



SHRINKING CITIES, RESTORING BALANCE: A TAWHIDIC APPROACH TO ETHICAL URBAN REGENERATION IN SOUTHPORT, PORT KLANG

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Abstract

Across many industrial port cities, demographic contraction and spatial decline have emerged as visible consequences of uneven urban development. While contemporary urban planning literature commonly interprets shrinking cities primarily through economic and demographic frameworks, the ethical and civilizational dimensions of urban regeneration remain relatively underexplored. This study examines the phenomenon of urban shrinkage in Southport, Port Klang, Malaysia, and explores how regenerative urban strategies may be interpreted through an Islamic ethical worldview. Using a qualitative case study approach that combines literature review, site observation, and visual documentation, the research identifies several spatial conditions associated with urban decline in Southport, including abandoned buildings, mono-functional industrial land use, weakened urban connectivity, and deteriorating public environments. These conditions collectively reduce urban attractiveness and exhibit characteristics commonly associated with shrinking urban districts. Drawing upon the Islamic philosophical concepts of khalifah (stewardship), mizan (balance), and islah (repair), the paper proposes a conceptual framework that interprets urban regeneration not merely as technical redevelopment but as an ethical process of restoring balance within the built environment. The findings suggest that strategies such as adaptive reuse, mixed-use development, improved urban connectivity, and circular economy practices can contribute to revitalising shrinking cities while promoting environmental responsibility and spatial balance. The study concludes that shrinking cities should not be viewed solely as symptoms of urban decline, but also as opportunities for ethical urban regeneration, where spatial renewal aligns with the broader values of Islamic civilization and sustainable urban futures.

Keywords: Shrinking cities; Urban regeneration; Islamic urban ethics; Sustainable urbanism; Port Klang

Perkembangan Artikel

Diterima: 30 April 2026
Disemak: 7 Mei 2026
Diterbit: 30 September 2026

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INTRODUCTION

Cities have historically been understood as centres of growth, economic concentration, and cultural

vitality. Yet in recent decades a growing number of urban areas around the world have begun to experience the opposite condition—population decline, economic contraction, and spatial deterioration. These urban environments, commonly described as shrinking cities, emerge when demographic out-migration, industrial restructuring, and uneven regional development gradually erode the vitality of previously dynamic urban centres. The phenomenon has attracted increasing scholarly attention over the past two decades, particularly through the work of researchers such as Oswalt (2005), Pallagst (2010), and Hospers (2014), who highlight how demographic decline, deindustrialisation, and spatial vacancy have reshaped many cities across Europe, North America, and parts of Asia. Rather than representing temporary fluctuations, urban shrinkage is now widely recognised as a structural transformation affecting the long-term trajectory of many industrial and port cities.

Much of the contemporary literature on shrinking cities approaches the phenomenon primarily through economic, demographic, and spatial planning perspectives. Scholars such as Mallach (2017) and Wiechmann and Pallagst (2012) emphasise how population decline often results from industrial restructuring, labour migration, and shifting regional economic networks. In response, urban policy and planning strategies typically focus on redevelopment, adaptive land use, infrastructure investment, and economic diversification as mechanisms to stabilise declining urban districts. While these approaches offer important insights into the technical and economic dynamics of urban transformation, they often overlook a deeper dimension of urban life: the cultural and ethical foundations that shape how societies understand the rise and decline of cities.

Long before the emergence of modern urban studies, the classical Muslim historian and philosopher Ibn Khaldun reflected on the cyclical nature of cities and civilizations. In *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun (1967) observed that urban centres rise and flourish when social cohesion and economic vitality are strong, but gradually decline when these forces weaken and imbalance emerges within the social and political order of the city. His analysis suggests that the prosperity or decline of cities cannot be understood solely through material conditions; rather, it reflects the broader vitality of the civilization that sustains them. From this perspective, urban decline is not merely an economic phenomenon but also a civilizational condition that reflects deeper disruptions in social balance and collective responsibility.

Within the intellectual tradition of Islamic civilization, the built environment has historically been understood as an expression of a comprehensive metaphysical worldview grounded in the principle of tawhid, the unity and coherence of creation. In contrast to modern secular planning paradigms that treat space as a neutral physical container, Islamic architectural thought interprets the built environment as part of a moral and symbolic order reflecting humanity's relationship with the Divine and the natural world (Al-Attas, 1978/2022; Nasr, 1987). In this worldview, human beings act as khalifah, stewards entrusted with maintaining balance (*mizan*) within the world. When spatial environments fall into neglect or imbalance, restoration and renewal become acts of *islah*—the ethical repair of what has been disrupted. Contemporary scholars such as Al-Attas (1995) further emphasise that knowledge itself involves recognising the proper place of things within the order of creation, a principle that carries important implications for how built environments are organised and sustained.

Against this broader intellectual background, the condition of shrinking cities may be interpreted not only as a technical problem of urban planning but also as an opportunity to reconsider the ethical foundations of urban regeneration. The case of Southport, Port Klang, offers a revealing

context for such reflection. Historically developed as an industrial port district supporting maritime trade and logistics activities, parts of Southport today exhibit spatial characteristics associated with urban shrinkage, including abandoned buildings, mono-industrial land use, deteriorating public environments, and weakened urban connectivity. These conditions raise important questions about how declining urban environments may be revitalised in ways that restore not only economic activity but also spatial balance and ethical responsibility within the built environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Shrinking Cities and Urban Regeneration

Over the past two decades, the phenomenon of shrinking cities has attracted increasing attention within urban studies and planning scholarship. Early foundational work by Oswalt (2005) introduced the concept of shrinking cities as a structural transformation affecting urban regions experiencing sustained population decline, economic restructuring, and spatial vacancy. Rather than temporary fluctuations, shrinking cities represent long-term demographic and economic shifts that challenge conventional assumptions about continuous urban growth. Subsequent research has expanded this discourse across different geographical contexts. Pallagst (2010) and Wiechmann and Pallagst (2012) highlight that shrinking cities are no longer limited to post-industrial regions of Europe and North America but have become a global phenomenon affecting cities undergoing industrial restructuring, demographic ageing, and migration-driven population decline. These processes often produce distinctive spatial characteristics such as abandoned buildings, underutilised infrastructure, and declining urban attractiveness.

More recent studies emphasise that urban shrinkage should not be understood solely as a failure of development but also as a condition requiring new planning paradigms. Mallach (2017) argues that declining cities must move beyond traditional growth-oriented planning and instead adopt adaptive strategies such as selective regeneration, land reuse, and neighbourhood stabilisation. Similarly, contemporary regeneration approaches increasingly emphasise adaptive reuse, mixed-use redevelopment, and environmental sustainability as mechanisms for revitalising declining urban environments (Chin et al., 2025). These strategies seek to transform underutilised spaces into productive and socially vibrant environments while reducing the environmental impact of new development.

Despite substantial scholarship on shrinking cities, relatively little attention has been given to their ethical and civilizational dimensions. Southport, Port Klang, offers an appropriate Malaysian case study through which these broader ethical and civilizational perspectives may be examined. Although Malaysia is generally associated with rapid urbanisation, certain mature industrial districts exhibit localised characteristics commonly associated with shrinking cities. Southport has undergone functional transformation following the expansion of Northport and Westports, together with changing patterns of industrial land use, resulting in declining urban vitality, underutilised buildings, and weakened public environments. These conditions provide an appropriate context for examining urban shrinkage beyond conventional demographic perspectives while also opening discussion on the ethical and civilizational dimensions of urban regeneration.

Civilizational Perspectives on Cities: Insights from Ibn Khaldun

Long before the emergence of modern urban studies, the classical Muslim historian and philosopher Ibn Khaldun provided a profound analysis of the rise and decline of cities within his seminal work *The Muqaddimah*. Writing in the fourteenth century, Ibn Khaldun observed that urban prosperity is closely linked to the vitality of the civilization that sustains it. Cities flourish when social cohesion (*asabiyyah*), economic productivity, and political stability reinforce one another, but they gradually decline when these forces weaken and imbalance emerges within society (Ibn Khaldun, 1967). Ibn Khaldun's analysis emphasises that urban development follows cyclical patterns shaped by social and moral dynamics rather than purely material conditions. As societies become increasingly urbanised and affluent, he argued, the initial cohesion that enabled their development may gradually weaken, leading to economic stagnation, institutional decline, and deterioration of urban environments. In this sense, the rise and decline of cities cannot be understood solely through demographic or economic indicators but must also be interpreted within broader civilizational processes.

This insight offers a valuable perspective for contemporary discussions on shrinking cities. The spatial decline observed in many urban environments today may reflect not only structural economic changes but also deeper transformations in social organisation, cultural values, and patterns of urban life. By situating urban decline within a broader civilizational framework, Ibn Khaldun's thought encourages a more holistic understanding of cities as dynamic expressions of social and cultural vitality.

Islamic Ethical Foundations of the Built Environment

Within the intellectual tradition of Islamic civilization, the built environment has historically been understood as an expression of a comprehensive metaphysical worldview grounded in the principle of tawhid, the unity and coherence of creation. In contrast to modern secular planning paradigms that treat space as a neutral physical container, Islamic architectural thought interprets the built environment as part of a moral and symbolic order reflecting humanity's relationship with the Divine and the natural world (Nasr, 1987). Islamic scholars have long emphasised that human beings occupy a particular ethical role within this cosmic order. The Qur'anic concept of khalifah describes humanity as stewards entrusted with maintaining balance within creation. This responsibility implies that human activities—including the shaping of cities and built environments—should preserve harmony between social life, natural systems, and spiritual awareness. The principle of mizan, frequently associated with balance and equilibrium in the Qur'an, reinforces this ethical obligation by emphasising that disorder and imbalance emerge when human actions disrupt the natural order of creation.

Classical Islamic scholarship also highlights the moral dimensions of maintaining and restoring balance in the world. Al-Ghazali, for example, emphasised that human knowledge and action must ultimately aim toward restoring harmony between human behaviour and the divine order governing the universe (Al-Ghazali, 1997). From this perspective, acts of repair, renewal, and improvement can be understood as part of a broader ethical responsibility to correct imbalance and prevent corruption (*fasad*) within the world. Modern Islamic philosophers have further articulated these ideas in relation to knowledge and civilization. Al-Attas (1995) argues that knowledge involves recognising the proper place of things within the order of creation, a concept that carries significant implications for how built

environments are organised and maintained. When spatial environments fall into disorder or neglect, this may reflect a deeper epistemological dislocation in which the proper relationships between human activity, environment, and ethical responsibility have been disrupted. According to Al-Attas (1978/2022), the crisis of modern civilization originates not merely from technological or economic shortcomings but from the secularisation of knowledge and the loss of *adab*, resulting in disorder within human society and its institutions. From this perspective, urban decline may also be interpreted as reflecting a broader ethical and civilizational imbalance rather than solely a physical or economic condition.

Seen through this intellectual tradition, the regeneration of declining urban environments may therefore be understood not merely as technical redevelopment but as an ethical process aimed at restoring balance and responsibility within the built environment. This perspective provides a philosophical foundation for interpreting contemporary urban regeneration strategies through the ethical principles of stewardship, balance, and repair.

Conceptual Framework

Urban shrinkage has commonly been analysed within contemporary planning literature as a structural outcome of demographic decline, industrial restructuring, and uneven spatial development. Such analyses often focus on measurable indicators such as population change, economic contraction, or infrastructural deterioration. While these factors are essential for understanding the physical manifestations of urban decline, they offer only a partial explanation of the deeper processes that shape the life cycle of cities. From a broader intellectual perspective, the vitality or decline of cities must also be understood in relation to the social, ethical, and civilizational conditions that sustain them.

Classical Islamic scholarship provides valuable insight into this relationship between civilization and the built environment. In *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun explains that cities flourish when social cohesion (*asabiyyah*), economic vitality, and political stability reinforce one another, but gradually decline when these forces weaken and imbalance emerges within the social order (Ibn Khaldun, 1967). Urban decline, in this sense, is not merely a technical or economic problem but a reflection of deeper transformations within society and its governing values. When the moral and social foundations of civilization weaken, the spatial environments produced by that civilization inevitably reflect similar patterns of imbalance and deterioration.

Within the broader Islamic intellectual tradition, this understanding of imbalance is closely related to the ethical concept of *mizan*, the principle of balance within creation. Islamic philosophy emphasises that human beings act as *khalifah*, stewards responsible for maintaining harmony between human activity, natural systems, and the broader order of the world (Nasr, 1987). When imbalance or neglect occurs within the built environment, the process of renewal can therefore be understood as *islah*—an act of restoration aimed at repairing what has fallen into disorder. Classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali emphasised that human knowledge and action should ultimately aim toward restoring harmony within creation by aligning human conduct with the divine order governing the world.

Modern Islamic philosophers have further articulated the epistemological dimension of this ethical responsibility. Al-Attas (1995) argues that knowledge involves recognising the proper place of things within the order of existence. When environments fall into neglect or spatial disorder, it may

reflect a deeper dislocation in which human activities no longer recognise their proper relationship with the environment and with the ethical principles that should guide them. From this perspective, restoring the built environment involves not only technical redevelopment but also the re-establishment of proper relationships between human society, spatial environments, and ethical responsibility.

Guided by these intellectual foundations, this study conceptualises urban regeneration as a process that reconnects contemporary planning strategies with ethical principles derived from Islamic worldview. Spatial conditions associated with shrinking cities—such as abandoned buildings, mono-functional land use, and infrastructural fragmentation—are interpreted as manifestations of imbalance within the urban environment. Regenerative strategies such as adaptive reuse, mixed-use development, improved connectivity, and circular economic practices are therefore understood as practical expressions of stewardship (*khalifah*), balance (*mizan*), and repair (*islah*). Through this framework, the regeneration of shrinking cities can be reinterpreted not merely as physical redevelopment but as an ethical process aimed at restoring equilibrium within the built environment.

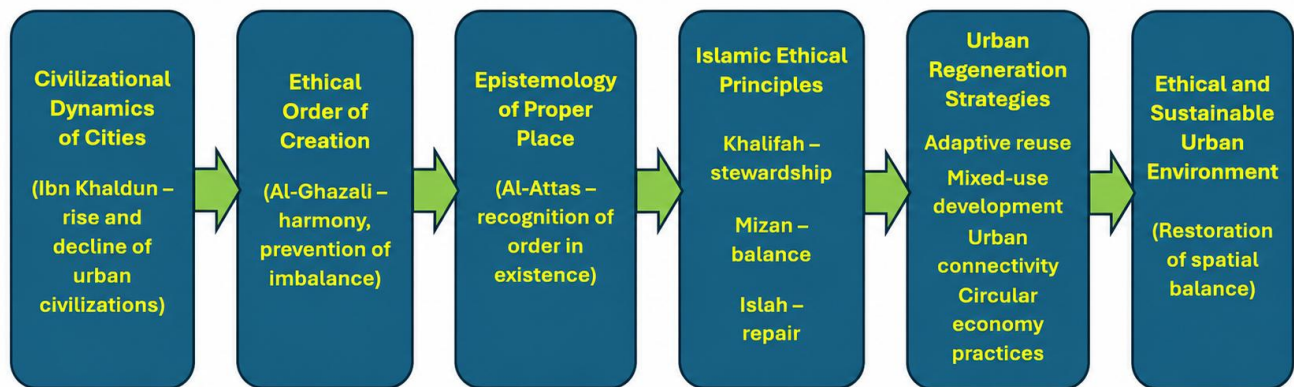


Figure 1. Conceptual framework linking civilizational theory, Islamic ethical principles, and regenerative urban strategies.

Figure 1 illustrates how Ibn Khaldun's theory of civilizational dynamics and Islamic ethical principles are synthesised into a conceptual framework for interpreting regenerative urban strategies in shrinking cities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine the spatial conditions associated with urban shrinkage in Southport, Port Klang. Qualitative case study methods are widely used in urban and architectural research to investigate complex spatial phenomena within real-world contexts where social, environmental, and spatial factors interact (Yin, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study strategy enables an in-depth examination of the physical characteristics of the area while situating the findings within broader discussions on shrinking cities and regenerative urban planning.

Beyond conventional spatial analysis, the study is guided by an interpretive framework informed by Islamic ethical philosophy, particularly the concepts of *khalifah* (stewardship), *mizan* (balance), and *islah* (repair). These principles provide a conceptual lens through

which the spatial conditions observed in the study area are interpreted. Through this approach, urban decline is not viewed solely as a demographic or economic condition but also as a spatial manifestation of imbalance within the built environment.

Case Study Area

The research focuses on Southport, Port Klang, located in the Klang district of Selangor, Malaysia. Historically developed as a major maritime and industrial port area, Southport plays an important role in supporting regional logistics and trade activities connected to the wider Klang Valley economic region. Despite its strategic economic significance, parts of the district today exhibit spatial characteristics commonly associated with shrinking urban environments. To further justify the selection of Southport as the case study, Table 1 summarises the historical and economic transformation of the area. Rather than experiencing absolute economic decline, Southport has undergone a process of functional restructuring following the expansion of Northport and Westports. This transition has altered the area's urban role, resulting in spatial conditions commonly associated with shrinking urban districts, including declining urban vitality, mono-functional land use, and underutilised buildings.

Table 1. Historical and Economic Evidence Supporting the Classification of Southport as a Shrinking Urban District

Indicator	Evidence	Implication for Urban Shrinkage	Source
Historical development	Southport (formerly Port Swettenham) was the original and only port in Port Klang before the development of Northport and Westports.	Demonstrates that Southport has undergone functional transformation rather than remaining the principal maritime hub.	Port Klang Authority (2024)
Current operational role	Southport (Southpoint) now primarily handles conventional cargo, breakbulk, bulk and liquid cargo, while large-scale container operations have shifted mainly to Northport and Westports.	Indicates a transition from a diversified port to a specialised industrial logistics area, reducing mixed urban activities.	Port Klang Authority (2024)
Port system restructuring	Westports was developed in the 1990s and has become the dominant container terminal, while Northport also expanded container operations.	Reflects the redistribution of economic activity within Port Klang, reducing Southport's strategic prominence.	Port Klang Authority (2024)
Field observations	Abandoned buildings, mono-functional industrial land use, deteriorating public spaces, fragmented urban connectivity and limited pedestrian activity were documented during site observation.	These conditions correspond with internationally recognised spatial characteristics of shrinking cities.	This study (2026); Li et al. (2023)

Note: The historical and operational information presented in Table 1 is synthesised from official publications of the Port Klang Authority and supplemented by field observations conducted by the authors in 2026.

As summarised in Table 1, Southport has experienced a gradual functional transformation within the Port Klang system. Although the wider port continues to expand economically, these historical and operational changes provide additional evidence supporting the interpretation of

Southport as a localised shrinking urban district.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through three complementary methods: literature review, site observation, and visual documentation. Part of the empirical material used in this research originates from a Master of Architecture (MArch) Urban Design Studio conducted at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), in which students undertook guided field investigations and spatial documentation within the Southport area of Port Klang. As part of the studio investigation, students conducted field observations, photographic recording, and preliminary spatial analysis of the urban environment. Selected site observations and visual documentation from this studio exercise are incorporated into the present study to support the analysis of urban shrinkage conditions.

Literature Review

A review of relevant literature was conducted to establish the theoretical and conceptual foundation of the research. The literature review covers two primary domains: (1) contemporary scholarship on shrinking cities and urban regeneration, and (2) philosophical perspectives from Islamic intellectual tradition concerning the ethical responsibilities associated with the built environment. This review informed the development of the conceptual framework linking urban decline with ethical principles derived from Islamic worldview.

Site Observation

Site observation was undertaken in Southport, Port Klang to document the spatial characteristics of the area. Direct observation is widely used in built environment research to record physical conditions, environmental qualities, and spatial patterns within urban environments (Groat & Wang, 2013). Through this method, the study identified several physical indicators associated with shrinking urban districts, including vacant buildings, degraded public spaces, industrial land dominance, and fragmented urban connectivity.

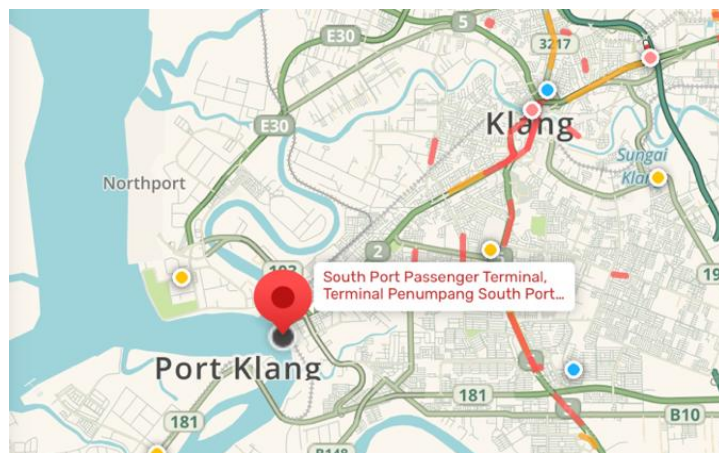


Figure 2. Location of Southport, Port Klang within the Klang District, Selangor, Malaysia.

Visual Documentation

Photographic documentation was used to support the interpretation of spatial conditions observed during the site visit. Visual recording is commonly employed in architectural research as a means of capturing spatial evidence and supporting interpretive analysis of the built environment (Groat & Wang, 2013). These images document key characteristics of the study area, including abandoned structures, deteriorating infrastructure, and the spatial barriers created by transportation infrastructure.

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted through a comparative interpretive approach that synthesises insights from literature with findings from field observations. First, key characteristics of shrinking cities identified in urban studies literature were categorised into thematic factors such as demographic contraction, declining urban attractiveness, spatial vacancy, and infrastructural fragmentation. Second, the spatial conditions observed in Southport were examined in relation to these identified characteristics. Through this comparison, the study identifies several factors contributing to urban decline within the case study area. Finally, the analysis interprets potential regeneration strategies through the Islamic ethical framework developed in the conceptual model. Planning approaches such as adaptive reuse, mixed-use development, improved connectivity, and circular economy practices are examined in relation to the principles of *khalifah*, *mizan*, and *islah*. This interpretive process allows the study to explore how ethical principles rooted in Islamic intellectual tradition may inform contemporary approaches to urban regeneration.

Research Scope and Limitations

This study focuses primarily on the spatial and conceptual dimensions of urban regeneration within the selected case study area. The research emphasises qualitative interpretation rather than quantitative demographic analysis. While the findings provide insight into the relationship between urban shrinkage and ethical frameworks in planning, the results are intended primarily to contribute to conceptual discussions on regenerative urbanism and Islamic perspectives on the built environment rather than to provide comprehensive statistical analysis of population change. Future studies may incorporate detailed demographic, economic, and longitudinal spatial datasets to further validate the urban shrinkage characteristics identified through qualitative observation.

RESULTA AND DISCUSSION

Spatial Manifestations of Urban Shrinkage in Southport, Port Klang

Field observations conducted in Southport reveal several spatial characteristics commonly associated with shrinking urban districts. These conditions correspond closely with patterns identified in urban shrinkage literature, including declining urban attractiveness, spatial vacancy, mono-functional land

use, and deteriorating infrastructure. Together, these factors indicate a gradual weakening of the urban vitality that once supported the development of the district. One of the most visible indicators of urban decline in the study area is the presence of abandoned or underutilised buildings. Several medium-rise residential and commercial structures appear vacant or partially occupied, suggesting a prolonged period of disinvestment in the local built environment. In shrinking city research, such vacant structures are widely recognised as spatial manifestations of demographic contraction and economic restructuring (Li et al., 2023). The proliferation of unused buildings not only reduces the functional capacity of the urban environment but also contributes to the perception of neglect and decline within the surrounding neighbourhood.



Figure 3. Examples of abandoned and underutilised buildings observed in Southport, Port Klang. Source: Field observation by authors (2026).

Another important observation concerns the limited diversity of urban functions within the area. Much of Southport remains dominated by industrial and logistical activities associated with port operations. While these activities continue to play an important economic role, the predominance of mono-industrial land use restricts the development of residential, cultural, and recreational activities that normally contribute to urban liveliness. As a result, the urban environment becomes largely inactive outside of industrial operating hours, reinforcing the area's declining attractiveness as a place to live or visit.



Figure 4. Industrial land dominance in Southport, illustrating mono-functional urban land use patterns associated with port logistics activities. Source: Field observation by authors (2026).

The study area also exhibits weak urban connectivity and spatial fragmentation. Major transportation infrastructure, particularly elevated roads and logistics routes, create physical and visual barriers that divide parts of the urban landscape. These infrastructural conditions reduce pedestrian

accessibility and limit interaction between different parts of the district, further weakening the social and spatial cohesion of the area.



Figure 5. Elevated transportation infrastructure creating spatial segregation and limiting pedestrian connectivity within Southport. Source: Field observation by authors (2026).

In addition, observations reveal the deterioration of public spaces and infrastructure, including damaged road surfaces, poorly maintained drainage systems, and limited pedestrian facilities. Such conditions not only reduce the functional quality of the urban environment but also influence how residents and visitors perceive the safety and attractiveness of the area. Taken together, these observations suggest that Southport exhibits several structural characteristics commonly associated with shrinking cities: declining urban attractiveness, mono-functional land use, spatial fragmentation, and deteriorating infrastructure. These spatial conditions form the empirical basis for interpreting the broader dynamics of urban decline within the district.



Figure 6. Examples of deteriorating public infrastructure and environmental maintenance issues observed in Southport. Source: Field observation by authors (2026).

Interpreting Urban Decline through Civilizational and Ethical Perspectives

While contemporary urban studies frequently interpret shrinking cities through demographic and economic indicators, the spatial conditions observed in Southport may also be understood through a broader civilizational perspective. In *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun explains that cities rise and flourish when social cohesion and economic vitality reinforce one another, but gradually decline when these forces weaken and imbalance emerges within the social and institutional structures that sustain

them (Ibn Khaldun, 1967). From this perspective, the deterioration of urban environments reflects not only material changes but also deeper transformations in the social and economic relationships that once supported the vitality of the city. Seen in this light, the spatial conditions observed in Southport may be interpreted as symptoms of a shifting urban structure in which industrial activities remain present while other aspects of urban life, residential presence, cultural activity, and social interaction, have gradually diminished. The resulting imbalance between economic infrastructure and everyday urban life contributes to a landscape characterised by inactivity, spatial fragmentation, and declining environmental quality.

Within the ethical framework of Islamic thought, such imbalance can also be understood through the concept of *mizan*, which refers to the principle of balance within creation. Islamic philosophy emphasises that human beings act as *khalifah*, stewards entrusted with maintaining harmony between human activities, natural systems, and the built environment. When neglect or disorder emerges within urban environments, it may therefore reflect a weakening of this ethical responsibility in the management of spatial environments. Classical Islamic scholarship further emphasises that the restoration of balance is an important ethical objective. Al-Ghazali, for example, argued that human knowledge and action should ultimately aim toward restoring harmony within the world and preventing corruption (*fasad*) that disrupts the natural order of creation. From this perspective, deteriorating urban environments may be interpreted not only as technical planning challenges but also as opportunities for ethical renewal through the repair and improvement of existing spaces.

Regenerative Urban Strategies for Southport

Based on the spatial conditions observed in the study area, several regenerative strategies may contribute to revitalising the Southport district. One important strategy is the adaptive reuse of abandoned buildings. Transforming vacant structures into residential, cultural, or commercial spaces can restore activity within the area while preserving existing urban resources. Adaptive reuse also aligns with contemporary sustainability principles by reducing the environmental impacts associated with demolition and new construction. Another potential strategy involves the introduction of mixed-use development within selected parts of the district. By integrating residential, commercial, and recreational functions within the same urban environment, mixed-use planning can increase daily urban activity and enhance the overall attractiveness of the area. Improving urban connectivity is also essential for revitalising the district. Enhancing pedestrian accessibility, strengthening connections between Southport and nearby urban centres such as Klang City, and mitigating the spatial barriers created by major transportation infrastructure can help reintegrate the area into the wider urban network.

Finally, the integration of circular economy principles offers opportunities to improve the environmental sustainability of the district. Given the presence of industrial activities within the port area, strategies that promote resource reuse, waste reduction, and sustainable material flows may contribute to both environmental resilience and economic renewal.

Toward Ethical Urban Regeneration

When interpreted through the conceptual framework proposed in this study, these regenerative strategies represent more than technical planning interventions. They may also be understood as practical expressions of ethical stewardship within the built environment. Adaptive reuse reflects the principle of *islah*, the act of repairing and improving existing structures, while mixed-use development and improved connectivity contribute to restoring *mizan*, the balance necessary for vibrant urban life. In this sense, the regeneration of shrinking cities can be interpreted as a process that reconnects urban development with ethical responsibility. By integrating contemporary planning strategies with philosophical principles derived from Islamic worldview, urban regeneration moves beyond purely economic objectives and contributes to the creation of more balanced, responsible, and sustainable urban environments.

The case of Southport, Port Klang therefore illustrates how shrinking urban districts may be reinterpreted not simply as declining industrial areas but as opportunities for ethical urban renewal, where spatial repair, environmental responsibility, and social vitality are pursued together.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the spatial conditions of Southport, Port Klang through the combined perspectives of contemporary shrinking city research and the ethical framework of Islamic intellectual tradition. Field observations revealed several characteristics commonly associated with urban shrinkage, including abandoned buildings, mono-functional industrial land use, deteriorating public environments, and fragmented urban connectivity. These spatial conditions reflect broader structural transformations within regional urban systems, where economic concentration in metropolitan centres has contributed to the functional transformation and declining urban vitality of older industrial districts.

While urban planning scholarship frequently interprets such conditions through economic or demographic indicators, the analysis presented in this study suggests that urban decline may also be understood within a broader civilizational perspective. As observed by Ibn Khaldun, the vitality of cities is closely connected to the social and economic forces that sustain them. When these forces weaken, the spatial environments produced by a civilization may gradually reflect patterns of imbalance and decline. The conditions observed in Southport therefore illustrate not only a transformation in urban economic structures but also a broader shift in the balance between industrial activity, social life, and spatial vitality within the district.

From the perspective of Islamic ethical philosophy, the regeneration of such environments may be interpreted as a process of restoring balance within the built environment. The principles of *khalifah* (stewardship), *mizan* (balance), and *islah* (repair) offer a conceptual framework for understanding urban regeneration not merely as technical redevelopment but as an ethical responsibility aimed at improving and renewing the environments in which communities live. In this context, strategies such as adaptive reuse, mixed-use development, improved urban connectivity, and circular economy practices represent practical expressions of these ethical principles.

The findings of this study therefore suggest that shrinking cities should not be viewed solely as symptoms of urban decline but also as opportunities for ethical urban regeneration. By reconnecting contemporary planning strategies with philosophical principles derived from Islamic intellectual tradition, urban regeneration can move beyond purely economic objectives and contribute to the

creation of more balanced, responsible, and sustainable urban environments.

Ultimately, the condition of Southport invites a broader reflection on the future of cities shaped by industrial transformation. When approached through the principles of stewardship and balance, the renewal of declining urban environments becomes more than a technical planning exercise; it becomes a process of restoring harmony between human activity, spatial environments, and the ethical responsibilities that guide the development of civilization itself. In doing so, this study demonstrates that Islamic ethical philosophy offers not only a theoretical lens for interpreting urban decline but also a practical conceptual framework for restoring balance through more humane, sustainable, and ethically grounded approaches to urban regeneration.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors sincerely acknowledge the Faculty of Built Environment, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Puncak Alam Campus, for its continuous institutional support. We are also grateful to our colleagues and students for their constructive feedback, thoughtful discussions, and generous sharing of ideas, all of which contributed to the refinement of this research. Special appreciation is extended to the **Urban Heritage Hive (UH+H)** for providing an inspiring intellectual platform and collaborative environment that supported the development of this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Hailane Salam: Conceptualization; Validation; Data curation; Writing – review & editing; Supervision.
Kamal Khatami: Methodology; Formal analysis; Investigation; Visualization; Writing – original draft.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the corresponding author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Not applicable.

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