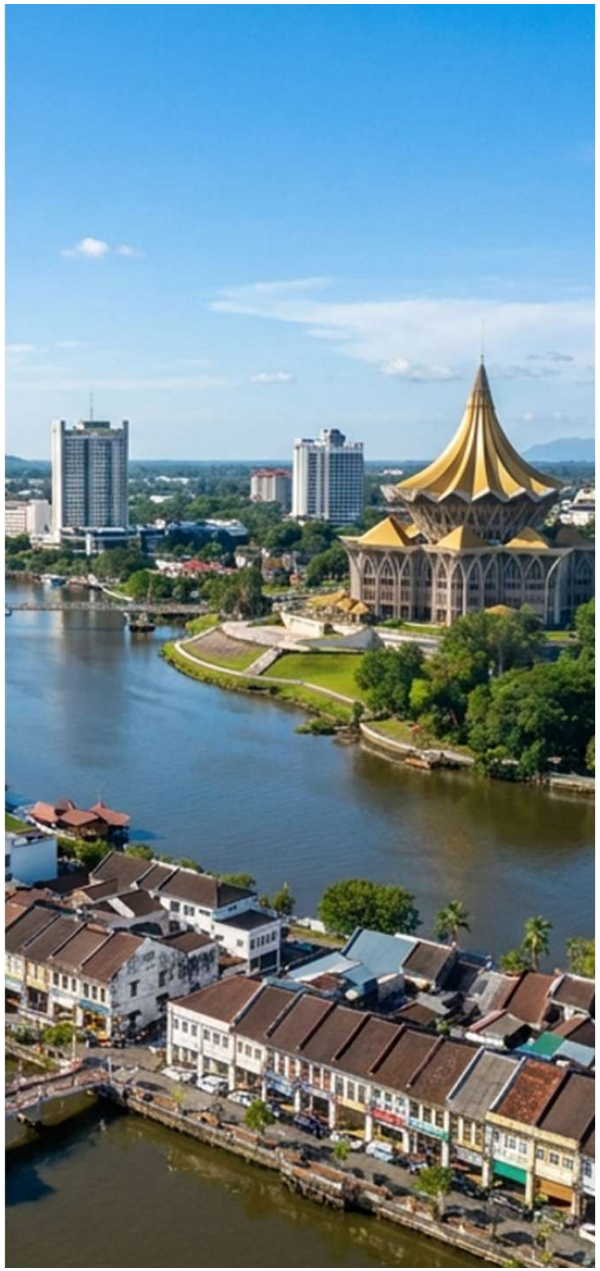
Session 2
Building Health: Shaping Cities for People and Wellbeing

Topic: Healthy Cities, Salutogenicity, Inclusivity, and Culture

Four pillars, one initiative - read through the lived experience of Kuching



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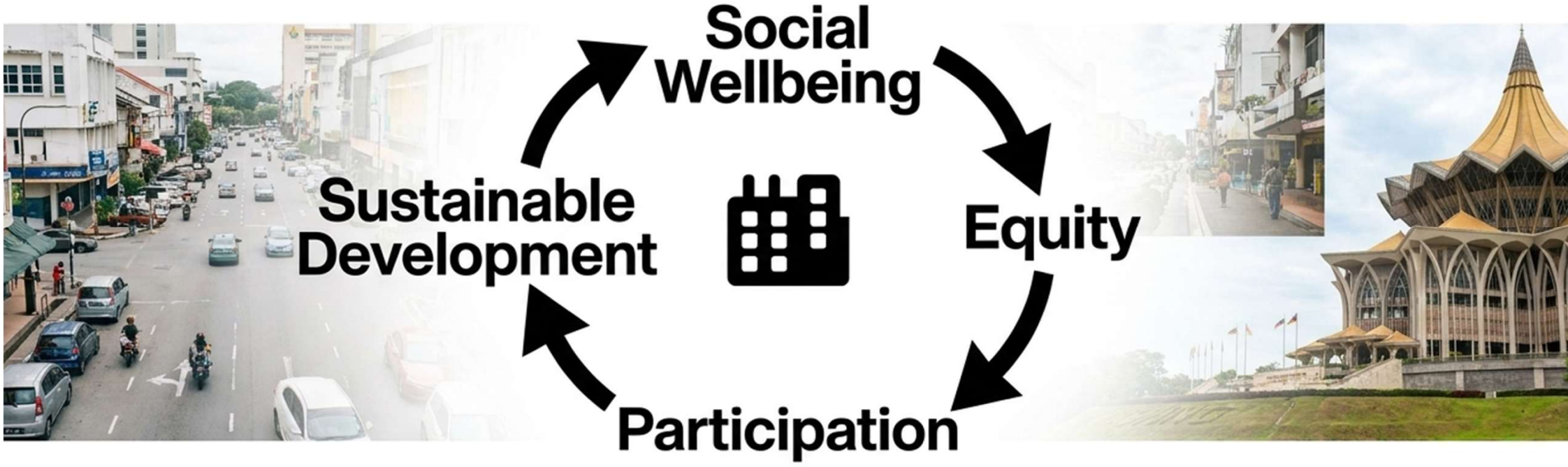
Design and Health as the Connecting Story

- When we say ‘design and health’, many people think first of hospitals.
- But the city itself is a health setting.
- Everyday environments shape physical activity, stress, safety, social interaction, and mental wellbeing.



Pillar 1: The Healthy City as a continuous Process

- A healthy city is not a city that has achieved a perfect state of health.
- It is a city committed to a process.



Health services are only part of the picture.
True health sits at the centre of urban policy and local governance.

Pillar 2: Salutogenicity (The Anatomy of Health Creation)

Instead of asking what causes illness, salutogenesis asks: what creates health?

The Anatomy of Coping

Comprehensibility

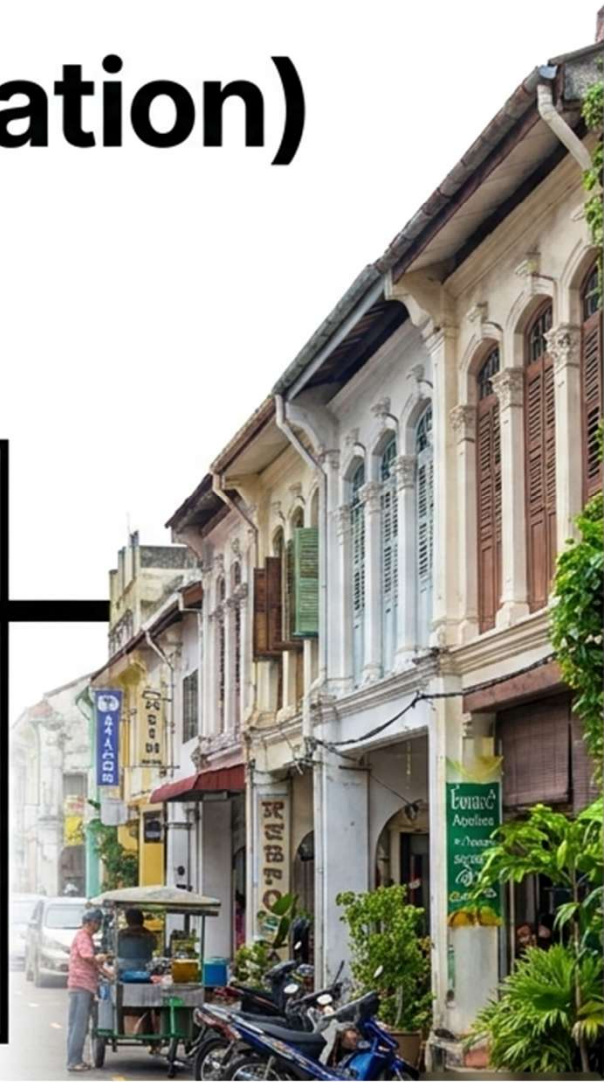
People can understand their environment.

Manageability

People can use it with confidence.

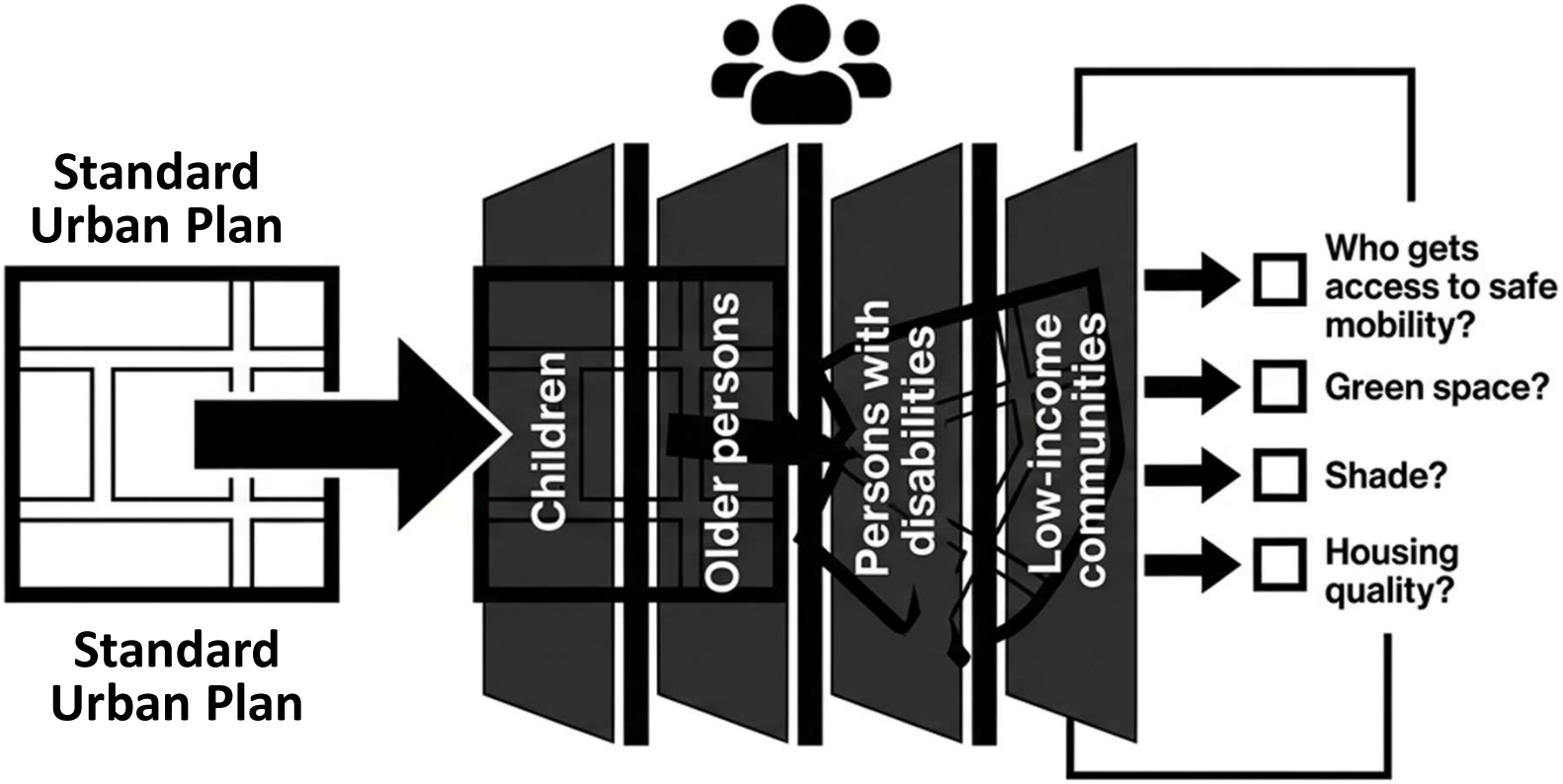
Meaningfulness

It carries value and meaning in their lives.



Pillar 3: The Inclusivity Filter

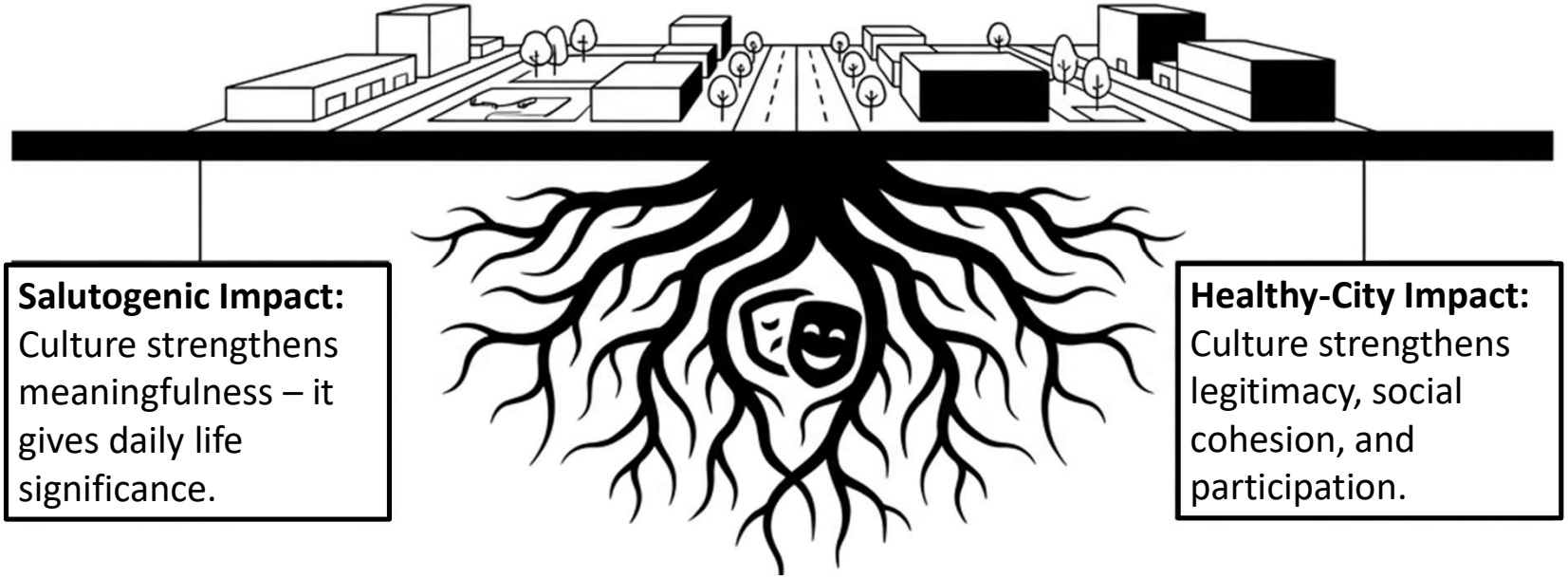
- **Inclusivity is not an optional social add-on - it is a core condition for urban health.**
- **If a city works well only for some people, it is not truly salutogenic.**





Pillar 4: Culture as the Foundation of Legitimacy

Cities are not only physical systems; they are places of memory, identity, habit and belonging.



Salutogenic Impact: Culture strengthens meaningfulness – it gives daily life significance.

Healthy-City Impact: Culture strengthens legitimacy, social cohesion, and participation.



Key Takeaway: Without culture, technically efficient solutions are not fully used, trusted, or recognised by the people.

The Master Framework: Translating Ideas into Practice



The Canopy — **Healthy City** — The Civic Goal

The Engine — **Salutogenicity** — The Health-Creation Logic

The Scale — **Inclusivity** — The Test of Fairness

Culture — Meaning & Legitimacy

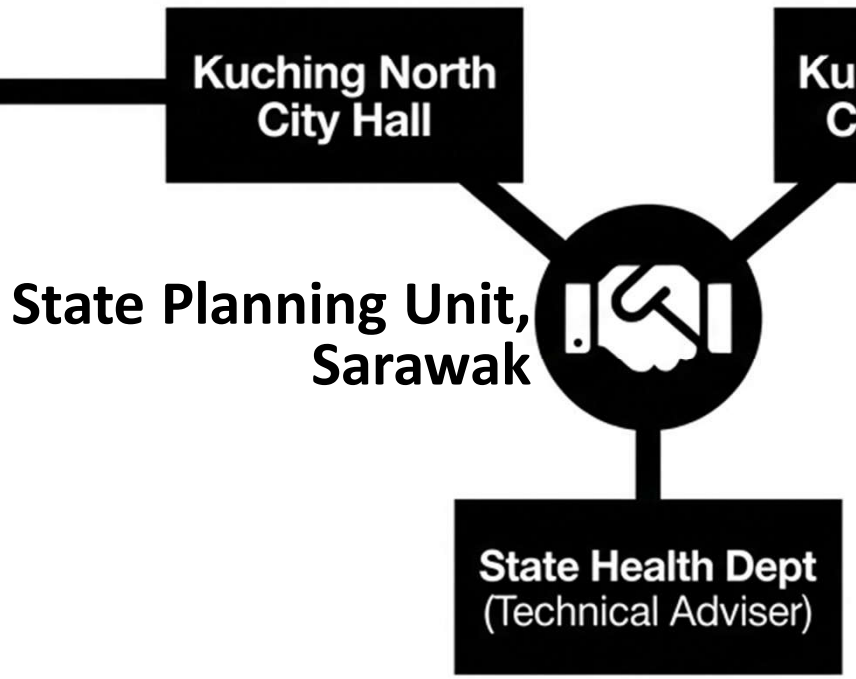


Design & Health is the field where policy, space, behavior, and wellbeing meet.

Grounding the Story: Kuching Since 1994

1994

Kuching North City Hall and Kuching South City Council joined the Healthy City initiative.





Key Insight: From the beginning, healthy-city work in Kuching was never only a design idea – it was a **collaborative, intersectoral governance project**

Kuching's Early Healthy City City Priorities



Level 4: **Greenery –**
Integrating more trees and green spaces across the city



Level 3: **Social Dignity –**
Supporting the homeless and building facilities for children's development

Level 2: **Housing & Settlements**
- Resettling squatters and construction-site shacks.

Level 1: **Environment –**
Drainage, sanitation, everyday environmental conditions

Takeaway: These are not narrow technical issues – they are issues of environment, equity, dignity, and everyday quality of life.

Kuching Reinterpreted: The Salutogenic Lens

	Salutogenicity	Inclusivity	Culture
Environment	Stress-Reducing Design	Accessible transport	Cagricultural Wellness
Mobility	Active Travel Options	Equitable mobility	Cattural Culture Services
Spaces	Restorative Places	Accessible public spaces	Build-[illegible] Environment Design

Did the city become more understandable, more manageable, and more meaningful for residents? (Beyond just completing a project.)

Evaluation: Greener surroundings, safer neighbourhoods, and better facilities contribute to a stronger sense of coherence – helping people cope and feel supported by their environment rather than overwhelmed by it.



Kuching Reinterpreted: The Inclusivity Lens

	Salutogenicity	**Inclusivity**	Culture
Environment	Stress-Reducing Design	Accessible transport	Cultural Health
Mobility	Active Travel Options	Equitable mobility	Agricultural Activity
Spaces	Restorative Places	Accessible public spaces	Personal Reality

Who benefits, and who struggles to use the city?

A healthy city must be judged by whether spaces are accessible across age, income, ability, and position.

Mechanisms of Health: Walkability, safe crossings, accessible transport, and child-friendly facilities are not minor planning details – they are the mechanisms through which health is shared or unequally distributed.



Kuching Reinterpreted: The Cultural Lens

	Salutogenicity	Inclusivity	Culture
Environment	Stress-Reducing Design	Accessible transport	Cultural Health
Mobility	Active Travel Options	Equitable mobility	Cultural Mobility
Spaces	Restorative Places	Accessible public spaces	Personal reality

How does culture act as a health asset?

Evaluation: Urban health is not just about function – it is about recognition. People use, trust, and care for spaces that resonate with local identity and habit.

The Kuching Proof: In a diverse city like Kuching, cultural rituals (like Gawai) support belonging, trust, and continuity. It makes healthy-city strategies feel legitimate rather than imported. Culture is part of how planning becomes socially effective.



PLACING THIS IN THE ROOM

Elevating Technical Solutions Through the Healthy-City Framework

These technical and ecological solutions achieve their full value when placed within a healthy-city framework, and made inclusive and culturally meaningful.



01 **Moonisah Usman (UK)**

Vitamin D status as a potential indicator of a healthy city: a London case study

02 **Yang Wenjing (China)**

Microclimate exposure and public space use in smart cities

03 **Yuhua Zhang / Zhengming Si (China)**

Climate anxiety in the urban context

Four Takeaways for Practice

1. Healthy Cities (Governance):

Require long-term governance, cross-sector coordination, and political commitment.

2. Salutogenicity (Design):

Design explicitly for comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness.

3. Inclusivity (Access):

Ensure benefits actively reach those who are often excluded.

4. Culture (Meaning):

Ensure interventions are locally meaningful and publicly legitimate.



Summary: A richer framework – not only how to build better environments, but how to build cities people can actually live in well



A Final Thought on Building Health

Technical and ecological solutions only become truly salutogenic when embedded in inclusive governance and cultural legitimacy.

“If healthcare facilities are places of treatment, then our cities must become places of everyday health creation.”

Prof Andrew Kiyu . Design & Health 15th World Congress . Kuching 2026