the last two years, Think City has collaborated with DBKL to curate festivals and events into Medan Pasar ranging from food fests to performances, shows and activities for avid cyclists.

In 2016, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Prasarana to turn a transit station into an arts and culture venue. Each week Masjid Jamek LRT station comes alive with performances

as part of the Arts On The Move programme. Since it began in June of last year it has received favourable feedback from commuters and support from the media.

However, we felt there could be more. To create a cultural and creative district, we piloted several programmes and launched a multi-use space that would build a new generation of audiences. The opening of RUANG By Think City has created a new level of activation with programmes packed into the calendar, driving people into downtown KL.

As the city is constantly changing and evolving, we need to monitor the changes in the social, economic and environmental fabric. We are hopeful that more Malaysians, especially millennials, will take a more active role in affecting change and carving out a space that they can call their own.



Power Up KL

Power Up KL is a vision document prepared by Think City in partnership with GDP Architects. It identifies a loss of identity and traditional economic functions, poor internal mobility and under-utilised cultural assets as key issues in the KL city centre. To address these, and to fulfill the vision for KL to become a world class city, three solution packages are proposed –

- Urban renewal and placemaking in traditional neighbourhoods (Energise)
- Connectivity and mobility investments (Connect) and
- the creation of a network of world class cultural and creative destinations (Create).

MAKING A MARK IN THE CAPITAL CITY

The past 18 months in Kuala Lumpur have been peppered with festivals to activate Medan Pasar, and ongoing engagement sessions with different communities in collaboration with DBKL and Citi Foundation.



◀ MALAM WAYANG AT MEDAN PASAR

A night of contemporary wayang kulit performed in Mandarin, followed by a modern Malay tale by Wayang Kulit Sri Warisan, attracting over 800 people, including families with young children.

▶ SAMA-SAMA FEST AT MEDAN PASAR

A food fest celebrating the diverse cuisines of the migrant communities was organised as part of Think City's efforts to engage with the diverse ethnic communities around downtown KL.



Photo credit: Badan Warisan

▶ THIS KUL CITY

A cooperative effort by Badan Warisan Malaysia, the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society and supported by Think City, This KUL City is a multi-dimensional programme of youth engagement, historical documentation and cultural mapping initiatives.

TAMAN TUGU STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Think City was enlisted by Khazanah Nasional to organise and carry out a number of engagement sessions with the community throughout the city to obtain input and feedback on the proposed plans for the Taman Tugu project.



ENTREPRENEURIAL MATCHING SESSIONS

Several entrepreneurial matching sessions were organised to introduce building owners to enterprises interested in setting up in downtown KL.

RIDE YOUR CITY IN MEDAN PASAR

A cycling fest organised by Freeform Sdn Bhd and supported by Think City, was held in Medan Pasar over a weekend. The event consisted of bicycle polo, stunts, competitions, performances and talks.



PEOPLE MAKE THE CITY



NORZAINI BINTI NORDIN, Deputy Director, Infrastructure Planning Department at Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL), shares her story of coming to the city decades ago and feeling like she didn't belong. Today, her vision includes creating a sense of belonging for everyone who enters the city.

I began working with City Hall about 22 years ago. There wasn't much when I first came, it was a very difficult city. I used to work in Jalan Sultan Ismail and there were loads of people taking the bus. In terms of public transport there was only the bus and the buses were horrible. I can only describe the experience as – “grumpy”. The people were “grumpy” and the city was “grumpy”. I thought, perhaps, I should be doing something about it, and that one way to do it would be to join the City Hall.

Over the years, I saw many changes to the city and today Kuala Lumpur can be compared to other major cities in the world. In some cases we are better, in some, we are not, but we have seen improvements and I hope I helped make these improvements.

One of the biggest issues that the city faces is that people come into the city to work, but then they leave after business hours and the city is empty. There's no sense of belonging at night and KL becomes soulless. If this is left to prolong, the city will be in a bad state – dirty, vandalised, and could even encourage all sorts of vice to occur. We realised at City Hall that it was important to get people to come back into the city.

And so the journey began. 22 years ago, looking at public spaces, people were saying that we had to follow in the footsteps of the Europeans with their piazzas and open spaces and we heeded that advice to a certain extent. But we found that this wasn't suitable for our weather – it was (still is) just too hot. We corrected this by planting lots of trees. So we continue to learn from the experts from all around the world, but now, we adopt knowledge in a smarter way.

We have little pockets of spaces, larger trees, seating areas, and you can find them in lots of places in the city. We are now working towards that green city that we've always wanted. I'm quite proud of that. We also experimented with lights. We put lights on trees, on buildings, in the middle of the road. The Sultan Abdul Samad building is one of our experiments and as a result it has brought traffic into that part of the city.

Once, we experimented with food trucks, hosting a foodie festival in Dataran Merdeka. It created a mess with the traffic but there was a lot of response, which means that people respond to events such as these – and it made me realise that people make the city.

PEOPLE MAKE THE CITY

As things progressed, more and more people began living within the city. But another problem surfaced – they had no place to go for recreation and nowhere to take their families. So we realised that if we don't create events and opportunities for them to make memories in the city – they will not have a sense of belonging or develop community spirit. Without a sense of belonging or community spirit, children will grow up, travel, study elsewhere, work elsewhere.

And that's an important aspect to consider as well, that we do not lose our best talent to other cities. If they have a bigger sense of belonging in KL, then they will come back to their 'kampung'. We wanted the heart of the city – the inner city – to be for families and communities. That's why we started with these placemaking activities. We want the community spirit to live in KL,

and I'm starting to see the community respond.

COMMUNITY BUILDING AND ASSETS

Communities intrigue me. I am originally from Penang. When we were much younger, living in Penang, we didn't see people as different. You could be any race, from any part of the world; when I was growing up, we were one. When I graduated from university and got a job in KL, I noticed that the city was just a workplace. Your neighbour was not important. It was very different from the way things were in Penang, where we were able to eat together and we didn't care about people's origins. When I had children of my own, I realised this was something I didn't want for them. I wanted a city life where people felt that they were equal.

Fortunately, this is also something that the community wants. During the last few years, instead of us initiating community-building – people actually came to us. That was a surprise. And they are not people from the lower-end of society, they are educated and affluent but they just want to make the city their own, and they wanted to help by offering their time, planting trees, sponsoring or giving away certain things, repainting – just to contribute to the city.

So as an asset, we have this group of willing citizens, and what we did was we combined them with people from different levels of society to work on projects together, such as community gardening, and it was a success. This has become a strategy for us – engaging communities with activities like greening, recycling projects – just bringing people together

without barriers. It was good for the more affluent people to know what the people on the other end of the spectrum were like.

CULTURAL MAPPING AND MIGRANT COMMUNITIES

We did some work on cultural mapping in Bukit Bintang and what we saw was a whole lot of people making themselves a community. Many people live there – older members of society who have been living there for decades. They don't see the growth as something negative or hindering them from living peacefully. They have over the years adapted to whatever changes have occurred.

There's actually a very strong community there. We went to the back end where there were no hotels or trendy restaurants – just people living in flats behind Jalan Imbi and it was a very peaceful place. We saw young and old, and different races all mingling amongst themselves. It was a lesson to us and we realised, "Okay, so this life still exists."

“Once, we experimented with food trucks, hosting a foodie festival in Dataran Merdeka. It created a mess with the traffic but there was a lot of response, which means that people respond to events such as these – and it made me realise that people make the city.

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What we decided to do then was just cleaning up, looking at the infrastructure, road surfaces and pavements. And we tried not to make too much of a change. There was no need to gentrify the area as there was a strong community and businesses were thriving there. And I believe this is the way to develop a city – not to take things away from the communities, but to build according to need.

On the City Hall side, we've become better listeners than what we used to be. And if there are things that need changing, we would negotiate and try to meet people halfway. I've enjoyed seeing that change in City Hall, and I think it will only improve.

As for migrant communities, as long as we need them, and invite them into our country, we need to provide for them. And so we need to integrate them, to make them feel at home. There's still work to do. We are still trying to see if there are places we can carve out for them to feel at home.

We have to make our presence felt, so that things don't get out of hand, but we need to make them feel at home because we need them. I do not know whether there are people who don't accept them but I think we should provide for them as long as they are here.

THE FUTURE IS BIG ON WALKING

What I'm excited about is getting people walking. It's actually quite safe to walk. Of course, you have to be smart enough to avoid the small back alleys but it's generally very safe.

We've made efforts for landscaping and there are some covered walkways, and I love it when you're able to go from one building to another with bridges and connected walkways. Sometimes you can jump onto the LRT and get back into walking to get to your destination. That's what we're working on and planning for. We're working on using the river as a wayfinder and a means of connectivity.

We call it 'City in a Park' – connecting the different parts of KL with walkable

green belts. Now once you think of the city as one big park, you've got to have pavements for walking and for bicycles also. We also plan to have storyboards placed around the city so that people can discover a little bit about that particular part of KL, and you have to explore to read the whole story.

We're changing the experience. We're providing shady trees, landscaping, benches to rest, and giving the journey a sense of exploration with the storyboards. It's similar to what you do when you travel overseas.

The experience has got to change and so we are very busy creating that experience within and even without. From the LRT station to your house for example – it could be one kilometre away, but if you can walk through some shops and pass a pocket park or two along the way – the journey can seem a lot shorter and a lot more enjoyable.

We're doing everything we can to make the city experience more enjoyable.



DBKL has consistently been programming events in Dataran Merdeka and the street facing the Sultan Abdul Samad building.



Dikit Barat Arjunasukma has performed the popular Kelantanese art form several times for AOTM, consistently drawing crowds and audience participation each time.

Every day hundreds of thousands of commuters travel by car, bus and train to the different parts of Kuala Lumpur and beyond for work, study and play. In bringing arts to the people, Think City, in partnership with Prasarana Malaysia Berhad, plans not only to foster an appreciation for the arts, but also to provide some reprieve for the weary city-dweller. As one of the busiest stations in KL, the Masjid Jamek LRT station was an ideal starting point.

“Arts On The Move came about because of the work that Think City does in the core Masjid Jamek area. We have been programming a number of activities in Medan Pasar, and also doing some work on Lebu Ampang,” said Susie Kukathas, Project Consultant for Think City.

“The idea was to capture the people using the train station, which make up a large number, and to programme some activities that they would enjoy.”

Think City had approached Prasarana about the idea and it so happened that a similar thought happened to be brewing.

“Prasarana had been thinking about a programme along the same lines, of events and activities occurring in their stations. However, they were grappling with a way to create a sustainable programme for the long term. So we proposed a plan and struck up a collaboration with them,” Susie said.

A DIVERSE PERFORMANCE PROGRAMME

The next step was to programme the performances for the station. Masjid Jamek station acts as a hub with two train lines converging and over 200,000 riders daily, making it the third most-used station in Kuala Lumpur. The challenge in curating shows was in determining who the target audience would be.

ARTS ON THE MOVE (AOTM)

Arts On The Move is an ongoing initiative in partnership with Prasarana Malaysia aimed at bringing visual and performing arts to Kuala Lumpur’s rail transport stations. Project Consultant, **SUSIE KUKATHAS**, tells us why this is important.



Susie explained, “I tried to look at the diversity of people moving through the station as an opportunity and not a challenge. It broadened my selection process and so I chose things that would appeal to young and old.”

“We’ve had traditional dikir barat from Kelantan, modern jazz, songs from Western musicals, dance performances by the Aswara Dance Company, traditional Indian sitar music, Chinese drum performances by Hands Percussion, and many more.”

BRINGING ART TO ORDINARY SPACES

Apart from performances, the programme also included reinventing the mood and atmosphere of the uniform spaces within the train station.

“In the Masjid Jamek station itself, there’s a tunnel, a rather dull stretch

and we wanted to break the monotony of that uninteresting space to make it more friendly, to give commuters something interesting to look at while they were passing through.

“We decided to curate photography and other visual arts for that space, starting with showcasing the work of five artists from the *Love Me In My Batik* exhibition, which showed at the Ilham Gallery. We had a photography exhibition by Studio DL called *Resonance*, depicting scenes and elements of daily life from around the Masjid Jamek area, including kopitiams and little stall owners, juxtaposed with images of dancers from Aswara.

“We hope that people will take time out of their busy schedules to enjoy the art and that it refreshes them a little in their day-to-day commute,” Susie added.

FREE FOR ALL

One key aspect of Arts On The Move is that no tickets are required for watching the shows, and for Susie this is important especially from a point of creating greater access to the arts.

“All performances are free and for a token of 80 sen, anyone can get into the station and watch a performance. Many people can’t afford to go into a theatre or venue to watch the kinds of shows we are bringing into the station and it’s been interesting to see faces light up.”

“I’ve met many people who say that the performances have given them a bit of reprieve to forget about work or study stress.”



Nyoba Kan, a contemporary Japanese-style dance group.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE ARTS COMMUNITY

According to Susie, the programme has also generated interest in the different artists and acts taking place.

“We’ve had quite a few events organisers stop and ask people to perform at their events, so it’s been a great avenue for our performers to reach out to new audiences and to get other work as well,” Susie added. For guitarist Az Samad, who has played numerous times at AOTM, the experience has been eye-opening.

He told The Star, “I’m used to intimate venues and concert settings. But I have to say playing at Arts On The Move has been a positive experience. You’re practically playing during peak hour human traffic. People are on the way home. So do they want to stop and listen? You’d be very surprised. A lot of people do stay for a few songs and some even sit on the stairs for the entire performance.”

EXTENDING THE PROGRAMME

What’s next for Arts On The Move?

As the benefits are obvious based on the feedback and popularity of the shows at the Masjid Jamek station, plans to expand the programme are a natural progression.

“I believe that Rapid KL is keen on replicating this project in other stations. For 2017, we’ve extended AOTM for another year increasing the programme to twice a week,” said Susie.



Classical violin virtuoso, Jae Sern.



Two Tablas by Prakash Kandasamy.

“

All performances are free and for a token of 80 sen, anyone can get into the station and watch a performance. Many people can’t afford to go into a theatre or venue to watch the kinds of shows we were bringing into the station and it’s been interesting to see faces light up.

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Arts On The Move brings performances to the Masjid Jamek LRT Station every Tuesday and Thursday from 5pm-7pm while visual arts exhibitions are ongoing.

To see what’s on, visit [fb.com/mythinkcity](https://www.facebook.com/mythinkcity)



A typical AOTM monthly calendar of performances.

FROM SPACES TO PLACES **RUANG BY THINK CITY**



Entrance to RUANG By Think City.

Located in a storied downtown building, RUANG By Think City, a new multipurpose space, offers the community an avenue for activities and bonding in the heart of Kuala Lumpur.

RUANG By Think City was opened in September 2016 to offer space for community activation and outreach efforts in downtown Kuala Lumpur (KL). The concept fulfills several tenets of Think City's urban rejuvenation plan for KL: firstly to adapt heritage buildings for new and relevant purposes, secondly to create vibrancy in downtown KL and thirdly to give the community a space for recreation, activities and bonding.

There was another reason that sparked the creation of RUANG.

"The genesis of RUANG came about when we realised that we needed an outpost in our core area of downtown KL. We were spending a lot of time there without having a place to check in or base ourselves, and it was becoming a challenge," said Lee Jia Ping, KL Programme Director.

"Through our many rounds of grants, we've also seen many requests for a space in the area for activities such as workshops, performances and rehearsals, but we were unable to help because there was no such space in the area.

"We came to realise that there was a real need for a multi-use space and all these factors led us to embark on a search in downtown KL."

“

The architect, Arthur Oakley Coltman from the firm Booty, Edwards and Partners, had also designed the Oriental Building, the Odeon Cinema, the Lee Rubber Building and the Rubber Research Institute of Malaya, so he had a rather pivotal role in shaping the architectural landscape of Kuala Lumpur.

”

THE OCBC BUILDING

It was by serendipity that Think City discovered the space that now houses RUANG in the historic OCBC building on Jalan Hang Kasturi.

“Freeform Sdn Bhd, an events and cultural curator had leased the whole building and were looking for a tenant to complement their programmes and

events,” said Jia Ping. “We got in touch and were able to negotiate a lease for the space.”

Formerly the headquarters of the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation, the building was designed by British architect Arthur Oakley Coltman in 1937.

Jia Ping said, “The building used to be a bank and today, you can still see the vault that was used in its previous life. The architect, Arthur Oakley Coltman from the firm Booty, Edwards and Partners, had also designed the Oriental Building, the Odeon Cinema, the Lee Rubber Building and the Rubber Research Institute of Malaya, so he had a rather pivotal role in shaping the architectural landscape of Kuala Lumpur.

“RUANG’s location within this building is therefore ideal as it demonstrates creative use of a space with minimal intervention.”

Internal Restoration

Having secured a lease, one of Think City’s chief priorities was to look at ways to redesign the space with as little budget as possible.

“We pilot a lot of new initiatives, so we have to be prudent and discerning in our spending,” Jia Ping emphasised.

“With that thought, we looked around for like-minded partners and Nippon came forth with the paint that we needed. Khind, a home appliance provider, also came on board with some electric fans for us through their Starfish Foundation. It was heartening to see corporates and private organisations come forth with support for our endeavour,” she said.

The space was kept flexible and versatile, in particular with furniture, exhibition panels and other mobile fixtures.



Exodus by Deja Vu, a non-profit international exhibition by Visioncy.

“We’ve pretty much respected the existing space. We were told by the main tenant of the building that we could not alter the existing flooring. However, the carpets had been removed and there were exposed holes in the floor, so we simply patched the floor with concrete. And the finished patchwork effect now adds character to the space.”

GENERATING INTEREST IN DOWNTOWN KUALA LUMPUR

“We wanted to demonstrate with RUANG that people will come if there is a space available for activities to be held,” said Jia Ping.

She added, “We sponsor events or activities in the area or collaborate with those who need space for their activities. There seems to be a renewed interest in the area and so far we’ve

had many diverse groups at RUANG, which proves there is a need for a multipurpose space here in the heritage quarter.”

RECEPTION

Since its launch, RUANG has garnered interest from embassies to NGOs, and diverse industries from wellness to the film industry, theatre and even architecture. A variety of community-driven events have been held there including an indoor pop-up park, and a photography exhibition by children, as well as a film workshop.

With more people visiting RUANG, Think City hopes to actively encourage more commercial and lifestyle businesses in the heritage quarter, giving city dwellers and visitors a reason to stay in the city centre.

“That’s the end goal of many of our initiatives – to create lively cities with commercial opportunities that are liveable, sustainable, inclusive, and rich in heritage – and RUANG is a step in that direction,” said Jia Ping.

“

We wanted to demonstrate with RUANG that people will come if there is a space available for activities to be held.

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Dance performance and demonstration by Mahavidya Dance Theatre.



Galeri Diraja Sultan Abdul Aziz.

REVIVING KLANG A COMMUNITY-LED EFFORT

When the Klang Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCCI) approached Think City, they had but one burning priority – to unlock the full potential of the historic and royal township of Klang.

It all began in late 2015 when Dr. Chia Song Kun, Advisor to the KCCCI Presidential Council, heard Think City's Executive Director, Hamdan Abdul Majeed, speaking about urban rejuvenation at an event. The occasion proved to be fortuitous and in collaboration with Think City, the KCCCI then created the Klang City Rejuvenation (KCR) team with the mandate to bring more vibrancy and opportunities for Klang.

"We had heard of urban rejuvenation but we never knew that there were dedicated movements behind renewing urban spaces, let alone the sheer amount of work that goes into it," said Ter Leong Leng, Chairman of the Working KCR Committee and Secretary General of KCCCI.

"We've noticed that there are many areas in Klang that are in a state of decline but present opportunities and we see great potential in the township. We therefore want to encourage everyone to play a role in optimising all our assets."

KCCCI approached Think City to learn more about what could be done to rejuvenate the financial and heritage districts that lay on both sides of the Klang River.

Klang's residents initiate a community-led effort to rejuvenate the historic township in collaboration with Think City.



Band performance by students from Kwang Hua High School.

COMPLEMENTING SKILLSETS

“Working with Think City really illustrated the importance of involving as many different voices and skills in this project. KCCCI does not want to be the sole owner of this effort nor do we have all the knowledge and resources to take on this mission by ourselves,” said Ter.

As a result, the formation of the KCR team included the vital participation of the Klang Municipal Council and many businesses in the community with several coming on board as corporate partners by sponsoring the project.

Other partners in the KCR team include the Klang Indian Chamber of Commerce and the Dewan Perniagaan Melayu Malaysia Selangor.

Think City plays an advisory role to the KCR, providing knowledge and expertise. In early 2017, a baseline study was done to determine the existing facilities and gaps in the focus areas of Klang.

“The uniqueness of the KCR project is that we have invited professionals from all fields and representatives from associations and bodies in Klang

to participate by carrying out the in-depth study,” said Datuk Lim Kuang Sia, president of KCCCI, at a press conference announcing the project.

“The baseline study is an important first step to the rejuvenation of Klang town and will help us make informed decisions as we work towards promoting the protection and development of living heritage, culture and architecture as well as contribute towards the promotion of Klang as one of the tourist hotspots in Malaysia,” Ter added.

Once data has been collected, an action plan will be designed together with further community engagement to gauge the needs of the community working and living there.

Following Think City’s practice, the KCR team signed an agreement with the Council for the project. Led by the Mayor, the local council has been invaluable in providing data and key maps to aid KCR’s work.

“Klang is definitely an interesting project for us,” said Hui Wai Chung, Programme Executive. “One of the reasons is that it

is completely community-led, seeing as they were the ones who approached us, and this is very rare.”

A key factor that will bring success and sustainability is the dedication and dynamism of the KCR core team. They have made this a tremendously rewarding collaboration for Think City and will be a model for future community-led rejuvenation programmes.

“

Working with Think City really illustrated the importance of involving as many different voices and skills in this project. KCCCI does not want to be the sole owner of this effort nor do we have all the knowledge and resources to take on this mission by ourselves.

”

Ter Leong Leng,
Chairman
of Working
Klang City
Rejuvenation
Committee





ADAPTIVE REUSE APW AND OUR ARTPROJECTS

APW

Art Printing Works (APW) was originally a print factory that opened in 1965, now repurposed to include co-working spaces, chic cafes and an events space. Business had slowed for the print factory and the space had begun to deteriorate. Ee Soon Wei, who inherited the business started by his grandfather, said that the repurposing of the space was a natural evolution.

“The space has always been somewhat personal to me, as my dad would bring me to work on weekends when I was a child. The idea for APW came about quite naturally as I had this personal connection. Because the printing business was not growing, we looked at adapting the space for other purposes,” Soon Wei said.

Creative and Collaborative Spaces

Since taking over the business in 2013, Soon Wei has transformed the commercial printing factory and converted it into a creative campus by programming a mix of co-working spaces, trendy eateries and an events platform, built around the still active printing presses.

“We began receiving a lot of foot traffic and people seemed curious about the warehouse and printing presses, asking if they could hold events there,” Soon Wei explained.

The repurposing of old buildings and spaces helps to maintain a sustainable city and retain its heritage. Think City has supported several projects, creating thriving examples of adaptive reuse.

“We took the risk and opportunity to explore this further and created a flexible event space and a collaborative workspace called Uppercase on the first floor,” he added.

For APW, adaptive reuse has proven to be a sustainable solution that makes business sense with revenue from a combination of its printing business, and rentals from fixed tenants and event space hires.

Most of the building’s original form and structure has also been retained whilst incorporating amenities such as air conditioning and new lighting grids.

A Pocket Park

“During the rejuvenation period of APW, we noticed that a lot of the external spaces were poorly utilised and zoned for storage and dumping grounds. While activation at internal spaces were picking up, a thought came to mind about caring for the external spaces as well,” Soon Wei said.

He prepared a paper entitled ‘Projek Poket Pokok – Creating a Pocket Park within a Repurposed Heritage Printing Factory’ and presented it to Think City.

Think City then provided a RM190,000 grant for the greening project, enabling Soon Wei to hire POW Ideas, an architectural design firm, to create a pocket park, adding shady trees, terraces where families could sit together, and public toilets. The space also features a bright red stage that can be used for events, exhibitions and performances.

The park was opened in August 2016 and proved to be a hit, drawing hundreds of people when APW hosted Malaysia Day celebrations a month later.

With the experience that the APW team has garnered from the heritage repurposing exercise, Soon Wei plans to spread his wings, looking at potential expansion within Klang Valley and Southeast Asia.

OUR ARTPROJECTS @ ZHONGSHAN

Located at 80 Jalan Rotan off Jalan Kampung Attap, the 1950s building comprises three interconnected shophouses divided into 12 units. In the past, it provided small entrepreneurs the opportunity to plant and grow their businesses and was home to the Selangor Zhongshan Association. However, it had fallen into disrepair in later years.

“We wanted to continue the same spirit of entrepreneurship that led to this building being erected in the first place,” says Liza Ho, one of the OUR ArtProjects directors behind the restoration project.

“It’s an exciting project as the entire building will be a centre for art, design and research,” said Snow Ng, the other half of OUR ArtProjects.

Galvanising the Creative Arts Community

Leveraging on the strength of their extensive experience and networks in the Asia Pacific, the duo aim to introduce Malaysian and Southeast Asian art to a global audience and use the OUR ArtProjects Gallery as a platform for dialogue and ideas exchange with the arts communities in the region.

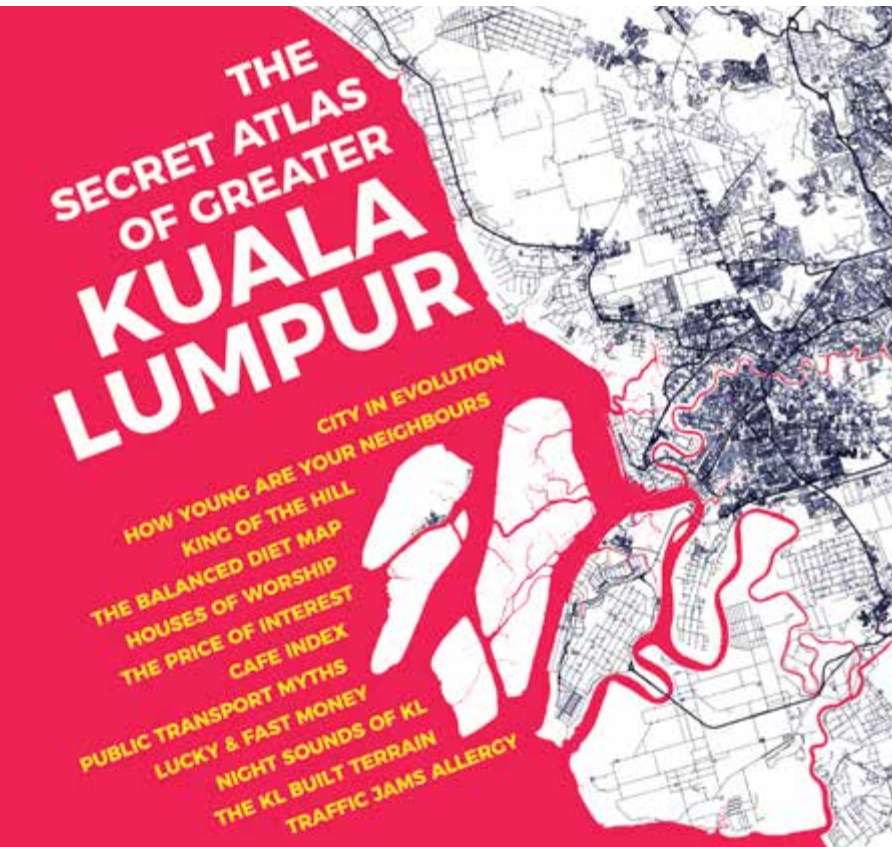
“We wanted to create a space with a sense of community within Kuala Lumpur and hope that the rejuvenated building will be a hub for social enterprises, start-ups, and art/culture institutions,” Liza said.

Recognising the projects’s potential to spur the rejuvenation of Kampung Attap, Think City approved two grants for the project. The first for restoration, repair and renovation works, while the second was for one of the lots to be converted into a space for art events, exhibitions, talks and workshops.

Think City also provided technical input and advice on city planning requirements, which included facilitating discussions between the owner and tenants to smoothen the process of launching the project.

The building has attracted young and creative enterprises such as the Malaysian Design Archive, The Ricecooker Archives, Tandang Store, Bogus Merchandise, Artist Studio, Reading Library by Amateur Collective and several others. So far, the tenants have expressed satisfaction and excitement with the concept, and having a place to call their own.

“There is a lot of coolness about this shophouse ... so much fresh energy coming from the art community and the design activists,” says Alak, co-owner of Tandang Store, a record store company with its own music label — Tandang Records.



THE SECRET ATLAS OF GREATER KUALA LUMPUR

HOW DID THE BOOK COME ABOUT?

Originally, Think City was looking for us to investigate the patterns and behavioural traits of KL-ites. The end result they were looking for was — what makes Kuala Lumpur (KL) unique from other cities in the region and globally.

While they found the data that we curate to be very useful in understanding our city, they felt the way we were presenting the information was borderline boring and suggested that we take on the challenge of communicating the information in a more digestible manner and reach out to a wider audience. Information is important for our city but futile if not understood. So, the book was a graphically more pleasing by-product of the original investigation.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR FINDINGS AND HOW THESE CAN BE USED TO IMPROVE THE CITY.

The findings, especially the ‘not in my backyard’ sensitivities, reflect the prevalent car culture of KL and how our experience of the city is both limited and enhanced by this reliance on the private vehicle. Think City is in the business of building communities and rejuvenating the city. By understanding the current behaviour of its people, Think City can better strategise how to build this sense of community amongst KL people.

A project investigating the patterns and behavioural traits of Kuala Lumpur and its citizens culminated in a coffee table book, graphically representing the city and its quirks. We speak to CHA-LY KOH, CEO at Propertypricetag.com and author of *The Secret Atlas of Greater Kuala Lumpur*.





By examining such correlations and relationships, we view our city from a different perspective and gain insights into the underlying currents that move property markets, as well as the people it hosts.



WHAT DID YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE WITH THIS SHARED KNOWLEDGE?

I believe that authorities and citizens can no longer deny technology's power in affecting how we live in our city. Defaulting to "this is the standard way" is no longer acceptable. Our mission is two-fold: to enable better city planning by movers and shakers who shape our cities, and to empower individual citizens with information, allowing them to influence how their city is being shaped, if not politically, then economically.

WHAT CAN WE FIND IN THE BOOK?

In the book, we attempt to understand the people of Greater Kuala Lumpur and their quirky behaviours through the lens of data.

Ever notice the mushrooming cafes in your neighbourhood and wonder who actually buys these RM10 lattes? The number of cafes, it turns out, has a positive correlation to property prices in the surrounding area. Neighbourhoods with a high number of cafes are also neighbourhoods where property prices are most likely to rise.

By examining such correlations and relationships, we view our city from a different perspective and gain insights into the underlying currents that move property markets, as well as the people it hosts.

HOW CAN DIFFERENT URBAN COMMUNITIES USE THE INFORMATION IN THE BOOK?

The information in the book is useful to anyone from small business owners to individual citizens who plan to buy a home or simply understand their neighbourhoods better. A small business owner of an ice cream store, for example, might be looking to strategise the opening of her next outlet and would need insights on the age and income of various areas while an individual home buyer might be curious to know how the LRT or MRT station near his home is affecting his property value. More importantly, we can observe how much the city has evolved over the years and how our neighbourhoods too have changed.

WHAT WAS THE PROCESS OF CREATING THE BOOK LIKE AND WERE THERE ANY INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS THAT YOU DISCOVERED ON THE JOURNEY?

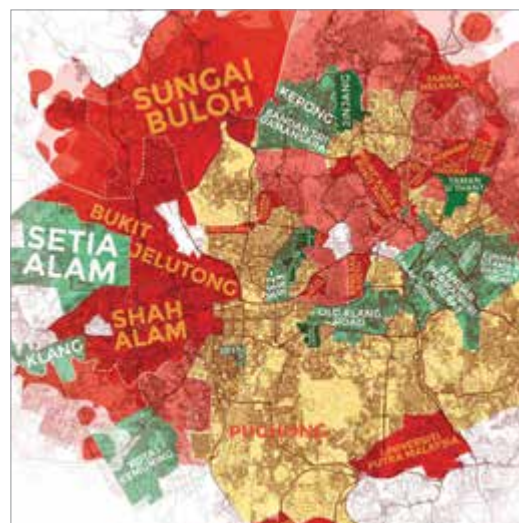
The data used for the book was taken from Propertypricetag's live database. That part was relatively easy because we continuously work on the data daily.

The challenge was really to pinpoint the right graphical approach to represent the data. The radial histogram, for example, is really created by us to communicate the idea of distance from a point of interest and using our sensitivity to the density of colours (think Monet) to show large amounts of information, intuitively. It was fun but a highly painful process as well.

ARE THERE PROJECTS BREWING OF A SIMILAR VEIN FOR THE FUTURE?

We have a lot more data that is yet to be explored and many curious topics we hope to get a data perspective on. But more immediately, we hope another key stakeholder will sponsor the structuring of Secret Atlas for other cities in Malaysia such as Johor Bahru, so that we can understand different communities a little more, and hopefully find some quirky behaviour that connects us all together as Malaysians.

The Secret Atlas of Greater Kuala Lumpur is available in major bookstores.



- Mostly halal food
- More halal food
- Neutral
- More non-halal food
- Mostly non-halal food

The Balanced Diet Map depicts the distribution of halal and non-halal food in Greater KL.



KL Programme Director Lee Jia Ping briefing DBKL Executive Director (Planning) Dato' Hj. Mohd Najib Bin Hj. Mohd on the Signature Parks Programme during the community engagement session.

PARKS FOR THE PEOPLE **BUILDING COMMUNITY TIES**

When Think City approached Adela Askandar to redesign a pocket park in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, she was enthused because prior to that moment, most of the work at Studio Bikin had been residential and commercial. Supported by the Citi Foundation, the project was one of the first public spaces she would work on.

"We were approached by Think City to be a part of the Signature Parks Programme in 2015, looking at three pocket parks owned by Kuala Lumpur City Council (DBKL). Although this project never came to fruition, the process of designing the parks, was an interesting experience and we learnt a lot about working with communities and building local ownership," Adela said.

Located in a very urban area, the parks that had been identified were in desperate need of repair and rejuvenation.

"Cities are often harsh environments to live in, and so a park would provide some relief for city inhabitants. In that particular area, there was nothing to offer residents any reprieve and the existing parks were badly maintained. Something had to be done to reactivate the community's involvement with the parks," she added.

Another point of note was that most of the residents were immigrants.

"Many of them don't feel welcome even though they probably need this space the most. It's likely they work in horrible conditions all day and then go back to their tiny homes, sharing a room with five or six other people, and they have no privacy," said Adela.

Parks play a vital role in the city, providing respite and recreational space for busy city dwellers. Think City identified three neglected parks and engaged three architecture firms to design the revival of these parks. The parks were subsequently reinstated for development. **ADELA ASKANDAR** of Studio Bikin, tells us about discovering inner city communities and bringing them closer to nature.



Community members giving feedback on designs during the community engagement session.

She added, “The park would be able to offer a safe space for recreation, meditation, an alternative place to eat a meal, or just a place where you can sit surrounded by nature. This is something that’s psychologically important for the migrant workers as well as the local residents.”

PROFILING THE PARK: A STUDY OF CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

Think City had previously conducted studies in the area, mapping out the target users of the parks, and the issues. There was a lot of tension between the local businesses and the immigrants, who hailed from many parts of the world but mainly from Bangladesh, Nepal and Indonesia.

“There wasn’t a lot of communication between the businesses and the migrant communities. Engaging them as a whole would have been a challenge,” she said. “Another issue was safety. There was danger of encroachment from traffic and other unhealthy elements of the

urban environment. The key users of the parks include elderly Chinese folk, tourists and immigrant families. So it was clear to us that residents had to take ownership of the parks in order to keep them alive.”

That said, Adela soon realised that the parks had great potential, not just for immediate inhabitants, but also for visitors to the city centre, as they were in the vicinity of major attractions.

COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

To understand the community's needs better, Think City with the support of DBKL, organised engagement sessions to meet and explain the project to residents, and to get their feedback.

“After the initial community and stakeholder sessions, we found that people were open to the idea of the revamped parks and we even saw the locals mingling with the migrant communities. We expected that there may have been different communities

wanting to use the space for different things, and that they may even fight for use of the space. But, the feedback was very positive because everyone seemed to accept that the park was for all to share,” Adela said.

The next step would have been to engage the residents to take ownership of the spaces, ensuring that they are well-used. “DBKL also informed us about unhealthy activities such as drug abuse occurring in the park, and residents therefore don’t feel as safe as they should, so that would have been another thing to consider.”

THE DESIGN APPROACH

After mapping out the nature of the architecture and the urban fabric surrounding the parks, Studio Bikin invited two other design companies, Studio Karya and Mentah Matter, to imagine the rejuvenation of these parks, taking into account the current demographics and issues surrounding them.

PARK A - THE TABLESCAPE

Profile: Due to the nearby soup kitchen for the homeless and a hawker centre, food and eating is a big part of this park's function. Mentah Matter conceptually designed a tablescape with moveable tables and chairs, and extended the design to include the existing bus stop. The park also faces the TRX building, so an open plaza had to be designed to absorb the traffic coming from that direction.

Point of interest: The benches and tables would have had to be designed so that people could eat there comfortably but not turn it into a permanent campsite. Bright, unbreakable lights were required as drug users tended to throw stones to destroy the lights at night.

Challenges: Super tough and versatile materials would have had to be sourced including vandal-proof lighting and seating.



PARK B - UNITREE

Profile: Although a well-used park, half of the playground equipment is broken and the space poorly lit. Many migrant families don't feel welcome so they only come out to play with their children at night. Existing vegetation such as the trees are in good condition.

Point of interest: Studio Bikin wanted to create a recreational park with elements of playfulness and exploration, with a lot of greenery. Children became the main focus of the design in the hopes that they would act as icebreakers to start conversations between business owners and the migrant families.

Challenges: With children as the main focus, safety and security is an issue. The space is also where drug users congregate late at night, creating an environment unsuitable for children. The design placed existing trees to form a natural ring with a lightweight steel-ring enclosure and open plaza in the middle. There were gates that could be locked at night for security purposes by community leaders. They could then take ownership of what activities or programming could happen there.



PARK C - PARK AND PLAY

Profile: The immediate area for Park C is mostly residential with some low-key businesses at a cul-de-sac. An open parking lot, a shed owned by Alam Flora, and a fruit seller with a stall are part of the perimeter.

Point of interest: A group of, urban skateboarders and graffiti-artists called District use the park to practise their skateboarding skills in a safe place. Studio Karya came up with the concept of a safe yet appealing space for urban sporting activities.

Challenges: The aim was to provide a destination and a safe space for young people who could easily get there by public transport. The challenge for Park and Play was to lift the ground plane into various asymmetrical levels. First, to house the fruit stall, so that the owner could spill out along the side street. Next, to incorporate more activities such as a little library or a small cafe. The hope was that the park would be used for healthier activities, and that businesses in the vicinity would get more traffic and visibility.



Park C.

PEOPLE CAN REVIVE THE CITY

For the city to revive itself, Adela realised that people needed to participate.

“People need to take part in the revival. What’s required is full on-ground communication with the local communities because you need them to know what is happening in projects such as these, and to engage them.

“But that’s the interesting part – the life of the parks when you actually get to build them and how the various communities interact with it.”

However Adela states that projects like these have to be seen through in order to gauge success.

“I think you have to believe in a project like this in order to go ahead with it, and to see what happens because different cities have different contexts, different issues. Until you try it out as sort of a ‘beta’ for pocket parks, you’ll never know. You can plan it and detail it out to death, but until you build it, let it run its course, and let the community take charge of it, you’ll never know whether it will be a successful project or not.”



JOHOR BAHRU

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JOHOR BAHRU A CITY BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE



The Sultan Ibrahim building at Bukit Timbalan, one of Johor Bahru's historical landmarks.

The Johor Bahru Transformation Plan was introduced to address an unexpected decline in the southern state capital's prosperity and popularity. Today, its positive effects can be seen and felt.

Six years ago, the fate of Johor Bahru (JB) took a turn. For decades, the city had enjoyed popularity and economic prosperity as the bustling capital of the south, owing to its strategic location and the sheer amount of traffic between Singapore and the Peninsula.

However, the once prosperous city experienced a hit when in 2010, the State Administrative Centre was moved to Nusajaya and the Lumba Kuda Flats were demolished to make way for the new Customs, Immigration & Quarantine (CIQ) complex. The population in the area nosedived and travellers bypassed the city altogether. The drop in visitors caused traders to move to greener pastures, leading to the decline of the old city centre.

Realising the need for a new strategy to address the issue, the Johor Bahru Transformation Plan (JBTP) was introduced by the Johor State Government, the Johor Bahru City Council (MBJB) and the Iskandar Regional Development Authority (IRDA).

According to Tuan Haji A. Rahim Nin, the mayor of JB, although the plan was focused on a relatively small area, it was particularly complex and required a two-phase schedule.

"The JB Transformation Plan covers an area of only five-kilometres square but it is a very complex area," he said. "This is because land availability for new developments is limited and therefore would need a carefully-crafted redevelopment strategy."

Six areas of focus were identified in the first phase of the plan – the beautification of Bukit Timbalan, the upgrading of the city's connectivity, the rehabilitation of Sungai Segget, the regeneration of specific core areas and the development of urban villages.

A key development in the plan is the RM20 billion Ibrahim International Business District (IIBD) located on the previous CIQ site. This large development covers approximately 101 hectares and is expected to boost competitiveness, productivity and economic viability.

In order to meet the plan's agenda of transforming JB into a "Vibrant, Cultural and Sustainable City of International Standing" the IIBD is envisioned as a sustainable business district, employing a green space strategy to reduce its carbon footprint with close to one third of the IIBD allocated to open spaces.

Over half of the IIBD has been classified for commercial use, with the main concentration of activities to be dominated by freestanding commercial entities.

IMPACTS OF PHASE ONE

So far, the plan has seen success. Maimunah Jaffar, Head of Planning & Compliance, IRDA said that the JB

Transformation Plan has breathed new life into the city. "Today, the city centre is once again buzzing with activity. However, the population remains transient – commuting in and out for work – and the city quietsens down significantly after office hours," Maimunah said.

"Although the situation is much better now, you need a live-in population to make the city more sustainable," she added.

"We are therefore looking to attract residents who will live in the city, with a target to raise the residential population by 10,000. That is our focus at the moment."

Meanwhile, MBBJ's placemaking efforts in the city centre have borne fruit with many start-up entrepreneurs opening cafés and outlets drawing on the tourism and creative sectors.

As investments continue to pour into the Iskandar Region, particularly in JB's

waterfront, the old city centre is stirring from its slumber.

With the first phase of the plan almost complete, the city now enters into Phase Two, which focuses on restoration of the JB city centre, specifically – the culture and heritage quarter.

PHASE TWO: THE HERITAGE QUARTER

Phase Two of the JB Transformation Plan will focus heavily on infrastructure development within the heritage quarter of JB and the restoration of heritage building facades.

PLUGGING INTO THE JB TRANSFORMATION PLAN

Think City came to JB in the midst of the city's rejuvenation process. Because Think City shared the common vision of revitalising JB city centre, there was a tremendous synergy of purposes with MBBJ and IRDA. As such, Think City was brought on board as a strategic partner in the heritage management plan, and is involved in most of the projects for the heritage quarter.



Think City's office in Johor Bahru.

“

We are looking to attract residents to stay in the city and raise the residential population by 10,000. That is our focus at the moment.

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Maimunah Jaffar, Head of Planning & Compliance, IRDA

“

We want to be tuned in to local sensitivities and dynamics. This is important for us to align our interventions with the community's intangibles. We want to learn from each other, as each city has different challenges and scenarios.

”

Daniel Lim, Programme Manager



“What we're doing is to bring the lessons learnt from other cities, and work together with local stakeholders like MBBJ, IRDA and the local community to see how existing initiatives can be enhanced, to make them more feasible and sustainable,” says Daniel Lim, Programme Manager.

“We are not trying to reinvent the wheel here. Our role is more to work with our partners to catalyse community participation in the transformation process.”

Think City's JB office officially opened its doors in June 2016 and it is indeed a demonstration of the Power of Small. Think City's base is a tiny shoplot in the heart of the heritage quarter, with a floorspace of no more than 400 square feet. The four-person JB team is led by Dr. Neil Khor, Think City's Chief Operating

Officer (COO) cum JB Programme Director, and is supported by the Urban Solutions Team.

“We wanted to be in the heart of the city rather than being based in an office space somewhere else, so that we can really be on the ground and get a feel of the community,” explains Daniel.

“This is being true to our values of being a catalyst for community-focused movements.”

True to the statement, the office has been designed to facilitate discussions with the community in a relaxed, informal environment, with the upper floor left as an open space.

“The idea here is not to have an office space, but rather a place where we can engage with the community. People can



Phase Two of the JB Transformation Plan will focus heavily on infrastructure development within the heritage quarter of JB.

just walk in and have discussions with us in a very relaxed setting,” explains Daniel.

FEELING THE PULSE OF DOWNTOWN JB

One of Think City’s first initiatives was a cultural mapping exercise of JB’s heritage quarter to understand the intangible values of the local community (as opposed to tangible assets such as buildings and infrastructure). Intangibles would involve their routines, lifestyles, perceptions and values. The survey

found that the area possessed a dynamic mix of young and upcoming entrepreneurs, multi-generational businesses and long established societies.

“You have the younger set opening up hip new cafes and tourist lodges. And then you have another community who has been here for generations,” says Daniel.

“We want to be tuned in to local sensitivities and dynamics. This is important for us to align our interventions with the community’s intangibles. We want to learn from each other, as each city has different challenges and scenarios.”

Taking cues from the cultural mapping study, Think City hopes to contribute technical knowledge, engage with the local community, and facilitate placemaking activities to help improve the city.

STATISTICS FROM THE JOHOR BAHRU CITY CENTRE BASELINE STUDY



JOHOR BAHRU TRANSFORMATION KEY INSIGHTS AND TAKEAWAYS



Red House – One of the distinct buildings within JB's heritage quarter.

In the six years since the implementation of the Johor Bahru Transformation Plan, the city has experienced an upward shift. The Honourable Mayor of Johor Bahru, TUAN HAJI A. RAHIM BIN HAJI NIN, tells us what went right.

WHAT ARE THE NOTABLE CHANGES YOU HAVE SEEN AS A RESULT OF THE JB TRANSFORMATION PLAN?

A:

Because of the high impact nature of the projects that we are rapidly rolling out, we have seen and continue to see keen interest and confidence in our efforts from investors and developers.

The rebranding of the Central Business District in Johor Bahru to Ibrahim International Business District (IIBD) also brought in new infusions of investment that will generate economic activities that are more competitive, and create a more complete commercial infrastructure.

This not only serves the residents and their burgeoning needs, it creates more opportunities for the economy and is in line with the wider masterplan for the Iskandar region.

WHAT NEW INITIATIVES CAN BE EXPECTED FROM THE JB TRANSFORMATION PLAN IN THE SECOND PHASE FOLLOWING THE FIRST SIX YEARS?

A:

The second phase of the JB transformation plan will focus on heritage. We believe that the preservation of historic JB is important even as we undergo rapid transformation and development. At MJB, we do not want heritage areas to be left behind by the wave of developments. We want it to be maintained and the infrastructure improved so that it can also generate competitive economic returns and provide benefits to the building owners and tenants.

Within the Johor Bahru city centre, we have about 456 old shophouses dating from various eras. Based on a study we conducted with IRDA, we've established that 91 of them are Grade I, meaning they are of incomparable value and require special restoration and conservation efforts.

What makes Johor Bahru unique is also the relationship between the Royal precinct and the commercial town. While conservation works are underway at the Istana Besar, we are making it part of our policy to enhance the conservation zone through public space upgrading and conservation of historic buildings.

MJB, together with IRDA and Think City, have thus initiated several measures that will catalyse the development of the

heritage quarter. These include a Conservation Master Plan, incentives to encourage building owners to preserve heritage buildings, and the Think City Grants Programme to enable further conservation work.

We have also identified a number of quick win projects that can be implemented in the short term to breathe new life to the heritage quarter. These include the Persiaran Muafakat project, rejuvenating places of worship of different faiths.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR THE JB TRANSFORMATION PLAN IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

A:

I always hold that any development strategy planned must meet the needs and aspirations of the city's residents and not just consist of mere rhetoric. If this is done, then I'm sure whatever development plans we want to implement will have the support and cooperation of all parties. We can provide world-class infrastructure, but all that may not guarantee that we will be an exemplary world-class city if our mindset does not change. Citizens cannot just remain still and not do anything.

I sincerely hope to have the involvement and full commitment, not just of all the stakeholders involved but also all the residents of the city, to work together with us to transform JB city centre towards becoming a "Vibrant, Cultural and Sustainable City of International Standing."



Tn. Hj. A Rahim Bin Hj. Nin, Mayor of JB (Centre) sharing a light moment with Think City's Daniel Lim and MJB staff (L-R: Haji Ibrahim, Puan Mazlifah, Puan Norbaizura, JB Mayor, Daniel Lim, Datuk Affendi).

“

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REINVENTING JOHOR BAHRU CITY



Johor Bahru KTM Railway Station, one of the buildings identified for conservation.

MAIMUNAH JAFFAR of IRDA, witnessed firsthand how the city of Johor went into decline and played an instrumental part in the new plan that revived the city.



I spent several years working in the United States and was a consultant involved in creating the Iskandar Malaysia Comprehensive Development Plan in 2006 before assuming my current role as Head of Planning & Compliance at the Iskandar Region Development Authority (IRDA) in 2007.

Apart from driving Iskandar Malaysia's blueprint initiatives such as the Iskandar Malaysia Smart City Framework and the Green-focused Agenda, a significant part of my work involves stakeholder engagement.

A FALLEN CITY

The JB city centre you see today is a vibrant hub of activity. But it wasn't like that six years ago. Back then it was very quiet.

When the CIQ was moved to its current location and the Lumba Kuda Flats residents were relocated, the city's population was drastically reduced and the local economy greatly impacted. The people who remained in the city were generally from the lower rungs of the social ladder, including illegal immigrants and gangs. This contributed to the rise in crime and many people were afraid to come into the city, leading to its further decline.

To address the decline of the city, IRDA formed a JB Transformation Team with MJB. The overall vision was to revive the city and make it vibrant again, with strong ties to its heritage and culture.

The task force was chaired by the Mayor, and directly under him were myself, representing IRDA, and Hajjah Aishah Abdul Kapi, the current Deputy Secretary to the Mayor, representing MBBJ, followed by the project management teams.

The JB Transformation Plan was put into action in 2010. However, as far back as 2006 we were already engaging with the communities in the city centre. In 2008, we began laying the groundwork for the plan to rejuvenate the city centre and collaborated with the JB City Council (MBJB) and the Johor Economic Planning Unit (UPENJ) to formulate the Plan, along with Iskandar Waterfront Holdings (IWH) to develop the masterplan for the city.

Our target is to fully implement the Plan by 2025. Within that time frame, we have identified quick win projects as well as short, medium and long-term plans. What you can see today is the

city heading towards that direction as a result of this Plan being put in action.

RESISTANCE AND CHALLENGES

When we first started our rejuvenation efforts, people didn't understand what we were trying to do. In the old town area, there were many influential Chinese and Indian clan associations who were resistant to change even though they didn't own the buildings. Young entrepreneurs were keen to rent the shops in the heritage area, but they faced strong resistance from these associations. So we spent a lot of time talking to them. I think the change eventually started when the JB Tiong Hua Association launched its gateway into the city centre. After that, they started to open up and began to allow the shops to be rented out. All this was possible because trust had been established.

Over the past 10 years, we have developed a very strong cooperative

relationship with the local community. Now we have good dialogues and we are able to work through difficult issues to a satisfying outcome. If we did not make the effort to build that relationship it would have been very difficult to get things done in the area.

We were also looking for opportunity assets. We identified Sungai Segget as an economic catalyst for the city. Our main purpose for the Sungai Segget project was to clean up the river, a major section of the city centre. This project was a challenge from the start because we had no budget for it when we started, but we pushed ahead anyway. Today, the project is nearing completion.

Another challenge was leadership change in the mayor's office. There have been five mayors since the JB Transformation Plan was implemented in 2010. With each leadership change, we had to convince the new mayor

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When we first started our rejuvenation efforts, people didn't understand what we were trying to do. In the old town area, there were many influential Chinese and Indian clan associations who were resistant to change even though they didn't own the buildings.

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JB Buzz, also known as Pasar Karat, one of the activities championed by IRDA.

to support the Sungai Segget project all over again. But we are fortunate to have people who believed in it and championed the cause within MBBJ.

FIRST STEPS

When we first started, we knew that we needed a catalyst. At that time, we focused on creating activities, so we made sure something was happening every month. We had so many activities that at one point, the community even requested to take a break because they were exhausted! They couldn't keep up.

One of the activities that MBBJ championed was the JB Buzz (or night bazaar, also known as Pasar Karat) which is held in the heart of the heritage quarter. At first, no one believed it would work. MBBJ had to pay traders to come and set up stalls! Eventually, the traders saw that the night bazaar was generating a lot of interest and the city was coming alive. Then there was a grab for prime spots!

A key thrust of the Plan is preserving the city's heritage, hence one area that we are focusing on is the historic Jalan Meldrum area, which is host to the city's food paradise – Meldrum Walk. We need to take care of this area because it will have an impact on the Sungai Segget project which is within close walking distance. Infrastructure upgrading works are currently being done to the area to make it more pedestrian and business-friendly.

We have also identified several significant heritage buildings in the city for conservation, such as the KTM building and Bukit Timbalan. We understand that sometimes the government has other priorities than

conservation when allocating budget. To address this, we have been encouraging the Tourism Offices to offer things like heritage tour packages. For example, if we could offer package tours that cover the royal museum, the KTM museum, art galleries and such, all these places can take a share of the ticket takings. This is one of the ideas that is in discussion.

POPULATING THE CITY

Right now JB has a large number of people moving through it each day. As early as 3am people are already starting to enter the city on their way to Singapore. This has contributed to the economic life of the city but it's still not enough. Although the city is bustling, it still quietsens down significantly in the evenings because the number of people in the city drops. You need a sizeable live-in population to keep a city vibrant. So our next task is to increase the live-in population of the city by at least 10,000 people by 2025. To attract people to live in the city, we have to ensure that there are vibrant activities, that safety and security is taken care of, the infrastructure is good – these are the enablers that we need to facilitate.

When we spoke to some Western potential homebuyers, they were really interested to live in the city because that is where the soul of the city is. But many Malaysians don't like to live in the city, especially with its old infrastructure, traffic congestion and such. Malaysians generally like the suburbs, but that may change.

The younger generation may want to consider living in the city and enjoying the activities and conveniences here. People who want to live in the city are

looking for a different kind of lifestyle. City dwellers are willing to put up with the inconveniences of city life because they want proximity to the activities that they most identify with – whether it's work or leisure. As such, what we are looking at is bringing the right type of economic activities into the city to provide the right employment opportunities and also to satisfy the lifestyle needs of city dwellers.

We had earlier identified some opportunities, such as having a city campus here, so people could live, study, work and play, all within the city. Another opportunity we are looking at now is for Singaporean companies to set up satellite offices in JB. This way, instead of having our working population cross over to Singapore, they can stay in JB and the work comes to them. This is similar to what's happening in London. Company HQ might be based in London, but back office and production facilities might be as far away as Manchester.

These are just some of the things we are exploring, moving forward.

COMMERCE, COMMUNITY AND THINK CITY

In my experience, rejuvenating a city does not just involve the physical aspects, such as improving the infrastructure or upgrading the building facades. It has to involve the economic and social aspects as well. Sometimes if you just upgrade the physical environment, there is no content. For JB, we are very focused on the fact that these three aspects need to go together.

With the enhancements that we are making in the city centre, a community who understands the importance of their participation in the city, and investors who are building the residential units in the area, the question that remains now is how to attract people to live here, and that is being addressed now.

In the immediate future, we plan to hold events in the city again to create more vibrancy. Thankfully, we have more partners to work with us now, like Think City.

Think City is community-focused, and that is aligned with our strong belief that efforts to revive the city need to be community-driven. But for us, community doesn't just mean people

who live or do business in the area. We include those who wish to invest in the area. As my main concern now is attracting people to live in the city, we need to talk to investors to build the properties to house them. So while IRDA also looks to engage the investor community, we now have Think City to help us engage with the local community.

The next issue is how do we ensure that people would want to live in the city? These properties may be bought by investors, but how do we encourage tenants to stay in their properties?

To attract residents, we need to step up our community programmes. We look forward to working with Think City to create more programmes related

to culture and heritage. Community-focused efforts will ensure the city is sustainable.

“

As such, what we are looking at is bringing the right type of economic activities into the city to provide the right employment opportunities and also to satisfy the lifestyle needs of city dwellers.

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The Sultan Ibrahim building has been identified for conservation.

RESTORING A CULTURAL TREASURE

Driving the conservation of the Istana Besar in Johor Bahru is the Sultan of Johor's personal passion for continuing the legacy of Johor's royal history, and creating a new experience for the people of Johor and beyond. DATO' PAIMAN KEROMO, Director of the Royal Abu Bakar Museum tells us about the conservation and adaptive reuse of a national treasure.



Royal Abu Bakar Museum: The former royal palace of the Johor sultanate has been adapted into a state-of-the-art museum.

The stately Royal Abu Bakar Museum is housed within the Istana Besar or Grand Palace of Johor. Built in the Renaissance style, it was commissioned in 1864 by Sultan Abu Bakar, the first Sultan of Johor. Overseen by European architects and fitted with the finest furnishings from England, it was completed in 1866 and became the first royal residence of the Johor royal family.

In 1990, during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Sultan Ismail, the palace was converted into a royal museum and made open to the public. Having served as a museum for over two decades, it was timely for the museum to experience upgrades, both physical and functional. In an effort to preserve the royal heritage of Johor, the current Sultan, HRH Sultan Ibrahim Ismail bin Almarhum Sultan Iskandar Al-Haj called for the conservation of the building and upgrade of the museum, personally appointing archaeology and conservation expert, Dato' Paiman Keromo.

CONSERVING AND ADAPTING A ROYAL HEIRLOOM

"This is a very unique project as it involves the former residential palace which has since been adapted into a museum. At the same time, it is also the living site of many current royal proceedings," said Dato' Paiman.

"Our Blue Ocean Strategy therefore had to involve the best practices for building conservation, construction and artisanal restoration works, the tactical use of space, and the curation and restoration of artefacts.

"At the same time, we had to consider the Sultan's wish to create a new experience for the people of Johor and beyond, to highlight the unique qualities of the palace, and to tell its stories in innovative and captivating ways. That was the challenge before us – to position the museum as one of the best in the world, without compromising the integrity of its heritage," he said.

At every step of the way, Dato' Paiman was adamant about adhering to proven conservation practices. He argued that conservation often did more harm to heritage sites, especially if the proper international standards were not observed, and if the

aim was coloured by the need for commercial viability.

“When you embark on a conservation project, you have to consider what your objective is. If the aim is preservation for posterity, then financial viability is not an important consideration.

“You can promote such buildings as tourism products, but you still have to ensure they conform to internationally accepted conservation practices. Otherwise, the building’s heritage value is not there anymore,” he added.

“I understand that conservation efforts should be aligned with current requirements, but I have seen old buildings being converted into boutique hotels where extensive renovations are done to the original structure. Ultimately, the original character of the building is destroyed and the historical and cultural value along with it.”

Wanting to ensure that the palace was adapted without compromising the integrity of its original cultural and historical value, Dato’ Paiman managed the extensive renovation works with strict policies, to ensure that works were carried out in accordance to international standards set by UNESCO.

STATE OF THE ART

In order to define the museology and use of space, Dato’ Paiman established a small team of conservators and curators, implementing in the process, a conservation lab.

“As with every conservation project, the work has to be carried out in phases. In the early stages, a dilapidation study is conducted to survey the extent of any damage within the building or externally, the causes of the damage as well as the examination of materials, equipment and methods used in the original building. The conservation lab runs these tests for us and reports on what is required,” Dato’ Paiman explained.

“The conservation lab also helps with testing to identify the material composition and proper restoration techniques of artefacts which require repairs,” he said.

According to Dato’ Paiman, there are over 50,000 artefacts in the royal collection, dating back to the reign of Sultan Abu Bakar. Before the museum closed for refurbishments, an extensive collection of royal heirlooms and historical records of the state’s royal family were on display. This included portraits of the Johor royal family

from the time of Sultan Abu Bakar till the present, memorabilia, orders, decorations and medals, antiquities and furniture, silverware, crystalware, jewellery of precious metals and stones, traditional Malay weapons and valuable antique coins. Many of the objects hailed from China, France, Italy and the Middle East, among others.

“To deal with such an extensive collection, a comprehensive inventory system was also developed to categorise, catalogue and monitor the status of each artefact,” Dato’ Paiman added.

A NEW EXPERIENCE

In alignment with Sultan Ibrahim’s desire to give museum visitors a new and enhanced experience, Dato’ Paiman looked to the standards of the International Council of Museums and guidelines set by UNESCO to improve the Royal Abu Bakar Museum.

“We’ve explored and identified innovative solutions for the museum, from the way we curate to the way we display and tell stories, involving interactive features with digital technology,” Dato’ Paiman explained. In fact, no expense has been spared as high-tech features such as ‘fly-through’ motion graphics, has made the Royal



The conservation lab set up by Dato’ Paiman is made up of a team of conservators and curators.

“

You can promote such buildings as tourism products, but you still have to ensure that they conform to internationally accepted conservation practices. Otherwise, the building’s heritage value is not there anymore.

”

Abu Bakar Museum one of the most up-to-date museums in the country.

Artefacts that are worn with time have been painstakingly restored, and in some cases replicated.

“We had to replicate the exact look and design of damaged items as Sultan Ibrahim is meticulous about the preservation of royal heritage,” he said.

“We sent them to world-renowned experts to have them restored using the same materials as the originals.” As the collection includes both organic and inorganic materials, Dato’ Paiman had to tap into his network of conservation and museum experts in the region to request assistance in restoring and replicating the artefacts.

A LIVING SITE AND INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

The buildings and grounds of the Royal Abu Bakar Museum also constitute a living site. Apart from housing the museum, the building is still the official venue for events such as investiture ceremonies, state banquets and royal functions, including the coronation ceremony of Sultan Ibrahim himself. The task for Dato’ Paiman and his team



As the world changes, modernisation and mechanisation may wipe out many of our traditions. However, the community will always play a key role in the creation and carrying forward of intangible cultural heritage. And as keepers of the Johor royal legacy, it is our job to pass this on to the people.



The Royal Abu Bakar Museum is also a living site where many official ceremonies continue to be held.

included ensuring a sense of continuity between the time of Sultan Abu Bakar and the present.

“People often ask me: what does this sense of continuity mean, how is it connected to old places, and why is it good for people? Based on my work over the years, the idea of continuity is that, in a world that is constantly changing, old places provide people with a sense of orientation to our society, using buildings, and objects from the past to establish values of time and place,” says Dato’ Paiman.

“Cultural heritage does not stop at buildings or objects. It also includes traditions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as performing arts, crafts, cultural knowledge and in this case – royal rituals and ceremonies.

“This is intangible cultural heritage, a living form of heritage which provides a sense of identity and belonging in relation to our own cultures. This cultural heritage will evolve as we change our practices and traditions in response to our environment, so for the Royal Abu Bakar Museum, and for Sultan Ibrahim himself, it was vital that the people of Johor and from all over the world are given memories and the

knowledge of the many milestones and rituals that the royal family hold dear,” he added.

As a response to this, the Throne Room where Sultan Ibrahim’s coronation was held, and a grand banquet hall, are replete with modern amenities and luxurious fittings. However, a number of special rooms dedicated to important milestones and rituals have also been created, such as the Reception Hall which houses the iconic Baccarat crystal table and chairs and the Hunting Room which reflects the more personal side of members of the royal family.

“As the world changes, modernisation and mechanisation may wipe out many of our traditions. However, the community will always play a key role in the creation and carrying forward of intangible cultural heritage. And as keepers of the Johor royal legacy, it is our job to pass this on to the people.”

Dato’ Paiman has over 40 years’ experience in the fields of archaeology and conservation, and was the former Director-General of Malaysia’s Museum Department. He is a subject matter expert on Think City’s Technical Advisory Panel, advising Think City on projects with historical value.

BABY STEPS IN JOHOR BAHRU

After less than a year in Johor Bahru, Think City has begun building bridges and formalising partnerships with local stakeholders while taking maiden steps in rehabilitating the heritage quarter.

13TH JOHOR BAHRU ARTS FESTIVAL

Think City provided grants to support 12 community groups during the festival which was held in the heart of the heritage quarter.



BACK LANE POP-UP PARK

Working together with MBBJ and the community, the first pop-up park was created along Jalan Pahang, at the back lane between the famous Red House and It Roo Café. Although it was a small space, it served as an effective compact theatre for *Sidang Teater*, a street theatre competition held during the 13th JB Arts Festival, which drew enthusiastic crowds.

ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS FOR LANEWAY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

Discussions and workshops were held with different community groups to share proposed plans for the Laneways Improvement Programme.





SHOPHOUSE RESTORATION

Eight shophouses along Jalan Segget will be improved under the Pilot Facade Upgrading Programme.

PERSIARAN MUFAKAT BANGSA JOHOR

Under the Johor Bahru Transformation Plan, Think City is collaborating with MBBJ and IRDA to plan and implement the *Persiaran Muafakat Bangsa Johor*.



JARO, INCLUDING THE DISABLED

In partnership with the Johor Area Rehabilitation Organisation (JARO), a non-profit organisation that rehabilitates and trains physically and mentally disabled members of society, a Johor Bahru Disability Services Sector Baseline Study was conducted. The study attempted to gain a deeper understanding of the existing service providers and needs of those living in the area with a disability.



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ENSURING THE SUCCESS OF GRANTS PROJECTS



Grantee DESIGNation, an incubation for local independent designers.

Using the bottom-up approach, the Think City Grants Programme ensures change is driven by the city's communities. HAMDAN ABDUL MAJEED and SOLOMON JEBARATNAM of Think City, tell us why this is important for sustainable change.

Breaking away from the traditional 'top-down' approach where urban planners and municipal councils would prescribe changes to a city, the grants programme offers citizens a chance to make a difference with initiatives that they feel will create an impact.

"We do this because we believe through small yet bold acts of positive disruption, where the intention comes from the community itself, we can create cities that value heritage, put sustainability at the core of advancements and progress, and serve all its people, thereby enriching lives," said Executive Director, Hamdan Abdul Majeed.

To qualify, projects have to be of historic significance, be able to improve economic, social or environmental conditions of communities, be related to the city, culture or community, or encourage intercultural participation.

BUILT HERITAGE

"While we have funded books, maps, events and other projects, we are particularly interested in seeing projects that have an impact on our built heritage," Hamdan said.

"Preserving our historic urban fabric is crucial to bringing life back into the heritage areas of our cities, which have been largely abandoned."

In 2016, Think City reached out to property owners in Kuala Lumpur to talk about restoring their buildings and as a step further – looked at partnering property owners with tenants from the creative industry as part of the rejuvenation of the city.

“We’re in talks with several property owners in downtown KL discussing facade restoration for their heritage buildings,” he said.

Similar Think City grants projects involving heritage buildings have seen success in George Town such as the Ren i Tang Guesthouse and Inn, which won the Traveller’s Choice Award for several years, and is a thriving enterprise on its own.

“We’ve seen how projects like these have been successful in other cities – by doing this we also hope to bring in a younger audience into downtown KL and create more vibrancy and economic opportunities, making the inner city areas more liveable.”

IMPACTFUL CHANGE

However, Think City’s role in the grants projects does not end with just providing the funding. As an impact-focused organisation, Think City monitors its grants projects closely to ensure it comes to successful completion.

“The challenge lies in building trust and confidence in participants, to show them that this is not something that is one-off – that it is going to be systematic,” Hamdan said.

“We have to emphasise that funding is but one part of it – Think City will actively work alongside them, to see their projects through from developing project ideas, to bringing in expertise, and helping to ensure that they deliver what was envisaged upfront for the projects,” he added.

While there are different types of funds, from project grants to boosters and matching grants, Think City prefers

not to fund projects in full, welcoming instead well-rounded project ideas that attract co-investment from different funding partners.

“We welcome people who come to us with projects that meet our criteria saying, ‘I have raised some funding but need further support from you’. This is when we know that the ideas are sound, that they have convinced investors or other funders, and that they are serious about seeing the projects through,” said Hamdan.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Programme Manager Solomon Jebaratnam is a dab hand at troubleshooting with grantees in a rut.

“Many grantees come to us while their projects are still in the ideation stage,” he said. “When it comes to implementation, some may have difficulties.”



Solomon briefing potential grantees during a grants seminar.

TYPES OF GRANTS

PROJECT
GRANT

BOOSTER
GRANT

MATCHING
GRANT

TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE &
CAPACITY
BUILDING GRANT

REPAYABLE
GRANT

“We try to help them in the execution of the project, even to the point of providing step by step guidance in some cases. We try not to hand hold them, but we do have to go above and beyond the norm with some projects and mentor them in order to get them off the ground.”

Support from Think City has taken many forms, from negotiating leases with building owners, to bringing in experts, to advice on technical conservation methods and being the active link between grantees and the various government authorities.

“Often, we have to actively facilitate dialogues to get the projects moving. Our relationship with local councils and relevant government bodies enable us to provide advice on how to obtain permits and we do sometimes facilitate discussions between grantees and the relevant authorities,” Solomon said.

Expert Consultation and Counselling

To ensure the quality of the Grants Programme, the applications go through a rigorous process of evaluation. Every potential shortlist is contacted and the process of the grant is explained

in detail. Every shortlisted grant application is then sent to be evaluated by our panel of Technical Advisors who are leading experts in the fields of architecture, preservation and conservation, heritage and culture, the Arts, urban planning and more.

Despite this, the grants programme is not without its fair share of challenges. As many applicants are new to the grants process, some overestimate their resources and have to negotiate changes to project milestones.

“Some grantees pull out of their projects due to work or personal commitments as a lot of them are doing these projects in their own time,” Solomon said.

“In these cases, we have to take on the role of a counsellor as well, to sit with them and remind them why they wanted to bring their project to life, and to show them how far they’ve come. We do all we can to see it through.”

The Think City Grants Programme is open twice a year and available in all four cities. Individuals, companies or NGOs are open to apply for grants ranging from RM10,000 to RM200,000.

“

Often, we have to actively facilitate dialogues to get the projects moving. Our relationship with local councils and relevant government bodies enable us to provide advice on how to obtain permits and we sometimes facilitate discussions between grantees and the relevant authorities.

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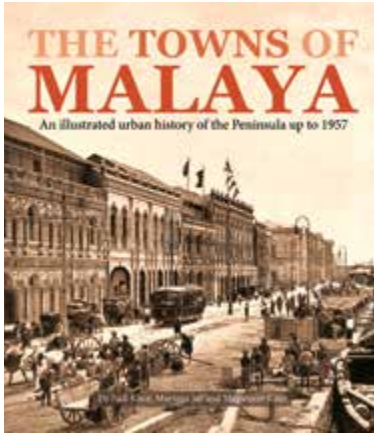
Solomon Jebaratnam,
Programme Manager



To find out more, log on to
thinkcity.com.my/grants

PUBLICATIONS WE HAVE SUPPORTED

THE TOWNS OF MALAYA: AN ILLUSTRATED URBAN HISTORY OF THE PENINSULA UP TO 1957

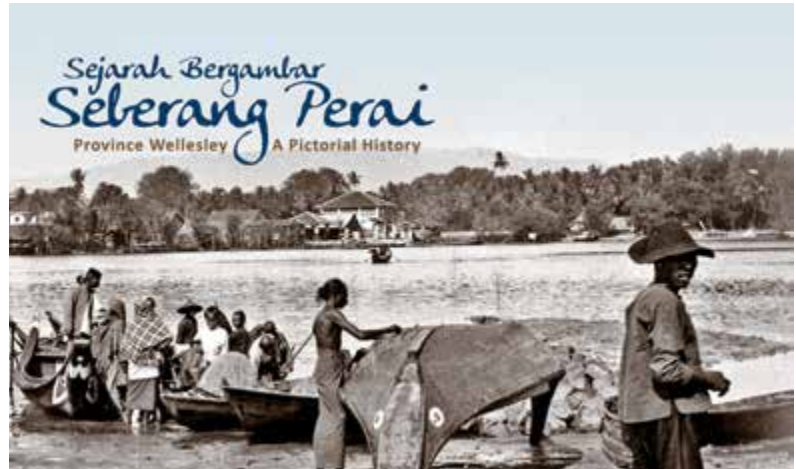


SYNOPSIS

The Towns of Malaya examines the history, development, planning and architecture of the major towns of the Malay Peninsula up to 1957. Divided into four main chapters, on royal towns, port towns, mining towns and other towns, it provides insights into some 35 of the peninsula's urban centres and their development.

Drawing on extensive photographic and map archives including those of the National Archives of Malaysia and private collections, the book provides fascinating visual insights into urban life in Malaya in days gone by.

SEJARAH BERGAMBAR SEBERANG PERAI: PROVINCE WELLESLEY, A PICTORIAL HISTORY



SYNOPSIS

Beyond its simple and unadorned title – Sejarah Bergambar Seberang Perai (Province Wellesley, A Pictorial History) – this publication more than justifies the oft-used phrase that a picture is worth a thousand words. History is subjective, and personal opinions and recollections reflect the changes that occur with the passage of time. Photographs, on the other hand, are truthful reminders of the past. From historical landmarks to workday routines, one simple picture can trigger a long buried memory and tell you more about the history of a place than any written story.

Overshadowed by its more popular neighbour, the strategic development of Province Wellesley took a backseat to that of George Town and Penang island after 1969. However, Province Wellesley continued to see the burgeoning of housing areas and industrial zones. It is hoped that the images shown in

the book will stimulate greater interest in the historical research and cultural mapping of Province Wellesley. Its history should be understood as an integral part of the history of Penang state as well as in the context of the development of the northern states of Malaysia. In view of the rapid economic advances and demographic growth, Province Wellesley's heritage, traditional settlements, townscapes and cultural landscapes need to be identified and preserved, before they are lost in the urbanisation currents of the 21st century.

The pictures have been arranged into the following categories: Artefacts and Inscriptions; Farming and Agriculture; Butterworth; Rivers and Bridges; F.M.S. Railway and Channel Crossing; Multicultural Communities; Bukit Mertajam; Transport and Development, and Maps.

SEBERANG PERAI: STORIES FROM ACROSS THE SEA



SYNOPSIS

Seberang Perai; Stories from Across the Sea is about the hinterland across the sea from Penang Island. The narrative on Penang has been predominantly on the island, and this book seeks to present the lesserknown half of this northwestern state in Peninsular Malaysia.

We are telling the Seberang Perai story through its people, the everyman and everywoman whose lives are anchored to this land. Through individual accounts and images, we portray the peoples' journeys, experiences and aspirations.

Their lives may be different from each other, and may even be remote to some, but the themes are universal – making a living, transcending the mundane, seeking meaning, strengthening communities, hoping for a brighter future. Though localised in Seberang Perai, these are stories that will resonate with Malaysian everywhere.

Change is perennial and threads through the narratives. Collectively, the stories depict Seberang Perai's history and heritage, developments and progress, and its future direction and aspirations.

This book is a tribute to the people of Seberang Perai.

LITERACITY: KUALA LUMPUR LITERARY FRAGMENTS



SYNOPSIS

Literacity, a bilingual publication, is a literary and cultural mapping project of Kuala Lumpur. This book contains essays, interviews and photo essays that shed light on contemporary perspectives and discussions that go beyond existing discourse with regard to urban literature specifically in Kuala Lumpur.

JOHOR: 300 EARLY POSTCARDS



SYNOPSIS

Johor: 300 Early Postcards is the sixth book of early picture postcards by Dato' Professor Dr. Cheah Jin Seng. The book contains picture postcards of the Malaysian state of Johor, offering a rare opportunity to view the architecture, landscapes and lifestyles of a bygone era, from the late 19th century to the 1950s.

The book begins with a brief history of modern Johor and its postcards and includes chapters on royalty, royal visitors and government; the Johor-Singapore causeway; the capital, Johor Bahru; and the towns, people, economy, flora and fauna of the state. It concludes with a history of deltiology and philately in Johor.

The postcards featured are drawn from the author's personal collection, built over more than 30 years, and are produced at, or close to their natural size and colour. As such, the book is a valuable collector's item as well as an important historical reference.



Think City and JWN sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formalise their partnership.

A PARTNERSHIP IN HERITAGE

WHAT ARE THE URGENT ISSUES YOU'RE CONSIDERING WHEN IT COMES TO THE PRESERVATION OF OUR HISTORIC URBAN FABRIC HERE IN KL, AND IN THE REST OF MALAYSIA?

A:

Among the issues that we are concerned with in the preservation of heritage buildings is ensuring the understanding and awareness of all interested parties with regard to the value of a heritage building, and that it is preserved with the right methods and techniques.

JWN also requires the unified support of all parties to ensure success in the execution of conservation work. Governmental support in allocating adequate funds is a key factor for us because a heritage building requires a certain amount of money in order to ensure that the conservation is a success.

The state of awareness of the general public is also a main factor in making sure that the conservation of a heritage building can be carried out well. Issues such as vandalism need to be considered and addressed with the support of the relevant authorities. Apart from that, the implementation of a conservation project will not succeed in full without continuous maintenance.

Maintenance and continued management is required especially by the legal owners of the building. Under Section 42 of the National Heritage Act 2005, it is also stated that it is the burden of the owner to maintain and look after the buildings without depending on assistance or support from the government. This is something that is often overlooked by owners of heritage buildings, and it is crucial to the survival of these buildings; after all, the age of a building can be extended and it can remain functional for a longer time without any problems if regular maintenance and upkeep is sustained.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the National Heritage Department (JWN), Think City and Universiti Malaysia Kelantan for the development of the heritage conservation and preservation sector in the country. Director of the Conservation Division, SR DR. HJH ROBIAH BINTI ABDUL RASHID of JWN describes the action plans for the partnership with Think City.



“

I believe that a close partnership with Think City will result in a paradigm shift in all aspects of conservation for the projects that we have identified, whether physical or non-physical.

”

WHAT DOES JWN WISH TO ACHIEVE IN THIS COLLABORATION WITH THINK CITY?

A:

Through our collaboration, we hope that we can add value and raise the level of conservation activities that are currently being conducted. The partnership with Think City will hopefully take several forms such as joint programmes to conduct studies and research, and financial support on specific projects. Apart from that we view the collaboration as an effort by JWN to heed the government's call to approach

partnerships (as laid out in the National Blue Ocean Strategy) as a means of finding creative and innovative solutions to reduce costs and create a greater impact. At the end of the day, when you make a positive impact, it's the general public that benefits. With this collaboration in place, it immediately engages the teams at JWN, creating opportunities for them to upskill in the areas of urban rejuvenation and conservation practices.

I believe that a close partnership with Think City will result in a paradigm shift in all aspects of conservation for the projects that we have identified, whether physical or non-physical.

HOW DOES THIS COLLABORATION FIT INTO JWN'S OVERALL AGENDA FOR THE COMING YEARS?

A:

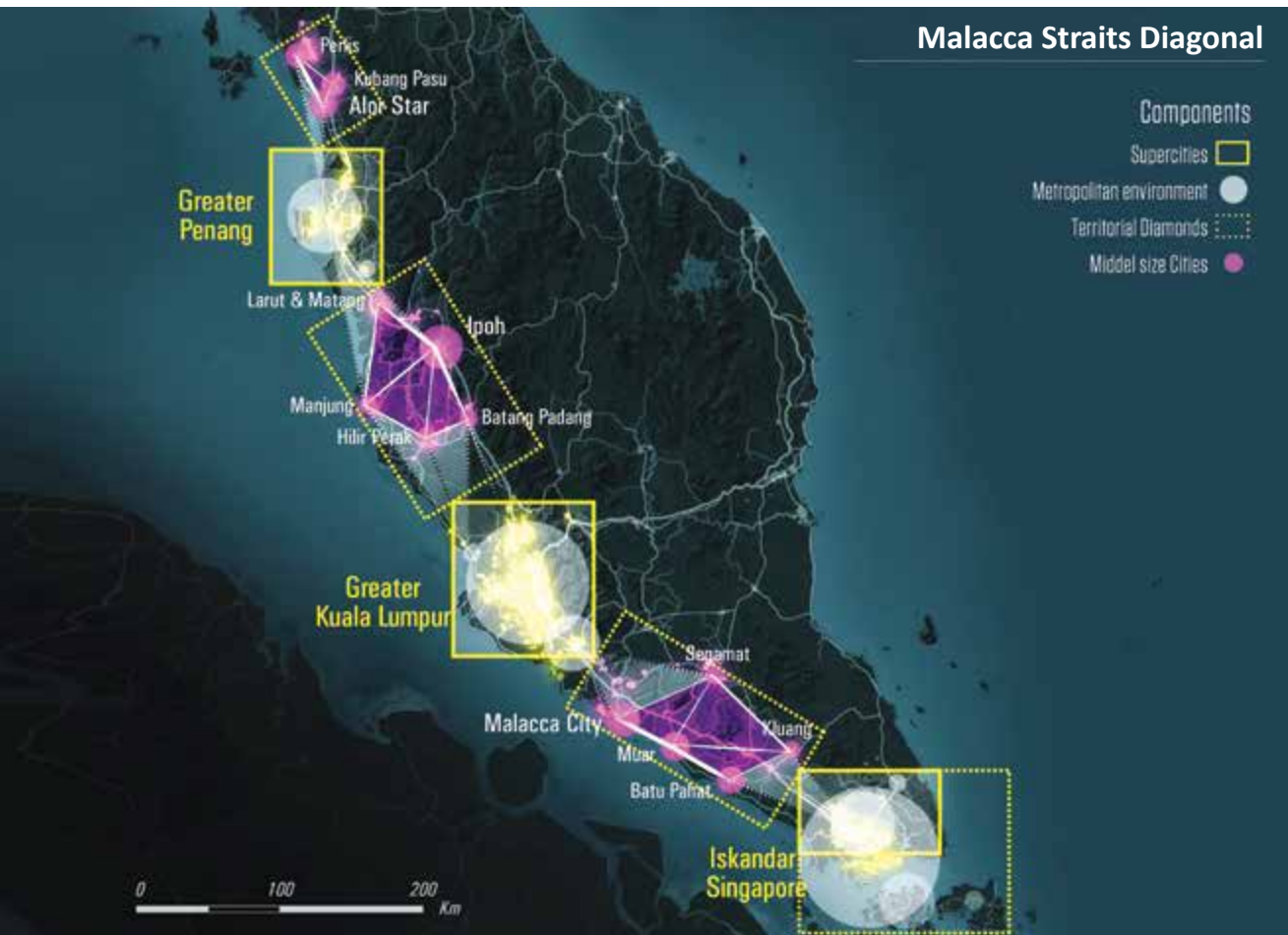
For the time being, our collaboration with Think City has seen us prepare a Conservation Management Plan for Fort Cornwallis, as well as being joint

partners in presenting the International Heritage Conservation Seminar 2016. We saw clear signs of a positive impact towards the cooperation of government and non-government agencies in heritage matters, which in the long run will lead to savings in cost, energy and time. We ought to remember that the preservation of heritage should not be taken lightly, because if we are slow to act, the heritage that we have now will no longer exist for future generations.

While focusing on both physical and non-physical projects, we are also performing a dilapidation study on Masjid Melayu Lebuah Acheh in George Town, Penang, yet another joint project between JWN and Think City. It is our hope that the planning of conservation and restoration work for this mosque will be more efficient because of the collaboration and pooled resources that we have together.



A dilapidation study is currently underway for Masjid Melayu Lebuah Acheh, George Town.



Think City is partnering with Madrid-based Fundacion Metropoli to undertake a national planning initiative for the Malacca Straits Diagonal – the region stretching from Singapore-Iskandar along the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia to the southern Thai border. It is complex and dynamic and home to more than 30 million people.

The project has the backing of Khazanah Nasional and will be a collaboration with the Federal Department of Town and Country Planning Peninsular Malaysia (JPBD), MyHSR, the Johor State Government and local municipalities. It will help activate key components of the National Physical Plan 3 and focus on leveraging additional benefits from planned investments in connectivity infrastructure such as the KL-Singapore High Speed Rail, and emerging global and regional opportunities.

CHARTING A NATIONAL VISION FOR MALAYSIA'S URBAN SYSTEM

Think City partners Fundacion Metropoli on a planning initiative to connect four international cities and enhance economic, spatial and social development.

Dr. Alfonso Vegara, President of Fundacion Metropoli said, “I believe that the Diagonal as a territory is one of the country’s main assets of identity and competitiveness. It requires intelligent territorial planning to achieve a balance between economic development, environmental sustainability and social cohesion.”

For the Malacca Straits Diagonal this means ensuring that the cities and towns within the Diagonal take full advantage of their locational advantages and Malaysia’s alliances within ASEAN, India and China.

“It involves connecting four countries: Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. An opportunity to create a unique development and economic integration corridor on the international scene that can inspire future Megaprojects such as One Belt, One Road in China,” said Dr. Vegara.

The project will build on Think City and Fundacion Metropoli’s previous work in Penang and Putrajaya. In addition to a national vision for the Diagonal, the team will deep dive into the “Muar-Melaka Diamond” and the “Iskandar Malaysia Supercity” encompassing

Singapore and the Riau Islands under the banner of “One City: Three Countries.”

The project will involve territorial cartography, social and economic analysis and a series of community and stakeholder engagement forums to identify catalytic projects and spaces for innovation.

According to Urban Solutions Programme Director Dr. Matt Benson, “The unique aspect of the project is the way it will tie together spatial, economic and infrastructure analytics at various geographic scales. This will be used as the basis to develop projects to a level that stakeholders can then take hold of and shepherd through to realisation.

“This isn’t just another planning study. It will be a national vision with concrete actions that will change the way the country thinks about its cities and towns and the opportunities they provide. It will be transformative and inspire new forms of investment.”

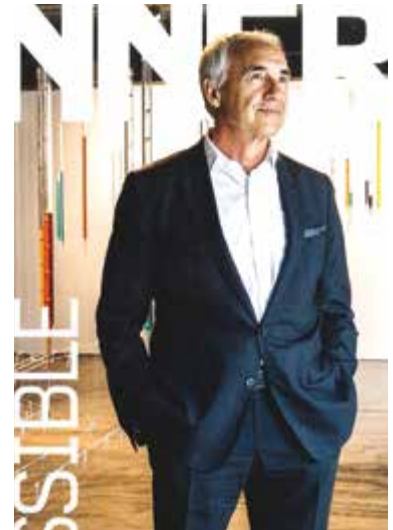
The project is expected to take between 12 and 18 months.

“

I believe that the Diagonal as a territory is one of the country’s main assets of identity and competitiveness. It requires intelligent territorial planning to achieve a balance between economic development, environmental sustainability and social cohesion.

”

Dr. Alfonso Vegara,
President of Fundacion Metropoli



The Malacca Straits Diagonal initiative will create a connected corridor uniting four cities with many economic opportunities.



Members of the public participating in a performance at Butterworth Fringe Festival 2016.

PLACEMAKING AS A CURE FOR CITY LIVING

Cynthia Nikitin's key observation of Kuala Lumpur is that its public spaces are completely dominated by cars and traffic. This is not uncommon in large cities where about 80% of public space is taken up by streets and roads. In contrast, she outlines that some of the cities in Malaysia are more successful than others in cultivating good public spaces, such as the streets of George Town, Penang.

"The streets in George Town such as in Little India are amazing shared spaces where you have trishaws, pedestrians, bicycles, cars, delivery vans all in one space, and everyone travels at the speed of a pedestrian. They're self regulating in terms of speed, and dispersion of roadway space for people. They're a bit crowded which lends vitality to a city – so those streets are quite wonderful," says Cynthia.

"Other wonderful shared spaces would be the markets such as Chowrasta Market, in George Town. There are markets all over Penang that serve as a place where people mix, gather and socialise – it's more than just about buying fresh produce or food for dinner – it's really where the shared life of a city happens," she adds.

This shared life is replicated in Kuala Lumpur, except that it happens in shopping malls. Due to the fabricated nature of malls, Cynthia states that they are not true public spaces particularly as they are privately owned and operated. Although the malls in Malaysia have the added public benefit of providing comfort with their climate-controlled environments, which, according to Cynthia is one up on malls in the United States, there remains a strong consumerist overlay.

The danger of many a public space is that it is underutilised, or worse, abandoned. CYNTHIA NIKITIN, Senior Vice President at Project for Public Spaces (PPS) illustrates how placemaking activities can bring jobs and opportunities for commerce.



“While you might enjoy a concert, an art exhibition or a cooking demonstration at a mall, your purpose there is really to purchase something. Where the person should ideally have an opportunity to create an experience for themselves, in malls it’s all more pre-packaged for public consumption.”

Cynthia cites the benefits of active shared public spaces as multifold.

“Public spaces are vital components of any prosperous city. Well-designed and well-managed public spaces are a key asset for a city’s functionality and they have a positive impact on a city’s economy, health, climate, safety, integration, inclusion and connectivity; connectivity of people to each other, and connectivity of people to place,” she says.

“The quality of life is closely related to the state of its public spaces, but it needs appropriate economic measures that promote public revenue, private income and livelihood creation, investment and wealth.”

She highlights that good public spaces should be able to provide people with a safe and welcoming place to gather.

“People have the right to the city. The city should be able to create a safe and welcome environment for women and girls, and vulnerable populations. They should be places where people feel free to express opinions and their creativity. And they should give people who use the public space an opportunity to make it better and more successful, through their being there, through their ideas and knowledge.”

GAPS IN KL’S PUBLIC SPACES

Kuala Lumpur, like many cities in the United States, are transient places where most urban workers leave after hours for their homes in the suburbs. The same goes for gentrified cities such as Amsterdam. In a recent BBC report, companies such as Airbnb have become so popular with Dutch homeowners that

“The quality of life is closely related to the state of its public spaces, but it needs appropriate economic measures that promote public revenue, private income and livelihood creation, investment and wealth.”



Markets are great examples of shared public spaces.

it has pushed the cost of rentals and real estate so high, residents have had no choice but to move out to the suburbs, leaving the city centre for tourists and the wealthy.

However, in KL the main challenge for Cynthia is still the fact that the streets and roads dominate the city, without concern for the pedestrian experience.

She emphasises, “A lot of it has to do with the programming and the management of the spaces that exist and converting some streets, really looking to see if you actually need the roads to be that wide, to move that much traffic every day, all the time. When you design your city around cars and traffic, you get cars and traffic, and when you design your city around people and places, you get more people and places.”

“It requires modifying some of those roads, making them more multi-modal, even closing them like they do all over the world – perhaps one Sunday a month for bicycling or other activities – to get people accustomed to using those spaces in a different way, and looking at it from a different perspective. It’s a tremendous amount of real estate that’s given over to just one target user, which is the motorist.”

While many urbanists would argue that the hot and humid weather is a deterrent to many local citizens, opting to drive even for the smallest of distances, Cynthia says that it is about changing the pedestrian experience.

“At PPS, we work in a lot of very hot and very cold places and we have always found that climate can be mitigated. It’s

about giving people a reason to walk and making it comfortable for them to do so.”

PLACEMAKING AND COMMERCE

Looking at some of the most successful placemaking activities that PPS has been involved in, Cynthia cites that placemaking and commerce are closely interrelated. Programmed activities that bring people together usually create opportunities for business and work.

Cynthia recounts the Discovery Green project in Texas, a public urban park in downtown Houston, which had met with positive outcomes as a result of placemaking. Just like in Kuala Lumpur, many people would come into the city to work but get on the highway to go home after business hours and the core of the city would be empty.

“Public spaces have that ability to create public relations for a city when they are well programmed and well managed.”

Because they wanted more people living in the city, instead of building luxury towers and hotels and giving developers tax breaks and incentives, the city authorities and their partners put two parking lots and several vacant parcels together, converting the space into a beautiful public park.

Many citizens were against the move, criticising the development, and declaring that no one would use the park. However, the city of Houston was in for a surprise.

“

When you design your city around cars and traffic, you get cars and traffic, and when you design your city around people and places, you get more people and places.

”

“People said that no one would go to the park, but the weekend that it opened they had 15,000 people. So they built the public space first, and then all of a sudden people wanted to buy up buildings, land and housing based on the fact that they were next to Discovery Green.

“The lesson here is that the amenity can generate wealth, and bring people in, who then spend more time in Houston and want to live there. And people were starting to market the park and the properties around it. They didn’t even need a marketing department because the residents were doing it for them. Public spaces have that ability to create public relations for a city when they are well programmed and well managed,” says Cynthia.

THE SPIRIT OF PLACE

Instrumental in the art of placemaking is a concept known as ‘the Spirit of Place’ – what the people of a community understand.

Cynthia says, “In any project, we work with the community, with stakeholders, institutions, local leaders, municipal leaders, cultural leaders, religious leaders – to have them explain to us what is the spirit of their place, what is their vision for the community, what

are its assets, what are the important defining features that create or blend into that spirit of place.”

This first crucial step is essential in determining what the community holds dear. This could be in the form of a natural landscape or scenic view, cultural traditions and crafts, an institution, or a historic building or neighbourhood.

She explains, “That’s one of our first interventions or interrogations when we work with a community – to identify what elements can recreate the spirit of their place. Also, discovering what is working about them, what is not working and what opportunities there are to strengthen them, looking at what people hold to be the most sacred elements, places or aspects of their community and their culture, and how we can actually – through physical, design or management changes and programming – impact and enhance them.”

THE COMMUNITY IS THE EXPERT

One of Cynthia’s chief beliefs, and one that has repeatedly held up well in placemaking design, is that the community is the expert, that the people who live in the community have tremendous quantities of information and innate knowledge that can help the process.

Unfortunately, Cynthia states that most planning processes are not set up to gather that knowledge or the community’s ideas.

“It’s often left to professionals and designers, people who are educated and schooled to figure out what’s the best thing for a community when actually the community is the one that knows what’s best for itself. And there probably will be disagreements, so as professionals we are there to facilitate that conversation and to draw out what the elements are, what the ideas are that contribute to the spirit of the place. Things such as what used to be there 20 years ago that was well-loved but went out of business, or a policy that was changed and was removed that worked, that we could bring back,” she adds. Cynthia stresses that preserving heritage properties is also a key move as it forms part of the long term identity and visual memory of a place.

“People sometimes call us space doctors; we evaluate a place to see if it’s sick, what’s wrong with it and what are the changes that need to be made to make it healthy and better functioning.”

SILLO BUSTING

With every public space, there are usually many stakeholders and authorities, and navigating the systems for approvals on placemaking and programming can be daunting. The PPS solution is silo busting.

“Silo busting is one of our major campaigns. Having city governments much more horizontal and making sure that each project has a ‘Place Team’ where every agency that touches that project meet and work together – that’s the ideal we always strive for,” she says.

“

People sometimes call us space doctors; we evaluate a place to see if it’s sick, what’s wrong with it and what are the changes that need to be made to make it healthy and better functioning. The community is the one that knows what’s best for itself.

”

The key to that, as far as the PPS philosophy goes, is in making the various institutions see placemaking as a collective responsibility, and that no one city department, municipal or ministry is in charge of placemaking alone.

“It’s a partnership among different city agencies working with the community and at PPS, we really are promoting this idea of place governance which is getting city departments and ministry departments out of their silos so that Engineering doesn’t just look at engineering, and Transportation doesn’t just look at traffic. Rather, they all work together on a place.

From an infrastructure context it saves time and money and with public spaces, it’s easier to bring in the community when they’re all working together.



BUILDING CAPACITY

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THINK SQUAD INVESTING IN NEXT GENERATION LEADERS



UITM students carrying out a community engagement session guided by the Think City team.

The Think Squad Programme offers students hands-on experience in Think City projects and exposure to community engagements to prepare them as advocates of urban rejuvenation.

In line with the philosophy of the 'Power of Small', Think City believes each individual has a role to play in creating a more sustainable and liveable city. With this in mind, Think Squad was created to encourage the next generation of leaders to be actively involved in the improvement of public urban spaces, and in representing and realising the wants and needs of the community.

As a programme, Think Squad involves students from both private and public institutions of higher education from diverse professional and technical backgrounds, with the common interest of safeguarding the future of our cities. Participants are given the foundations of urban renewal and a chance to be involved in selected Think City projects with guidance from Think City experts.

"We want to give students in the Think Squad programme hands-on experience in our projects. By exposing them to urban issues early in their education, we're able to create a breed of champions for urban rejuvenation," said Riduan Ngesan, Programme Executive.

"Within the next five years, we hope that the Think Squad alumni will be applying what they've learnt in terms of best practices and methodologies deployed during the programme in their respective careers," he said.

“

There are many lessons from the programme that students can apply as they move forward in life, regardless of the field they enter. Lessons such as community participation, empathy throughout the project and thinking innovatively.

”



Riduan Ngesan,
Programme
Executive

“With participants coming from different public and private sector industries, a symbiotic relationship between Think City and Think Squad alumni can then exist, easing the process of urban rejuvenation in the future.”

THE 2016 CHAPTER: INSIGHTS, IDEAS AND IMPACT

In 2016, the Think Squad programme was conducted in partnership with Universiti Teknologi MARA involving 50 students as part of the Urban Planning subject, with support from the Kuala Lumpur City Council.

The programme yielded a number of interesting insights and ideas.

In the preliminary stage, the students did not realise the importance of community involvement in the initial process of planning urban spaces. They questioned the methodology of collecting feedback, assuming that the community should only be informed in the final stage just before a plan is executed.

“One of the valuable outcomes of the programme was the shift in importance placed on community involvement before and after a plan or design solution has been produced,” Riduan said.

“We also discussed many of the students’ ideas for improving the

city. These are valuable as they are perspectives of city dwellers who will return to rejuvenate the city,” said Riduan.

“Many of them also brought up ideas inspired by visiting other cities, and adapting them to suit the local context. As they continue to gain experience and exposure to different cities, these ideas can also be adapted to suit urban projects of the future, once the community has been consulted.

“There are many lessons from the programme that students can apply as they move forward in life, regardless of the field they enter. Lessons such as community participation, empathy throughout the project and thinking innovatively.”

TALENT

The Think Squad Programme is also a way for Think City to recruit new talent. Alumni are encouraged to stay connected and be actively involved in contributing their expertise to selected Think City programmes, sharing their innovative ideas and novel perspectives for improving the city.



Pop-up placemaking in Medan Pasar by Think Squad students.

To date, the public programmes and pop-up activities run by Think Squad has garnered encouraging participation and feedback. It illustrates the desire in many young students and working professionals to create better cities in Malaysia. With exposure and guidance, it is Think City’s hope that the next generation of leaders can be moulded into the best practitioners for our cities.

THE 'PANTS BEFORE SHOES' APPROACH IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Capire Consulting Group, a specialist community engagement company, was invited to provide training on engagement strategies. We hear from CHRIS ROBINSON, co-founder and principal of Capire, about why the guiding principle of 'Pants Before Shoes' is crucial in designing community and stakeholder engagement.



The workshops upheld a 'learn-by-doing' approach to training.

YOU RAN SOME CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOPS IN THE AREA OF ENGAGING COMMUNITIES FOR THINK CITY RECENTLY. HOW DID YOU DESIGN THOSE SESSIONS AND WHAT OUTCOMES WERE YOU LOOKING FOR?
A:

We designed the Community and Stakeholder Engagement training and capacity building workshops, to combine a mix of theory and real-world practice. Over six months, participants from Kuala Lumpur City Council (DBKL), Think City, Bukit Bintang business representatives, universities and not-for-profit agencies in KL were able to learn about international trends in community engagement and to explore new engagement tools and techniques.

Our key aim was to share our insights, and for participants to gain practical experience with real-life engagement in KL. Ours was a 'learn-by-doing' approach to training. Feedback from participants were positive. They had found useful new ways to design engagement strategies, learnt new skills in engagement that broke down cultural and perceived barriers, and through investigating international case studies and real-life project examples from our own professional consultancy experience.

Participants finished the programme feeling more confident and ready to try new methods; ready to be more strategic in the design of their

programmes and to better design the activities for the correct stage of each project. They also explored how transparency about engagement will or will not, contribute to project decisions.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN KUALA LUMPUR? WERE THERE ANY SPECIFIC CULTURAL ASPECTS TO CONSIDER?

A:

Community engagement in Kuala Lumpur, and Malaysia in general, requires careful consideration of a wide range of factors when designing the 'why', the 'who' the 'how' and the 'when' of any engagement programme. Many of these factors are consistent world-wide, yet in Malaysia, engagement programme design and execution challenges do take on their own unique complexity.

The diversity of Malaysia's community and professional languages, and the need to acknowledge or overcome cultural barriers to effective engagement is an important consideration. There is a need to balance gender during in-field engagement, and where possible, to describe what extent participants have rights to a say on public policy decisions.

The ability of engagement to assist in plan-making, plan-testing, and plan-approval is an emerging interest. Of interest to us, we also observed an emerging desire by professional Malaysians to better understand how 'foreigners', or people participating in anti-social behaviours, could or should be involved in engagement activities about local places or spaces.

On a practical level, designing engagement programmes to suit the time of day, the diversity of religious observances and the need

to accommodate the requirements of the role of politics and influence of developers will continually challenge and test best practice.

Like in many cities around the world, there is a need for local and national government to continually invest in building the capacity of local communities to understand city planning, what changes are required and what we value or want to protect. The cultural, built and natural heritage of Kuala Lumpur remain critical to the international 'brand' of Malaysia – as does Malaysia's rapid modernisation of social, community and civic infrastructure. Thoughtful and genuine community engagement is well placed to inform and guide public and private sector investments in order to maximise community benefits.

WHAT'S CRUCIAL IN FORMING A STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT?

A:

Generally, for engagement design we need to 'put our pants on before our shoes' – that is, we need to understand the 'why' and the 'who' of engagement, before we design the 'how' 'when' and the 'what'.

We need to understand as project sponsors, how the engagement will inform better decisions, how it will build the capacity of the team and the community, and how the engagement will strengthen, nurture or repair relationships.

Once we know the purpose of engagement, the real negotiables and the project milestones, we can then start to build activities, reporting and evaluation methods; getting the right project structure in place and a mix of skills in line with project objectives

and progress status, then seeking to engage representatives of all sections of community, supporters and objectors and going to people where they are and engaging them in the way that best suits them.

Using existing community networks and structures to connect, and commit to a longer term process will be essential – keeping stakeholders and community members informed even if there are quiet times. Using methods and engagement questions to suit the stage of the project, to overcome barriers to engagement and to encourage meaningful engagement, the creation of balanced solutions and managing expectations are all core considerations. The best engagement strategies mix up face-to-face activities (activities that are physical, real and fun) and an online presence. All are essential in keeping communities engaged. Importantly, good strategies close the loop by publishing findings – how they made a difference, what changed and what the next steps are.

“

Generally, for engagement design we need to 'put our pants on before our shoes' – that is, we need to understand the 'why' and the 'who' of engagement, before we design the 'how' 'when' and the 'what'.

”

HOW CAN COMMUNITIES BE LED TO DEVELOP OWNERSHIP OF THEIR PUBLIC SPACES?

A:

Transitioning local public spaces from being a place 'owned' or 'managed' by others (let's say Council), to a place where local communities are more invested, is an interesting task. Being more 'invested' in a local space may look like locals care more or have a shared responsibility to protect, maintain or nurture the space.

To facilitate this will require a deep understanding of what communities we are actually targeting, what is the driver to increase local 'ownership', and what are the social, cultural, economic or political contexts within which the space operates.

We need to be clear what the 'local ownership' objective actually means. Is the overarching intent to reduce the maintenance burden of Council, or 'clean up' the site from the homeless, 'make it safe to play' for children or 'provide a place to meet other people'? Whatever the strategic objective, 'place-based' engagement is key here to understanding the drivers of local change, and as a sub-set, the cultural, social or environmental functions of the public space and the personal or spiritual connection locals have with the space.

Without a deep and genuine understanding of the space, local fears, aspirations, local stories, dreams or unique cultures – any well-

meaning urban design solutions run the extreme risk of being detached, without connection to the place or the people and one that may further distance people from the place. Urban designers sometimes speak of the need for the ability of public places to be 'personalised' – however this doesn't necessarily mean that locals can paint it to suit them. From a local's perspective, it may just mean "I can see how they fit into this place, I can connect with this space, I feel safe, inspired or rejuvenated." Every time we can connect with a space, we 'own' it just that little more. Engagement is at the core of this change.



A workshop participant and Chris Robinson at one of the training sessions.



Workshop participants included DBKL, business representatives, universities and non-profit agencies.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Think City believes in giving skills to partners and citizens so that ownership of urban rejuvenation can be shared. Here are some of our efforts in capacity building and advocacy.



THINK CITY TALKS

A free monthly talk session held at APW Kuala Lumpur featuring like-minded individuals sharing their experiences related to urban issues. At the same time, it provides an opportunity to archive urban knowledge and solutions.



LIME WORKSHOP

Think City hosted a workshop facilitated by Ar. Junn Ng and Dr. Gwynn Jenkins, an architectural and cultural anthropology consultant, to teach participants alternative ways to preserve and conserve old buildings, namely using lime.



CULTURAL MAPPING WITH JOHOR BAHRU CITY COUNCIL (MBJB)

Led by cultural practitioner Janet Pillai, Think City staff together with MBJB mapped out cultural assets in the heritage core of Johor Bahru.

KHAZANAH MEGATRENDS FORUM 2016

Hamdan Abdul Majeed presenting The Case for Cities at the Khazanah Megatrends Forum 2016, themed Geography as Destiny.



BFM HEALTH AND LIVING LIVE 2017

Hamdan Abdul Majeed at a panel discussion organised by BFM exploring ways of Creating Urban Happiness, focusing on mental health in the urban environment.



ASEAN CREATIVE CITIES FORUM & EXHIBITION

KL Programme Director, Lee Jia Ping, discussed Think City's approach to "Creative Clusters & Hubs as Drivers for Sustainable Creative Cities" in the Philippines.



URBAN DESIGN FORUM: REDEFINING PUBLIC SPACES

Programme Manager, Daniel Lim, facilitated a placemaking workshop in Singapore organised by LOPELAB. (Photo credit LOPELAB)

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SETTING UP URBAN SOLUTIONS

With the expansion into four cities, Urban Solutions is set to strengthen the organisation's technical capacity, knowledge and research.

Eight years ago Think City began as a team of four in George Town, but with its expansion into three additional cities, the team has grown to 37. Increasing work complexity has led to a need for the organisation's structure to evolve. In response to this, Think City created the Urban Solutions unit, which acts both as a research arm and an internal consultancy for the teams in different cities.

It comprises two work streams, Urban Knowledge and Urban Design & Planning.

URBAN KNOWLEDGE

Urban Knowledge deals with Think City's research, education and advocacy with the aim of creating a knowledge bank, establishing partnerships and providing thought leadership.

The creation of Urban Knowledge came through sheer necessity. While Think City has identified many urban issues, there are often no clear cut solutions, and methods deployed in the West often do not suit the region.

"Solutions deployed overseas cannot always be easily applied to Malaysia, and so we have to find our own answers," said Duncan Cave, Programme Manager who heads Urban Knowledge.

"Following on from our research, we typically pilot projects ourselves to test the solutions. If they're successful, we move on to produce workable models that can be applied to other Malaysian cities," he added.

"Not all our research is piloted," he emphasised. "Instead, the research papers may serve as guidelines for future initiatives by Think City, or simply made available to the public, especially where we need people to take action."

Knowledge Bank

There is a need to document knowledge gained from Think City's endeavours into digestible and actionable information. This way, staff, partners and even other third parties can act on urban projects that would benefit cities.

URBAN SOLUTIONS FUNCTIONS

1
Urban Design & Planning

2
Capacity Building

3
Urban Research

4
Urban Knowledge Bank

5
National and Regional Network Development

“

Formalising the wealth of knowledge we have accumulated from our projects and programmes, seminars and workshops over the past, and capturing it in an accessible form is essential so that Think City has a structured knowledge database.

”

Duncan Cave, Urban Knowledge Programme Manager



“The teams in the new cities couldn’t just open a how-to manual and find the information they needed,” said Duncan. “Formalising the wealth of knowledge we have accumulated from our projects and programmes, seminars and workshops over the past, and capturing it in an accessible form is essential so that Think City has a structured knowledge database.”

The sheer volume of information makes this a daunting task, and so in 2016, a 5-year roadmap was established to ensure the project would stay on track.

“Right now we are in the data collection and archiving stage, and beginning to transition to the next phase, which is to analyse the data before it can be used for other programmes,” Duncan added.

Capacity Building

“Urban Knowledge also organises training and upskilling programmes for stakeholders and other interested parties. We engage experts from within Malaysia and overseas to run these courses. Some of our programmes have even had regional leaders coming in to attend.”

An example of this is the Urban Conservation Planning course created

in collaboration with the Getty Conservation Institute and Badan Warisan Malaysia. The ongoing course is led by international and local instructors, and is accredited by the Malaysian Institute of Planners. Plans are underway to make the course regional, expanding the scope of Think City’s work.

URBAN DESIGN & PLANNING

Urban Design & Planning has the chief mandate of devising, plotting and supporting the implementation of on-ground projects.

“The Urban Design and Planning team provides technical support to the rest of the organisation by contributing expertise in specific areas where ideas or manpower is needed,” said Dr. Matt Benson, Urban Solutions Programme Director.

“The unit functions as an internal consultancy, deploying its members to the cities where they are needed, based on the specific nature and characteristics of each project. The core client is Think City and the cities it operates in, although we’re aware that someday it will move beyond that scope to offer external consultancy services.”

Support Across Cities

“When you go into a city, there’s a lot of work to do such as baseline planning, mapping, urban design concepts, fleshing out the strategies or the details on the ground for how we’re going into a place. That requires a lot of resources and people,” Matt explained. “The Urban Planning and Design team’s role is to assist by bringing in additional resources. They can go into a city, help them out as best they can for a few months, then pull back.”

“Team members are assigned to each project based on the best fit for the project’s needs and specific characteristics. Think City also works closely with national and even foreign experts – specialists in different areas of knowledge – from partner companies and institutions,” he added.

“We also need to establish external relationships in every place we are working in such as with the local government or communities. This is important to create an environment where we can effectively engage, consult, and present strategies.”

There are advantages to this setup; it enables a robust multidisciplinary approach to projects, creating innovative solutions from a diverse set of skills. The solutions proposed are also more likely to take into account local culture and conditions.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND MOVING FORWARD SUSTAINABLY

“We’ve done a lot of work over the years, and we have learnt a lot in the process,” said Duncan of Urban Knowledge. “We are also consistently delivering competencies in projects that

are of international or regional standing. This means that the knowledge bank we build will be of great value to other cities as well, and position us as authorities in urban regeneration.”

With a target for Think City to be recognised as a regional thought leader in urban regeneration by 2020, Matt also envisions that in five years time, it will be in a position to provide quality technical advisory services in the Asian region.

“What we’re doing today serves Think City’s mandate of community-focused urban regeneration, but there is also a conscious movement towards becoming a consultancy or service provider in a wider context. For example, providing services to national or regional bodies, private corporations, and working towards becoming a sustainable social enterprise by diversifying the funding stream,” said Dr. Benson.

“Urban Solutions, working with others in the different cities, have demonstrated competencies in projects that are of high quality, such as JB’s streetscape amenity improvements, master planning ideas for Penang Sentral and public space improvements in old KL.”

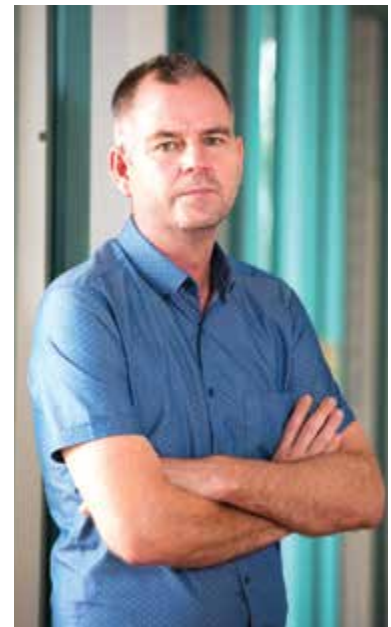
“We are also making contributions to national planning initiatives via our territorial work in Iskandar Malaysia – Singapore – Riau Islands. We are building our capacity and reputation to a point where Think City will be recognised as a regional leader and be invited to participate in urban rejuvenation work in other countries, successfully applying the learnings gleaned from our work here in Malaysia.”

“

When you go into a city, there’s a lot of work to do such as baseline planning, mapping, urban design concepts, fleshing out the strategies or the details on the ground for how we’re going into a place. That requires a lot of resources and people. The Urban Planning and Design team’s role is to assist by bringing in additional resources. They can go into a city, help them out as best they can for a few months, then pull back.

”

Dr. Matt Benson, Urban Solutions
Programme Director



PILOT PROJECTS GARDENS FOR COMMUNITY BONDING AND THE SAFE CITIES PROGRAMME

Looking to resolve specific problems in Malaysian cities, Urban Solutions runs pilot projects so that the feasibility of a programme can be evaluated and improved. Two recent projects look at improving living conditions in low cost housing, and making our cities safer, both through low cost interventions involving the community.



*Before and after image of the site at Section 8, Kota Damansara, Selangor.
Photo credit: Jeffrey Phang*

FROM WASTELAND TO FARMLAND

For years the land facing the PPR flats at Kota Damansara was overgrown with weeds and bushes hiding empty containers that played host to Aedes mosquitoes, inflicting the community with dengue.

Today this wasteland has been transformed into a beautiful and functional organic vegetable garden. Twenty rows of planting beds yield a weekly harvest of vegetables, providing welcome relief to residents facing increasing food bills.

“The vegetable garden is an escape from our small flats, a chance for the community to interact with each other while pursuing our interest in growing our own food,” says PPR resident, Manan.

Each planting bed is allocated to four households who jointly look after its productivity. Participation is inclusive and ensures that the four households are multi-racial to build up better community harmony.

Ustazah Samsiah, a 70-year old garden volunteer remarked, “It is a wonderful opportunity for different races to work together on a common hobby and also a first time where residents have a shared desire to upkeep the cleanliness of the garden. I hope this will set a new behaviour of care that is badly needed in our community.”

The volunteers’ motto is “Utamakan Masyarakat”, placing community interests before personal interests. They have pledged to set aside 20% of the weekly garden produce for a soup kitchen to help out any family in the community that had fallen on hard times.

The garden is also self-sustaining as volunteers breed composting earthworms to keep every plot fertile with the production of vermicast, an excellent organic fertiliser. To generate food for the worms, organic food waste from the members' kitchens are deposited into compost bins built into every plot to encourage new recycling habits.

The garden also provides capacity building opportunities; garden members meet every two weeks to discuss the operations and direction to be taken for the project, and a six-member committee attends to the cleanliness, security and administration of the garden.

The garden is a testimony to a partnership between the community, the corporation and the government who worked together to make it possible. The Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) provided advice, logistical and legal support in acquiring permission to use the land for the garden. Over 50 staff from Deloitte Malaysia did the initial clearing of the land as part of their CSR programme, while the PPR Rukun Tetangga provided the platform for the community to be involved in the setting up of the garden. NGO Friends of Kota Damansara co-ordinated the project, with Think City providing funding.

This project has enabled all partners to recognise how working together is so essential for the sustainability of the project. It has encouraged MBPJ to rebrand its community garden with a new logo, identifying that behind project success lies a spirit of caring in all contributors.

PILOTING A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH TO A SAFER CITY

Understanding the importance of a safe city in urban regeneration, Think City and partners are piloting "Safe City", an alternative approach to safety in downtown Kuala Lumpur, and one that emphasises greater community participation. This is a factor recognised by the United Nations in their Safer Cities initiative as "an essential part of effective crime prevention".

The key to the success of 'safe city' initiatives worldwide is their integrated approach combining environmental design, traditional policing strategies, community engagement, and better dialogue between stakeholders. An international report on crime prevention and community safety found that this "delivered results in terms of improving community safety and reinforcing the capacities of local actors."

Under the 2010 Malaysian Government Transformation Programme, local government has already ramped up measures to address crime through a combination of CCTVs, better street lighting, barriers, and increased security and police presence. Community-based programmes such as Rukun Tetangga and Neighbourhood Watch also received some attention.

However, addressing safety and security in downtown KL brings unique challenges. Foremost is breaking the cycle of fear as fear of crime decreases people's use of space, which in turn leads to fewer 'eyes on the street' and creates opportunities for crime. The area's highly transient population also makes it difficult to engage with the community.

Having identified the key issues and their underlying causes, Think City is working with DBKL, local businesses, institutions, police and residents to establish a dedicated "Downtown KL Safe City Committee". The committee will work together to deepen the understanding of safety concerns and devise and co-ordinate the implementation of an action plan.

A study by the European Forum for Urban Safety outlined three citizen involvement strategies that could be used – space management, attitude modification, and prevention. Under Think City's Safe City programme, this could take the form of a public information campaign, additional foot patrols, and the development of safe routes in the area. Efforts will also be made to activate public spaces through events and activities.

"Addressing safety concerns is fundamental for our urban regeneration efforts in downtown KL," said KL Programme Director Lee Jia Ping.

"The approach needs to be able to tackle the reality of the situation on the ground, but equally important is making sure visitors and locals perceive the area as welcoming."

As with any pilot programme Think City will make a concerted effort to measure its impact. While safety and crime statistics will be an important indicator of the programme's success, its true measure will be its contribution to the wider urban regeneration efforts. The lessons learnt will be applicable across the organisation and in communities around the country.

METRICS OF LONG-TERM SUCCESS **CREATING A FRAMEWORK FOR IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Think City measures its success based on the long-term impact it has on the lives of city dwellers. DR. JASMINA KUKA, Head of Programme at Yayasan Hasanah leant her expertise in developing Think City's framework for assessing and measuring impact. Here she shares insights into the more intricate aspects of developing the framework.



As a catalyst for change in the urban environment, Think City's role is to create a thriving ecosystem to improve cities and impact lives – working with the community to discover their wants and needs, while collaborating closely with policymakers to incorporate those needs and wants into sustainable urban solutions.

As part of its growth and expansion, Think City has begun formalising methods and practices, to create organisational structure, and one of the most vital of all processes – the implementation of metrics.

WHAT WAS THE FIRST STEP IN CREATING AN IMPACT-MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK FOR THINK CITY?

A:

Conducting a visioning session was the first step in developing Think City's impact assessment framework. We focused on a 10-year horizon at both the strategic and operational levels.

Yayasan Hasanah facilitated this process which involved Think City team members from George Town, Butterworth, Kuala Lumpur and Johor. We worked at identifying goals that Think City would like to achieve by 2026, social change that they can contribute to, benefits to beneficiaries and stakeholders as well as obstacles (current and potential) in the process of achieving their goals.

Why obstacles? When different obstacles from political, funding, policy or organisational issues are clearly laid out, Think City would be able to define adequate measures and plans that will minimise the negative effects of those obstacles, and consequently improve the effectiveness of their work.

Keeping in mind that Think City works across four geographies with different needs and problems, we identified three overall goals that each geography will strive to contribute to:

- Influencing urban policies for city-shaping and place making;
- Improving liveability in cities by applying sustainable, innovative and catalytic urban solutions
- Attracting co-investment in areas of need to ensure city-making initiatives are sustainable.

HOW IS THINK CITY'S IMPACT MEASURED, AND WHAT INDICATORS HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED?

A:

There are three broad indicator groups.

First are the quantitative and qualitative indicators. Quantitative indicators measure the output of Think City's work e.g. the number of endorsed plans, public events, skill-building workshops, grants approved, and other projects that have been completed.

Qualitative indicators are more complex as they measure the level of public satisfaction with implemented projects, increase in knowledge given and used by public authorities, and community satisfaction with public space programmes, both

proposed and implemented. This is an extremely important component, as the number of projects and activities may not matter if people are not impacted in a positive way.

The next indicator group deals with measuring Think City's influence in different sectors: culture, social, the economy and the environment. Examples include Think City's influence in the protection of cultural heritage (cultural indicators), improved liveability in cities or participation of communities in decision-making processes (social indicators), increase of protected green spaces in cities (environmental indicators), and new jobs created (economic indicators).

Finally, we focused on defining short-term (up to 1 year), medium-term (3-5 years) and long-term (5-10 years) indicators.

By regularly collecting relevant data and analysing these three groups of indicators, we can get a clear understanding of Think City's performance i.e. short term gaps and opportunities, and required improvements for achievement of their mid-term and long term goals.

ARE THERE INDICATORS SPECIFIC TO THE DIFFERENT GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS WHERE THINK CITY IS PRESENT?

A:

Each geography has developed their own plans and activities that correspond with specifically identified needs, however they all contribute to the three overall goals mentioned.

For example, the first overall goal is to influence urban policies for city-shaping and place making. With that goal in mind, George Town is focused on building sound monitoring

and consultative practices and processes that support a historic city. The Butterworth office, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, is developing the Plan Led Development Model of Regenerated Secondary Cities that will become a reference point for city shaping policies in Malaysia. The Kuala Lumpur office is oriented towards inclusive and sustainable city practices that are being successfully implemented in cooperation with DBKL and other relevant government authorities.

Following this approach, each geography has a set of indicators that measure the results of their specific activities. However, indicators that measure achievement of overall goals are the same for all geographies. By using this standardised approach, Think City will be able to measure the collective contribution and impact of their activities.

WHAT IS THE AUDITING PROCESS LIKE?

A:

Think City reports to Yayasan Hasanah on a quarterly basis using indicators presented in their impact assessment frameworks. Every geography defines a different set of project activities, which are directly linked to relevant indicators, sources of data and timing for achieving those activities. This approach makes an audit process (both internal and external) rather smooth and straightforward.

WILL THE INSTITUTIONALISING PROCESS SLOW DOWN THINK CITY? ARE THERE SAFEGUARDS TO HELP THINK CITY RETAIN ITS AGILITY AND INNOVATIVE SPIRIT?

A:

The goal of the initial visioning session I talked about earlier was to encourage Think City team members not to think

'out of the box' but to think like 'there is no box'. The rest of the process follows the same approach.

Building and maintaining well-defined and functional institutional processes and procedures might sound too technical, but once this well-fuelled system is in place it will actually enable Think City to focus less on the bureaucratic part of their everyday work. Team members will have more breathing room for creativity, innovation, the courage to test new initiatives, and especially the ability to reach out and get feedback from community members, who are traditionally not involved in the development and implementation of ideas for the city. It will enrich and diversify the content of Think City's work and contribute to building more liveable, resilient and people-centric cities.

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PEOPLE AND PARTNERS

125

THE PEOPLE OF THINK CITY

128

THINK CITY PARTNERS

GEORGE TOWN



BUTTERWORTH



KUALA LUMPUR



JOHOR BAHRU



SHARED SERVICES



THINK CITY PARTNERS

PARENT COMPANY



PRINCIPAL FUNDER



GOVERNMENTAL PARTNERS



INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS



COMMUNITY PARTNERS



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