

Revitalising cities through urban regeneration best practices

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More than 550 delegates convened at M Resort & Hotel Kuala Lumpur on Sept 10 for the 15th International Conference on World Class Sustainable Cities (WCSC 2024), featuring the theme, “Revitalising Kuala Lumpur Through Innovative Urban Regeneration”. The event is aimed at enhancing liveability, sustainability and economic vitality in the country’s capital.

In his welcome address, WCSC 2024 chairman Tan Yee Seng said, “Urban regeneration is a challenging task, requiring us to develop our cities to improve functionality, sustainability and inclusivity while keeping the city’s unique heritage intact. [WCSC 2024 will] look at how urban regeneration can improve our city for the people, focusing on sustainable growth, economic prosperity, social inclusivity and environmental sustainability.”

This year’s conference featured eight international and local speakers, panellists and moderators. Endorsed and supported by Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL), the conference was organised by the Real Estate and Housing Developers’ Association Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur (Rehda WP (KL)), the Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM) and the Malaysian Institute of Planners (MIP).

The conference kicked off with keynote presentations by Kuala Lumpur mayor Datuk Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif, followed by Kyushu Sangyo University’s specially appointed professor Yoshinobu Fukasawa, Earoph International president and East Java vice-governor Emil Elestianto Dardak, Indonesia Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning’s director of national spatial planning Pelopor Topaewai Abidin Tokampasu and PNB Merdeka Ventures CEO Tengku Datuk Ab Aziz Tengku Mahmud.

Rejuvenating KL city

In her keynote presentation titled “Revitalising KL for the People”, KL mayor Maimunah said the goal is to build a city that is not only economically vibrant but also environmentally friendly, inclusive and liveable.

“This vision is being realised through several initiatives that focus on urban regeneration, transit-oriented housing, culture and community participation. Hence, urban revitalisation is crucial to Kuala Lumpur’s transformation. The first step is a paradigm shift in how we see Kuala Lumpur. It is more than a bustling metropolis. It is a breathing and living community and DBKL aims to improve



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Tan: WCSC 2024 will focus on sustainable growth, economic prosperity, social inclusivity and environmental sustainability



Maimunah: Kuala Lumpur is more than a bustling metropolis. It is a breathing and living community, and DBKL aims to improve the quality of life for the people.



Fukasawa: Transit-oriented developments resulted in a synergy between the components along the railway lines, allowing for land value appreciation



Emil: Successful urban regeneration requires political will, participatory planning, proper assessment of business viability and the engagement of experts

the quality of life for the people,” said Maimunah.

She added that DBKL is looking to rejuvenate old buildings and areas in the city such as Dataran Merdeka and Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad.

“We want to restore the historical structures and transform them into more engaging public spaces with improved events and gathering facilities. DBKL will also ensure the public spaces are secure, accessible and dynamic.”

Reaping the benefits of TODs

Next, Kyushu Sangyo University’s Fukasawa explained in his presentation titled “Promoting Sustainable Growth Through Japan’s Rail-Plus-Property Model” how cities in Japan are utilising transit-oriented developments (TODs) to rejuvenate areas along the rail lines.

“This [TOD] concept began nearly 100 years ago. Commercial developments, housing, public infrastructure such as schools and even amusement facilities were developed and this resulted in a synergy between them and the

railway lines. This arrangement allowed for land value appreciation and companies could capture this value and channel the investments to the public,” said Fukasawa.

Additionally, he noted that the railways can promote tourism, ease traffic congestion and reconnect urban areas that were previously divided.

Proper planning vital for successful urban regeneration

In the next special keynote address, “Sustainable and Resilient Urban Regeneration”, Earoph’s Emil provided several key features of urban regeneration, among which are the repurposing of neighbourhoods, reconfiguration of their layouts, improvement of amenities and upgrade of existing buildings and housing.

He explained that for urban regeneration to be successful, it requires political will, participatory planning, proper assessment of business viability and the engagement of experts.

“Project output needs to be clearly identified to ensure clarity

in the project planning and implementation stage, as well as aligning stakeholder expectations,” said Emil.

Spatial planning for Greater Jakarta area

The next speaker, Indonesia Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning’s Pelopor highlighted several challenges that Indonesia faces pertaining to urban redevelopment in his presentation titled “Urban Regeneration with the People for the People”.

Citing figures from the World Bank, he stated that 75% of urban areas in the country are located in coastal territories and hence are at risk of flooding from the rising sea level. In addition, he highlighted inadequate infrastructure, informal settlements, urban poverty and social inequality among other factors contributing to the challenges.

To address them, Pelopor offered some insights into the urban regeneration of the Greater Jakarta area. They include adding walkways at various levels, development of through lanes to improve ease of movement

from one point to another, and the development of active public open spaces that support transit movement within the TOD areas. Other efforts include building more green spaces, upgrading of slums and the revitalisation of the Jakarta Old Town to be a zero-emission area and more pedestrian-friendly.

Sustainability efforts in Merdeka 118

The next speaker was PNB Merdeka Ventures’ Ab Aziz, who walked the audience through the history of the construction of Merdeka 118 Tower and its sustainability efforts.

He said Merdeka 118 incorporates sustainable construction, site planning and management to reduce water and energy consumption, while reducing pollution.

These measures include having rainwater run-off management and water-efficient landscaping, allowing water usage reduction by more than 30%. As for energy efficiency, the tower utilises solar photovoltaic panels, high performance lighting, zoned daylight sensors and more.

“We are targeting to achieve a triple-platinum green certification for the tower, which would be a first in Malaysia,” said Ab Aziz, noting that it has already achieved the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum certification, with PNB setting its sights on obtaining Platinum certification from GreenRE and Green Building Index next.

Policies and forward planning

The afternoon sessions saw director-general of Town and Country Planning Malaysia (PLAN Malaysia) Datuk Alias Rameli speaking on “Reviving Cities Through the Urban Renewal Act”, followed by two sharing segments.

The first was by Battersea Power Station Development Company London chief design review officer Marina Chung on the “Urban Renewal of the Battersea Power Station: Design for Inclusivity”. The second was by BDP India urban design director Manisha Bhartia on “Urban Regeneration Towards Creating Inclusive and Resilient Communities”.

During Alias’ session, he highlighted several pointers on how the Urban Renewal Act will have an impact on revitalising the older or neglected parts of cities around Malaysia. There are numerous buildings across Malaysia that are over 30 years old, many of which need to be refurbished or reused.

Focusing on Kuala Lumpur, he remarked that there are 139 potential sites for urban renewal that cover a total of 3,206.51 acres with an estimated gross development value of RM355.3 billion.

He emphasised the importance of the Urban Renewal Act, which is the government’s way to safeguard the rakyat’s interest and to provide social, economic and physical benefits and advantages. At the same time, it is to ensure property owners are adequately compensated.

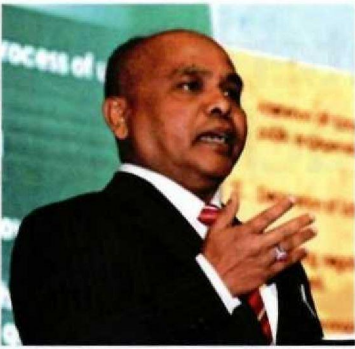
One of the main issues with regard to urban renewal is the consent threshold. Currently in Malaysia, all property owners residing in a place that is in need of redevelopment need to provide consent. As this is near impossible, it has been suggested that the consent threshold be reduced to 80% for buildings below 30 years old and 75% for buildings older than 30 years for safe buildings.



Pelopor: Indonesia faces several challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, informal settlements, urban poverty and social inequality in its urban regeneration journey



Ab Aziz: Merdeka 118 incorporates sustainable construction, site planning and management to reduce water and energy consumption, while reducing pollution



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For buildings that are not safe or abandoned, a simple majority of 51% is suggested.

In closing, Alias reiterated that the Urban Renewal Act is a tool or instrument to facilitate, control and regulate urban renewal processes and protect the rights and interests of land and property owners.

Inclusive for all

The next speaker, Chung, showcased how Battersea Power Station was designed to be inclusive for all and how urban renewal has reactivated and brought new life to a once desolate and empty area.

A quick overview revealed that there are 19 acres of public spaces; 386 affordable homes delivered to date; 140 restaurants, retail and leisure venues; 2,000 homes have been delivered with 2,500 residents; and over three million sq ft of commercial space.

As a result of the renewal, there has been economic impact with about £5 billion (RM28 billion) invested across the estate to date and 6,600 new jobs created with about 14,000 more expected. It is expected that 20,000 jobs will be created once the whole master plan is completed, according to Chung.

Furthermore, the businesses are supported via incubation initiatives such as pop-up kiosks and supporting SMEs (small and medium enterprises) and through partnerships with charities. Social contribution is also instilled with 120 local community organisations identified and prioritised, more than 3,000 devices refurbished and distributed to locals since April 2020, rent-free premises for social enterprise, and free meeting rooms for local charities and groups.

To ensure connectivity, the area is easily accessible via the



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£300 million contribution towards Northern Line Extension (NLE) and £7.5 million contribution towards the NLE Western entrance. In addition to Uber Boat taxis, there is even a bike hub for 500 bikes and cycle space for 9,000, a new pedestrian tunnel, £4.5 million for highway improvements and £1 million for controlled parking zones.

Besides ensuring the spaces are inclusive, green features and sustainability have also been incorporated into the project. They include a 60,000 sq ft Energy Centre that supports district heat and energy network, a licensed

ornithologist that recorded over 95 different species of birds on the estate, the planting of 300 trees and 24 different tree species, and other biophilic design elements.

The Good City

When it was Manisha’s turn to speak, she highlighted the state of cities, the limitations when it comes to renewing a city and what makes The Good City that are predicated on 10 principles.

One of the cities she brought up was Liverpool, which appears to be showing signs of decay due to age. She also shared the UK government’s regeneration efforts

from 1997 to 2010 that resulted in the revitalisation of the city.

BDP, which is a multi-discipline firm of architects, engineers, designers and urbanists, was involved in those efforts. Thanks to this new lease of life, Liverpool has received 390 million visitors, generated £4.1 billion in economic activity, created 4,700 jobs and boosted the local economy by 24%.

While there are success stories, Manisha admitted that there are limitations — some cities are very image-focused, adopting Western models that may not take into account the local cultural and environmental context, resulting in a place that does not resonate with the local population.

She also points to outdated policies that may focus on addressing the height, bulk and orientation of buildings rather than promoting a sense of place and identity. A lack of understanding about an area too can lead to segregation of an integrated space and people. There is also a lack of supporting infrastructure to cater to a higher population density.

Despite these limitations, there are some guiding principles that can provide guideposts on creating a more vibrant city that is inclusive and resilient. The 10 principles are: quality of life; biodiversity; being resource efficient; resilience; flexibility; brings people together; getting around; efficient planning; non-polluting and being zero carbon ready.

She noted that the use of data analytics can be helpful in devising plans and strategies for cities.

Manisha offered these parting words of advice: “We must act now, with vision and purpose, to ensure that the cities of tomorrow provide better lives for all who inhabit them. The 10 principles I’ve shared today offer a road map to not just better cities, but to better lives for everyone who calls them home.”



The conference saw local and international speakers sharing city best practices with delegates