

Happiness index can be a useful tool in city planning

KUALA LUMPUR: It is important to measure the Happiness Index in Malaysia as it can serve as a benchmark for local authorities to improve their services, thus ensuring the country's well-being, says one expert.

Universiti Putra Malaysia Design and Architecture Faculty dean Assoc Prof Dr Suhardi Maulan said the indicators outlined – which included the provision of public facilities and basic infrastructure – could be used as guidelines in solving problems as well as improving the quality of life of residents in a city.

“In a city, the local authority is the government agency ‘closest’ to the

community, especially in addressing issues faced by residents such as environmental hygiene, solid waste management and effective and orderly rubbish collection.

“Although some quarters see it as trivial, such municipal issues will affect the quality of life of residents if they are not addressed efficiently,” he told Bernama.

The Town and Country Planning Department (PLANMalaysia) recently released a list of 80 local authorities in the peninsula and Sabah which scored high marks in the 2021 Happiness Index that was measured on several aspects, including the quality of their services.

Suhardi, who is also the Institute of Landscape Architects Malaysia president, said the happiness index helped identify the strengths and weaknesses of each local authority through 14 indicators such as living standards and health, safety of residential areas, and public facilities.

Also taken into account were basic infrastructure, work pleasure, financial management, relationships with neighbours, community activities, local government services and the quality of the environment, he said.

“At the same time, the city administration must be prepared to face the increase in the size of the urban population,” Suhardi added.

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Razak Faculty of Technology and Informatics (Architecture and Urban Design) senior lecturer Dr Nurul Azreen Azlan said improvements should be made on more concrete aspects such as the provision of public facilities and environmental quality in cities.

“This is because a safe environment and good public facilities can indirectly help reduce stress and improve personal health,” she said.

She added that the environment of large and more complex cities gave a different set of challenges to their local authorities, in addition to the cost of living and community relations.

Citing Kuala Lumpur that was categorised as a “moderately happy” city, Nurul Azreen said the local authority there faced a great challenge in managing the federal capital to ensure it remained resilient and to further improve the quality of services provided to city dwellers.

“The quality of the environment in Kuala Lumpur needs to be improved through a more conducive and high quality urban design by prioritising accessibility to public transportation as well as increasing green areas,” she said, adding that climate change also needed to be taken into account for better disaster management.