

## **KL draft plan: Use eco-cities as models**

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SOME commentators on the Kuala Lumpur Draft Plan 2020 have identified precisely the main flaw in the plan: It does not account enough for sustainable living and development. The draft plan is unperceptive because its city planners fail to understand that today's escalating fuel and food prices, as well as detrimental climate change, are serious, long-term problems.

The city planners could have referred to several eco-cities in the world as models in urban planning. These eco-cities are so called because they are recognised worldwide as blueprints for sustainable urban living. One outstanding example is Curitiba, a Brazilian city with a population of two million over an area of 432 square kilometres.

Curitiba is renowned for its innovative mass transit system. Although it has one of the highest car ownership per capita in Brazil, it has the lowest rates of ambient pollution and per capita fuel consumption.

The reason is simply that Curitiba citizens prefer to use public transport, so much so that Curitiba has an average of over two million passengers a day on public transport.

Most cities in the world expand concentrically, annexing new areas around the outskirts while progressively increasing the density of the business and commercial districts at the city centre. Consequently, the city centre grows increasingly polluted, congested and inhospitable.

Since the 1970s, Curitiba planners instead emphasised expansion along prescribed structural axes, allowing the city as well as the public transport system to spread outward along these axes. The public transport system expands in tandem with the city so that homes, workplaces and shops are always readily accessible to one another.

Curitiba is one radical example where the city is designed around people rather than around cars. It is also an example of a city with multiple centres (instead of one centre), with each centre catering to the needs of its local residents.

There are many more innovations in Curitiba that KL city planners could have learned from. For instance, Curitiba recycles 70 per cent of its garbage. Its citizens are even paid for turning in garbage for recycling. Nearly one-fifth of Curitiba comprises parks and woods, not including the 1.5 million trees planted along streets. In total, this gives an impressive green area per capita of 52 square metres. Trees not only mitigate the high carbon dioxide level, they also cool the city by evaporating water.

Another example is China's new eco-city, Dongtan, that is being built from scratch. One of the key plans is to supply all of Dongtan's energy demands from renewable sources such as wind and solar power, as well as biogas produced from the city's sewage and compost.

Urban organic agriculture could also be introduced in KL. Special urban lots, even rooftops of high-rise buildings, can be used to grow easily perishable food for city consumption.

Food grown organically reduces dependency on fossil fuel-based agrochemicals.

Moreover, urban agriculture brings food closer to the consumers, which in turn leads to cheaper food, less food shuttling and lower food imports.

If KL is to be a world-class city, its underlying problems must be addressed using sustainable-oriented thinking.

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