



17 JUL, 2019

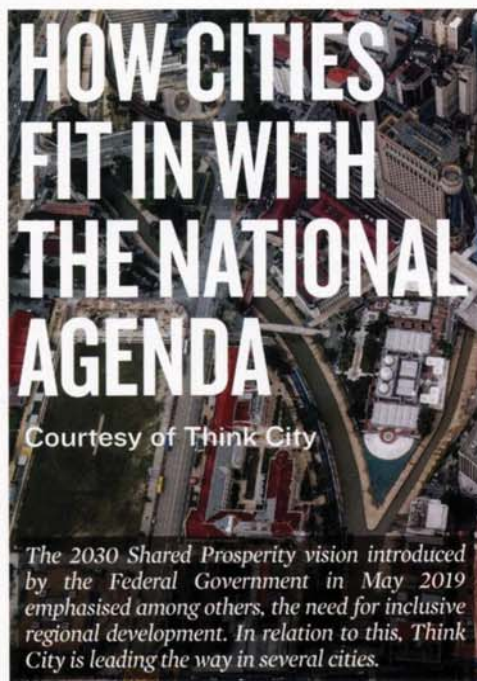
HOW CITIES FIT IN WITH THE NATIONAL AGENDA

Business Today, Malaysia



Page 1 of 3

URBAN REGENERATION



HUMANITY is entering the age of rapid urbanisation, with Malaysia expected to reach an urbanisation rate of 80 percent in 2020. With four out of five Malaysians living in urban areas, our cities and towns are critical economic engines for growth. Globally, cities have always played an important role in growth by providing opportunities for the matching of supply of talent and investment to demand from enterprise and innovation.

For example, Kuala Lumpur which is fully urbanised makes up roughly 5.5 percent of Malaysia's population but contributed 15.6 percent of national GDP in 2017. It also had the highest GDP per capita at current prices amounting to RM111,321. The next two highest states by GDP per capita were Labuan at only 52 percent and Penang at only 45 percent that of Kuala Lumpur's.

Given this, it is not far-fetched to argue that the health and wealth of a nation is best reflected in the health of its cities or urban agglomerations. Rapid urbanisation and population growth in cities are not without their downside, and these are becoming more apparent as haphazard development seems to be the order of the day here for the past few decades.

CREATING LIVEABLE CITIES

"Of particular relevance and importance to us is the need to invest in the liveability and resilience of our cities, which in turn will improve competitiveness," said Hamdan Abdul Majeed, Think City's managing director.

"Malaysian cities are not spared of the ills besieging other urban centres such as congestion, unsatisfactory waste management, inadequate housing, poor sanitation, and insufficient infrastructure," he added.

A failure to manage these challenges quickly all at once can erode our cities' competitiveness as places for investment, trade, and tourism, just to name some.

"Given this, it is imperative to invest in cities in order to attract and keep both investments and talent. Guided by our data-driven approach as a learning organisation and working at the intersection of communities, the private sector, and government, Think City (see sidebar) is able to offer something unique to the equation," said Hamdan.

With rapid globalisation and an increasingly mobile workforce, analysts have argued that the characteristic of global competition for investment and talent will change from just between nations, to one that includes competition between cities.

Malaysia, like many countries across the world, is grappling with the challenge of balancing a growing population and demand, with a natural environment that is increasingly under stress. In the global context of increasing intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, adopting green growth has also become an imperative for Malaysia.

BALANCED REGIONAL GROWTH

In May 2019, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced the 2030 Shared Prosperity vision. One of the strategic thrusts announced in this vision was focusing on inclusive regional growth towards inclusive and distributive economic development.

The Shared Prosperity vision aims to develop more comprehensive economic centres throughout the country to bridge the gaps between the haves and the have nots. Think City reminds us that second and third tier cities and towns should not be neglected and have their roles to play.

"Individually, these smaller cities and towns may be relatively weak and have fewer functions. However, a cluster of these neighbouring cities and towns, what Think City calls Territorial Diamonds, could potentially leverage each other's strengths. As a synergistic unit, these Diamonds are attractive and powerful enough to be regional economic engines".



17 JUL, 2019

HOW CITIES FIT IN WITH THE NATIONAL AGENDA

Business Today, Malaysia



As the country aims to re-engineer and create economic growth, the development and renewal of cities will be crucial to create that much needed critical mass for economic agglomeration.

The challenge facing smaller cities include building the capacity of their local councils and empowering them to explore new ways of working through data and technology. Large international capital cities themselves are finding it challenging enough grappling with issues from disruption such as cybersecurity, over-tourism and the negative impacts of the sharing economy.

THINK CITY – CATALYSING CHANGE IN CITIES

The Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Cities 2030, tabled at the Ninth session of the World Urban Forum in 2018 recommended accelerating the implementation of innovative solutions to foster a culture of creativity and innovation while promoting informed and evidence-based decision making and policy formulation.

One such innovative example is Think City's Penang Green Connectors project to address climate change. Penang's urban areas face heat stress and flooding. The project aims to develop a comprehensive green infrastructure plan linking coastal parks to pedestrian waterfronts, as well as urban river corridors to biodiverse peri-urban green spaces. This will not only reduce surface temperatures but promote pedestrian movement, recreation, and habitats for wildlife. Flooding will be significantly reduced by adopting a sponge city approach where the city is designed to passively absorb, clean and use rainfall in an ecologically friendly way.

From humble beginnings in 2009 as a grant-management agency based in George Town, Think City has evolved into an established city making agency in George Town, Butterworth, Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru.

"While these four cities – selected based on their strong fundamentals – will serve as pioneers, the transformation will be expanded to other cities over time. These cities will serve as role models for other cities in the country and region. We have developed city making know-how by investing significant effort together with our local and international partners to understand the urban issues in the cities we work in, and experimenting with different approaches to strengthen our methodology.

"Our redefined vision is to make cities more people-friendly by catalysing change in the way

cities are planned, developed, and celebrated. As we embark on the next phase of development, we intend to deepen our impact in the cities we are present in and, extend our reach (resources permitting) to other parts of Malaysia and the region, while ensuring the sustainability of our work," said Hamdan.

Far from being an entity that works alone, Think City will continue to work closely with local authorities, communities, institutions, private entities, and global experts to trial, plan, and implement programmes to rejuvenate cities. New domains that Think City is exploring include climate change adaptation and harnessing urban data to generate insights for better citymaking.

"Over the next few years, we intend to become the leading city making agency in the region by becoming the preferred delivery partner of a few more local authorities in Malaysia, to be recognised as a regional urban solutions 'think-and-do-tank', as well as being a responsible social purpose organisation that collaborates with communities, the private sector and the government."

Think City's mission is to:

- 1) Build a movement to advocate for quality city making across communities, government and the private sector
- 2) Foster community participation and engagement in city making to increase citizens' ownership and excitement over their cities.
- 3) Prototype new ideas through experiments and demonstrative projects and programmes, supported by data to promote evidence-based policymaking.
- 4) Develop city makers who are entrepreneurial, inclusive and empathetic to broaden the base of city making professionals with similar mindsets and values across the country
- 5) Ensure sustainability of our work and impact by rigorously tracking outcomes delivered, expanding delivery partners and diversifying sources of funding.

Think City (thinkcity.com.my) is a social purpose organisation set up to increase the wellbeing of communities by creating more sustainable and liveable cities.



17 JUL, 2019

HOW CITIES FIT IN WITH THE NATIONAL AGENDA

Business Today, Malaysia



Page 3 of 3

SUMMARIES

HUMANITY is entering the age of rapid urbanisation, with Malaysia expected to reach an urbanisation rate of 80 percent in 2020. With four out of five Malaysians living in urban areas, our cities and towns are critical economic engines for growth. Globally, cities have always played an important role in growth by providing opportunities for the matching of supply of talent and investment to demand from enterprise and innovation.