

# Street art in urban design

KUALA Lumpur is currently hosting the Ninth World Urban Forum (WUF9), a non-legislative technical forum convened by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) biennially since 2002.

Themed “Cities 2030, Cities for All: Implementing the New Urban Agenda”, WUF9 (Feb 9 to 13) is happening at a time when a paradigm shift in thinking is needed in balancing the pace of urban development with the social cohesiveness of contemporary living in Malaysia.

Taking a cue from the rapid growth of mega cities worldwide and the proliferation of Unesco-certified Creative Cities since 2004, Malaysia’s efforts in pushing for creative arts and urban regeneration, most notably the establishment of Think City in 2009 (under parent company Khazanah Nasional and funded by Yayasan Hasanah), are commendable.

But while such efforts are laudable and progressive, more needs to be done in engaging the city councils of various states in the coordination and implementation of community-centric projects and considering other unconventional urban rejuvenation projects that could create “liveable, resilient, and people-centric cities” (as stated in the objectives of the Think City initiatives).

One example of creative urban rejuvenation



would be Malaysian street art, which has seen a proliferation of sorts starting from the urban graffiti of Klang River in 2005.

One would only need to visit Shah Alam’s Laman Seni 2 and 7 to see the potential of such creative endeavours and street art in the social and cultural rejuvenation of modern Malaysia.

While there are “pockets” of creative spaces in Malaysian cities (such as in SS2, Petaling Jaya, Butterworth, Kuching and Sibul) and states (Kelantan, Terengganu and Melaka), and commissioned cultural murals in Penang, Ipoh and Johor Baru, such creative spaces are insufficient

and need the continuous support of state local councils to develop and sustain the creative urban spaces.

The potential of graffiti and street art is undeniable and perhaps it is timely that the World Urban Forum has touched on multiple themes, chief among them being public spaces, urban design and social cohesion.

A progressive way forward is to engage the street and graffiti art community now in formal and effective partnerships that would see the latter playing a more prominent role in rejuvenating urban spaces.

Besides organising corporate-sponsored graffiti contests, several proactive measures could be initiated to leverage on such talents, including per-

mitting street/graffiti art to flourish in urban/community centres, providing grants to the artistes, and allowing the growth of street art in city centres.

By adopting a more inclusive urban development approach – one that includes the often stereotyped street/graffiti art community – the UN’s New Urban Agenda could be achieved. This could well position Malaysia as a contender for the first Creative City for street art in South-East Asia.

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