

# CONSEQUENCE OF ARCHITECTURE

Research Group



## **Social Inequality in Kuala Lumpur**

The Priorities of the Rakyat vs the Government in the Built Environment

Hock Yong, Gan

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## Abstract

Since gaining independence on 30th August 1957 from British rule, Malaysia has been successful in expanding the economy and is currently established itself as a developing country ever since. Architectural development has shown a significant improvement in infrastructure, but despite that, these planning, ongoing, and completed architectural projects still lack the consideration of society and their needs or solutions to problems the *rakyat*, known as the locals of Malaysia, faces every day. Architecture plays an important role in affecting the society in a high level, especially impacting the users of the space, and eliminating the social inequality that became apparent after the riot of 1969.

In the current architectural field in Malaysia, there are clear social and economic inequalities that are not spoken about often enough, and the ignorance of the government only makes the ethnic gap become more segregated. Being the main capital city of Malaysia, the *rakyat* (“the people”) tend to see Kuala Lumpur, as a workspace instead of a community space, with only limited public spaces within the dense urban layout. With the migration plan of the government body away from the city, it allows more privatised developers to develop the already dense urban layout further.

It all sums down to the question, how the government neglect the priorities of *rakyat* based on the built environment?

## Methodology

To grasp the issues that the rakyat have to face in terms of social inequality and the impacts of the built environment within Kuala Lumpur that were neglected by the government and these privatised developers, descriptive research is used as a method to explore. Various theories will be considered and argued throughout the research. Malaysians were chosen to provide their perspective on the current built environment.

Interviewees were hand-picked via friends and family, who have had experience in Kuala Lumpur, some with work experience but all with experience as a local, to provide their perspective on the current built environment in relation with the social inequality situation and share their experience on the impacts of the neglect in social value. The interview is separated into 4 (four) main categories: community spaces, social inequality and spatial segregation, perception of Kuala Lumpur, and public spaces being taken over by privatised developers

I sought to form links between their responses and to the theories set up in previous chapters.

# Literature Review

## Part 1 :

### The Social Value of Community Spaces within Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The usage of public spaces plays a crucial part in the community. From the materiality of space, infrastructure facilitates and hinders activities in the city, altering interaction and mobility (Worpole & Knox, 2007) (Mean & Tims, 2005). As such, Kuala Lumpur shows how the spaces manipulate community activities. Performance of democratic rites by the community, like street demonstrations, are held within Kuala Lumpur majority of the time but despite the importance, the production of these public spaces is abandoned to allow for privatised establishments. (Parkinson, 2009) (Azlan, 2018). During the colonial period, the priority when building cities and infrastructures were to facilitate trade and commerce (Hoskyns, 2014) (Graham, 2010) (Parkinson, 2012).



**Figure 1 : High foot traffic within narrow road in Kuala Lumpur due to the rise of private developments.**



**Figure 2 : Spatial segregation as seen from skyline view - Urban city with working class people and lower income groups families divided by a highway.**

## **Part 2 :**

### **The Social Inequality and Segregation by Ethnicity within Kuala Lumpur**

Ethnic segregation is the aftermath of the rise of development contributed by two factors in Malaysia's history which are: the second Malaysia plan to "reshape" Malaysian society by decreasing Malaysian Chinese and foreign influence from the aftermath of the 1969 racial riot (Salleh & Choguill, 1992), and the deregulation of the economy during the recession in the 1980s, allowing foreign capital to flood into the nation (Goh & Liauw, 2009) (Tedong, et al., 2014). Since then, government bodies have had less participation in residential development causing a rise in the development of private establishments that favour the wealthy in enclosed residential developments on the outskirts of the capital (Tedong, et al., 2014). This resulted in the widening of the inequality gap between the high- and low-income people and created spatial segregation in the built environment from the fear of adopting an enclosed model establishing 'splintering urbanism' by the 2000s, when the urban landscape became even more fragmented (Azlan, 2018) (Tedong, et al., 2014) (Dick & Rimmer, 1998) (Low, 2001) (Graham & Marvin, 2001).



### **Part 3 :**

#### **Kuala Lumpur failed as a Community City Centre**

Kuala Lumpur is said to be perceived as a workplace rather than a place for social engagement, citing from a study that respondents travel by private vehicles due to walking in the city making them feel exhausted, a lack of public transportation close to their offices, and lack of comfort on public transportation (Shamsuddin, et al., 2012) (Shamsuddin, et al., 2018). There is an argument stating that strolling in the city centre is comfortable, though it should be emphasized that this provision is focused on tourist destination areas (Zakaria & Ujang, 2015). Kuala Lumpur City Hall identified the difficulties in walkability in Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020, which includes the lack of transparency, disconnected pedestrian links, and a general lack of amenities and facilities for walkers (The Veritas Design Group, 2021) (Azlan, 2018). While Wong (2011) suggested that Kuala Lumpur is two cities wherein one is the city of the everyday, closed and private, making walkability an imposition and another wherein the city appears highly walkable and crowded during ethnic celebrations as the widely spread tourism tagline, 'Malaysia, Truly Asia' implies, as it has the potential to generate revenue (Wong, 2011).

## **Part 4 :**

### The Negligence of the *rakyat* in regards of Private Development

In Kuala Lumpur alone, there are 155 shopping malls as of 2017 with 20 of these being major shopping malls are located just within the Golden Triangle, that attracts around 13 million international overnight visitors to Kuala Lumpur in the year 2018 (Hirschmann, 2021) (Wong, 2021). This oversupply of public facilities that are developed by private developers has sparked debate in media (Achariam & Hamid, 2017) (Ghazali, 2017) (Lau , 2017) (Lee, 2016) (Shi, 2016). The intention of these architectural development projects is to modernise to benefit the purpose of improving infrastructure aimed at production and consumption resulting in profit (Davis, 2018). To safeguard the developed image it has established, the state would gather the homeless in Kuala Lumpur before important national events such as formal visits by foreign leaders (Achariam & Hamid, 2017). This is similar to how street protests are unacceptable, as it has been alleged that “these street protests will only negatively impact the income of traders in the city centre” (Azlan, 2018) (Amly, 2015). According to Lai (2015), this argument has been brought to a national level in 2015 when Abdul Rahman Dahlan, the Urban Wellbeing, Housing, and Local Government Minister posted a Twitter comment urging the “BERSIH” protest to be postponed because it would cause the fall in the value of the Malaysian Ringgit currency (Lai, 2015). These allegations have not been proven as such since private establishments generally do not have complaints of decreased business. However, they remain associated with the reasoning on an economic line prioritizing the producer and consumer identities while ignoring the *rakyat* aspects (Misak, 2009).



**Figure 3 : Bukit Bintang, known for its shopping complexes, was once the focal point of the deadly 1969 riot, was rejuvenated as a the centre for retail cluster.**

## **Conclusion - Literature Review**

Infrastructure, as per Graham and McFarlene, supports and inhibits many types of acts within the city. The reduction of public claim-making activities in public space indicates that democracy is being damaged (Graham & McFarlene, 2015). John Parkinson (2012) examined the spatial demands of democracy and stated that venues where people may gather for public protests are important, but that the current public space caters more to individuals occupying the space for a short period of time and is too congested for protests to be held. "People are customers, not citizen, in places like these" (Parkinson, 2012).

# Primary

## Part 1 :

### Spatial Segregation by Ethnicity

Division by ethnicity in Malaysia started during British rule with the colonial policy, “divide and rule”, where the 3 major ethnic groups were segregated into different occupations in different regions. This legacy continued after independence from the British in 1957 when the British extended the chance to the Malays to join the administration sector while forbidding the non-Malays from the sector (Dali & Nordin, 2010) (Azlan, 2018) (Tedong, et al., 2014) (Mamdani, 2012).

The media in the 1990s and the government were presenting an image of racial unity and peace among Malaysia’s diverse ethnic groups (Ahmad, 1999). The ignorance from the government due to differences in political opinions has caused Malaysians to be divided spatially (Abu Khalid & Yang, 2019). Ethnic division was made even more obvious by the British implementation of education policy allowing four different sets of vernacular schools to function: English, Malay, Chinese, and Tamil schools, all employing a different teaching method and curriculum (Dali & Nordin, 2010).

As a consequence of the legacy left by British colonial policies, the Bumiputera (the Malays), despite being the highest percentage population of Malaysia, retains the lowest average income compared to other ethnic groups. The economic inequity, particularly along ethnic division, was a danger that inevitably resulted in political and social imbalance (Abu Khalid & Yang, 2019). The riot of 1969 was one of the examples of danger from the consequences of the legacy left by the British. The Chinese majority parties gained more seats in the elections, causing a declaration of national emergency (Kua, 2007). The result of the riot resulted in the formation of Malaysia’s New Economic Policy that had its successes in national unity with the objective of eradicating poverty and restructuring inter-ethnic differences (Jomo, 1991) (Aun, 2021), but the segregation of space was left untouched by the government as with the British during the colonial period due to the British scepticism towards the Chinese (Azlan, 2018) (Shamsul, 2001).

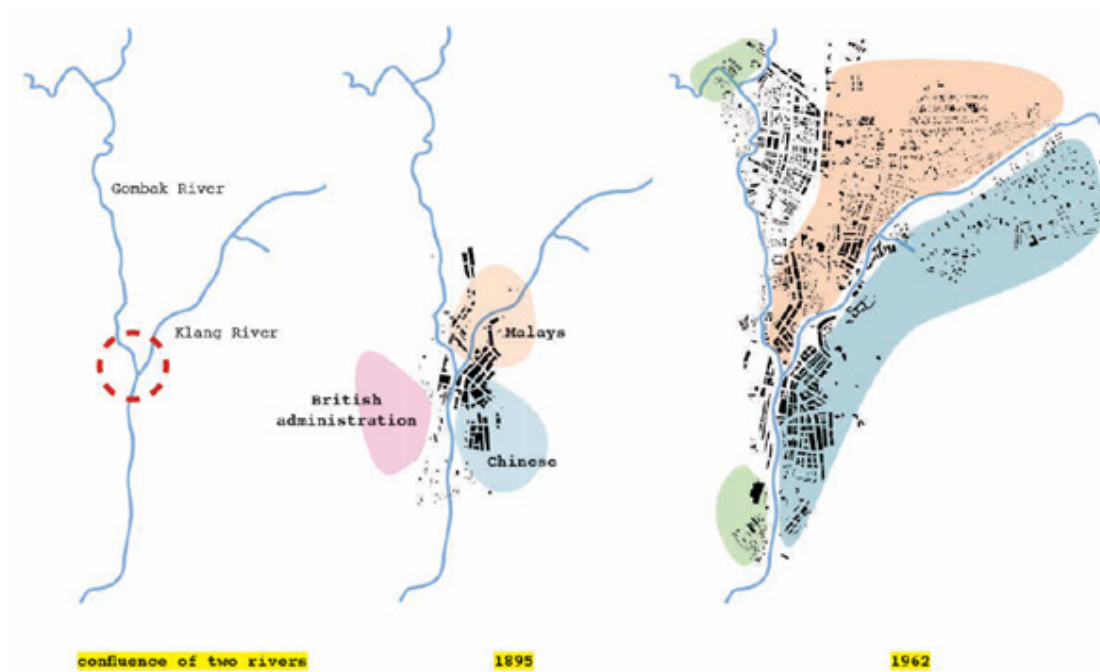


Figure 4 : Despite the fact that the segregation of space occurred more naturally, the British who arrived later did oppose the segregation (Azlan, 2018).



Figure 5 : Petaling Street represent the Chinese



Figure 6 : Brickfield representing the Indians

## Part 2 :

### Imbalance of Urban Spaces in Kuala Lumpur

While the consequences and issues from the racial riot and the segregation of space were discussed by many (Noor, 2002) (Noor, 2005) (Comber, 1983) (Milner, 1995), Malaysian architecture has had very little influence since (Ting, 2010). In Ting's review of Ross King's book, he explained that King has utilised his architectural observations of Kuala Lumpur, through the three transit paths, quoting "these three transits are broad descriptions of a quantifiable history of architecture of Kuala Lumpur, but calibrated to a jarringly different kind of urban order when compared to the modern western city". Continuously, from his second transit, he described the segregation of space caused by colonialism and identified these areas as where the divisions are more fragmented and divided (King, 2008) (Ting, 2010). Historical centres and public spaces are being privatised to provide social and leisure space despite the history of the nation. the intended action of privatising a historical site marks the beginning of the demolishing the social value to make space for project that would generate revenue (Azlan, 2018).

A book stated that access and ownership were used to determine the publicness of a location (Low & Smith, 2006). It can be contended that privatised spaces are currently more open for the public than areas that were once public since they are more accessible. This is caused by the minimal public transportation provided forcing the *rakyat* to travel by privately-owned vehicles which are worsened by the lack of public space, considering the tropical climate of Malaysia (Azlan, 2018). The *rakyat* is then being forced into these privatised facilities to engage public life as a consequence ('public life' meaning to meet other strangers and making casual friends) and in Asia, where private industry provides so much social and leisure space, these commercial venues may be considered as 'increasing involvement in public life' (Hogan, et al., 2012).

Shuhana and Ahmad Bashri (2002) stated that in the urban design of Kuala Lumpur in 2002, the main public spaces that once represents the core element of sociocultural interactions are disappearing due to by the rise of modern shopping centres resulting in the still available public spaces to lose their function and identity to provide for the *rakyat* (Shamsuddin & Sulaiman, 2001). Indeed, the disappearance of public spaces in city centres destroys the place identity and city character, significantly impacting the *rakyat* (Harun & Said, 2009). The *Padang* in Dataran Merdeka is one of the parks currently still standing for Malaysians, where Tunku Abdul Rahman declaring Malaysian's independence from the colonisation of British in 1957, representing the idea of freedom and democracy (Abu Bakar, 2002).

Shuhana and Ahmad Bashri (2002) stated that in the urban design of Kuala Lumpur in 2002, the main public spaces are disappearing that once represents the core element of sociocultural interactions that is caused by the rise of modern shopping centres resulting in the still available public spaces to lose their function and identity to provide for the “rakyat” (Shamsuddin & Sulaiman, 2001). Indeed, the disappearance of public spaces in city centres destroys the place identity and city character, significantly impacting the “rakyat” (Harun & Said, 2009). The ‘Padang’ is one of the currently still standing park for the Malaysians representing the idea of freedom and democracy that once stood Tunku Abdul Rahman declaring Malaysian’s independence from the colonisation of British in 1957 (Abu Bakar, 2002).



### Part 3 :

#### Inequality in Urban Planning through Liveability

The physical quality necessary to create a wonderful street is known as liveability, and it has an impact on how the streets or public spaces are used (Jacobs, 1993). Yet, there are only a few instances of streets settings in Kuala Lumpur that are deemed as welcoming and accommodating to the *rakyat* (Rahman, et al., 2015) (Rahman, 2013). With Kuala Lumpur City Centre being overtaken by privatised developers through the notorious development of private establishments, it has become so over-saturated and congested that it was deemed too much for even the government bodies in which a new 'home', Putrajaya, was declared as a priority under the direction of Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (Moser, 2010). The priority to construction began in August 1995, after his judgement of overcrowding and traffic congestion within Kuala Lumpur, approximately costing USD 8.1 billion to build with the aim to create an efficient administrative hub for government offices (Landau, 2020). Despite the fact that during that time, public has it that the finances spent just within the first phase of the "intelligence city" was around USD 1.3 billion and stated that it was wasteful especially after the collapse of economy in Malaysia by about 6%, and proceeded to be completed only after 15 years costing a third of the government's total annual budget (Fuller, 1999). Attention was directed toward the development of a 'new intelligent city' that was claimed to be intelligent merely in the provision of information infrastructure, instead of being intelligent socially and environmentally (Marshall, 2003).

The importance of framework for great urban space is dictated by the role of human aspects whereby the urban space can be judged by the people who utilise and occupy the space (Gehl, 2010). The needs of street users vary depending on their activities and reasons for using the roadway. Activities in these public spaces can be categorised into three: essential, optional, and social activities (Gehl, 2010) (Turel, et al., 2007). The results from Rahman's survey were in line with the theory of Gehl in 1991 that most of the essential group's activities such as working, housing, shopping, etc., were connected to liveability (Rahman, et al., 2015) (Gehl, 1991). It was mentioned that the traffic congestion in Jalan Tun Abdul Rahman is part of the main reasons for users not wanting to use the public space as it creates an uncomfortable and dangerous feeling to the users, leading to a stressful sensation (Krupat, 1985). Jalan Tun Abdul Rahman is dominated with private vehicles traveling to the area causing air pollution level to be higher without any solution to clear the air causing users to feel sick (Schwela, 2000). Rahman believes that the *rakyat* needs a more user-friendly public spaces that stresses consideration of guidelines and law for urban planning and design.

However, public spaces that are privatised benefit from being better managed and regulated, but with access and activities being restricted. There is a growing worry about the cleanliness, maintenance, and safety of such areas (Minton, 2006). The trend of commodification of the public spaces raised another problem where the local government has the decision power to rent out these public spaces to accommodate commercial purposes, which creates destructive impacts like increased spending, social segregation, access restrictions, and restriction on expressive freedom (Kohn, 2004).

# Cases

## Part 1 :

### Space used for Protest in Kuala Lumpur – BERSIH 4.0

Malaysia's major social demonstration was BERSIH 4.0. The *rakyat* demanded several goals to be met by the that was caused by the aftermath of the general election of 2013 where it was put forward that the election victory was falsified. The main demands were for a transparent election, as well as Prime Minister Najib Razak to resign, in accordance with his involvement in the financial scandal concerning 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) wherein a large sum of money worth up to 700 million American Dollars was wired to his personal bank accounts (Nabila Mat Isa, 2020). The BERSIH 4.0 protest was supposed to be held in Kuala Lumpur in the public *padang* ('field') of Dataran Merdeka, but the protesters were not given the green light for the social demonstration as the *padang* was occupied by the rehearsal for the Malaysian Independence Day celebrations. The local police declared the demonstration to be illegal. They said no permissions were given to the protest organisers despite the spaces used by the protesters being public spaces for the *rakyat* (Azlan, 2015) (Azlan, 2018). In the end, the protests were held in five different locations with the intention to march into the city centre towards Dataran Merdeka where the *padang* is. It can be argued that the protests group chose the location of the *padang* seeking to borrow the historical significance of the space and associate the protest with conceptual ideas of freedom and power balance. Due to the spatial pattern of everyday life determines the availability to join in protests as well as its form, the design of the urban layout could have an impact on mobility of the users (Sewell, 2001) (Wolford, 2004). While the materiality and symbolic meanings of the space affect the social demonstration, the act of protest itself produces space despite being opposed to the use of spaces that are either private and public, by altering space and making new ones that are combined with a sense of belonging (Donatella & Fabbri, 2016).



**Figure 7 : 'Padang' of Dataran Merdeka, a historical location that represents freedom and independence from the colonisation of the British, declared off-limit for BERSIH protest rally.**



**Figure 8 : BERSIH protestor shows his anger towards the government**



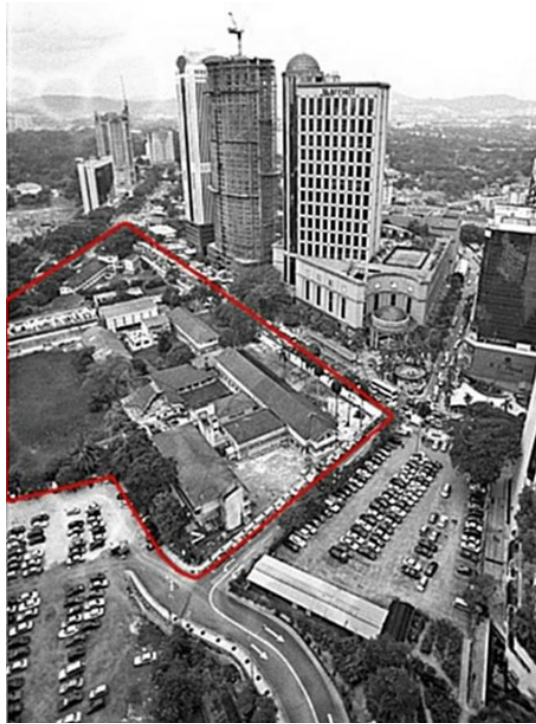
**Figure 9 : Public road is occupied as the 'Padang' is closed for protest.**

## **Part 2 :**

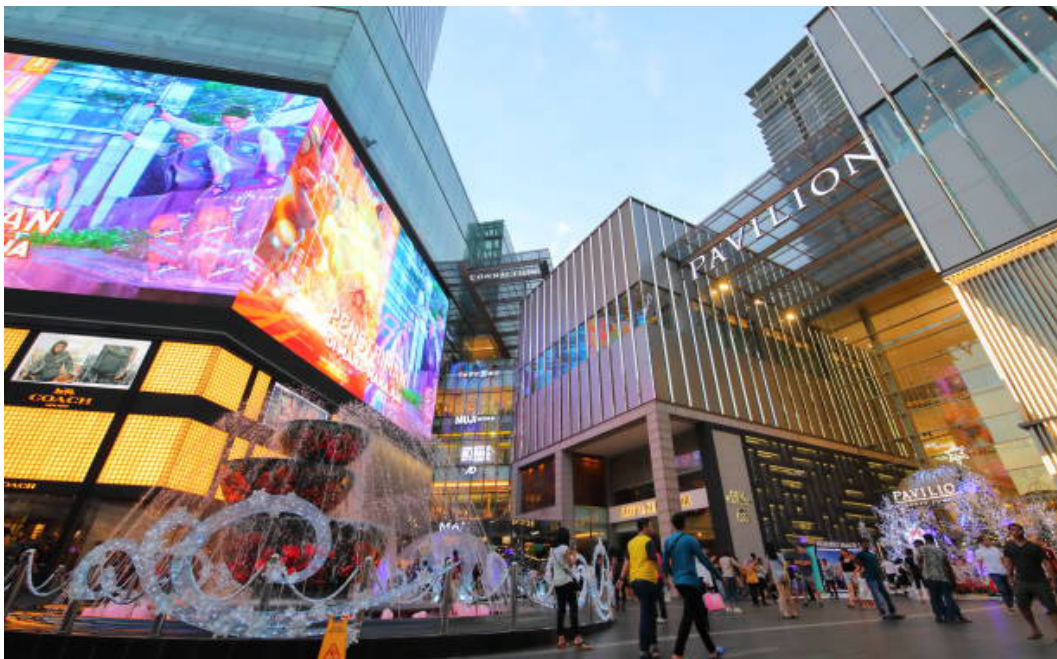
### **Privatisation of Public Space**

The history of Kuala Lumpur stretches back to the colonisation of the British. The current capital city was once known for the tin-collecting centre. Public spaces such as the padang were kept for its historical and cultural significance in the Independence of Malaysia, but the spaces within the city itself were demolished and revitalised by private developers with the intention of erecting commercial establishments (Giron, 2018). The Bukit Bintang area currently has shopping complexes like Pavilion which was once an all-girls school with a large open public field.

For instance, a public park was sold to privatised developers to build high-end residential apartments which contrasts with the need for affordable for the local community (Raj, 2018). Due to globalization and the pressure to build a friendly environment, competition economics, and social connection, cities like Kuala Lumpur would seek formation of public-private partnerships, known as “urban entrepreneurialism”, as the city does not have the financial capacity to run these projects independently (Agyemang, 2017) (Eick, 2012) (Ntakana & Mbanga, 2020). With these arrangements, the government often proceeds without any form of engagement with the communities that ultimately use and will benefit from the services and facilities provided by the public space (Hui & Hayllar, 2010). Devereux and Littlefield (2017) stated that in private sectors, urban space development is often seen as to generate revenue, and it is frequently emphasised towards restrictive spaces that cater to certain users and consumers. The generated urban areas are spaces of order and control, as well as aesthetic unity and consistency. They act as private zones and place of sanctuary for affluent individuals who wish to avoid clashes with others (Devereux & Littlefield, 2017). The effect of privatised public space will eventually change and redirect the behaviour, action, and the thought process as people move within the space in a daily basis, leading to social segregation and social behaviour caused by spatial restrictions (Ntakana & Mbanga, 2020). As one of the examples of privatised development taking over spaces, located in part of Kuala Lumpur in Jalan Sungai Baru of Kampung Baru, residents were instructed to vacate their multigenerational home for the development of a commercial housing project supported by the government since 2018. They were offered an extremely low compensation according to the World of Buzz Malaysia, residents were only offered up to 200,000 Malaysian Ringgit per family when such prime land is estimated to be worth up to 3.1 million Malaysian Ringgit (Renushara, 2021). Privatised development has the benefit of efficient management on certain aspects that would also benefit the users of the spaces, but restrict the ability to accommodate expressive freedom, unlike public spaces (Minton, 2006) (Kohn, 2004).



**Figure 10 : All Girls School of Bukit Bintang, before becoming a shopping complex known as The Pavillion Mall.**



**Figure 11 : Present time of The Pavillion Mall.**

### **Part 3 :**

#### Current Public Space

One of the most well-known parks within Kuala Lumpur City Centre is the park directly connecting to the Petronas Twin Tower known as “KLCC Park”, where many locals take their morning and evening jogs. These public spaces are crucial for the public as mentioned by (Low & Smith, 2006), as part of the social value and the interaction between the users and the space itself (Worpole & Knox, 2007). There’s also “Perdana Botanical Garden”, the largest park in Kuala Lumpur consisting of several historical buildings and monuments with cultural and heritage significance. Despite the fact that “Perdana Botanical Garden” is designed rakyat for recreational purposes, studies show that in the metropolitan areas, there is a lack of attention on maintenance and even on the provision of said public parks (Tyrväinen & Väänänen, 1998), as evident from another study where low regard for nature-filled areas is shown in the budget cuts towards maintenance of parks (Chiesura, 2004). There is an important link between city parks and the issue of peoples’ health. where social value is increased by public spaces that encourage interaction between people and spaces by portraying understanding, trust, supportive behaviours, and values shared among one another (Loures, et al., 2007). Based on the survey done by Goh & Mahmood, “Perdana Botanical Garden”, despite being the main public park that was created for the rakyat, made many locals unhappy with the location of the park. They claimed that the park is difficult to reach by public transportation and had to resort to using private-owned vehicles. (Goh & Mahmood, 2016).



**Figure 12 : Perdana Botanical Garden - Recreation Park in Kuala Lumpur**



**Figure 13 : KLCC Park - Public Park located directly adjacent to Kuala Lumpur Twin Tower.**



## **Part 4 :**

### **Spatial Segregation by Ethnicity**

Malaysia is a multicultural country that was a consequence of colonisation. Different ethnic groups were brought into the country by the British for the purpose of increasing the supply of labour. It was inevitable that conflicts will arise due to the differences in culture and religion (Ahmad, 1999). These conflicts reared its head during the riot of 1969, and the government attempted to alleviate the pressure by implementing the New Economic Policy which was expected to improve social relations by integrating a housing mix policy (Hamzah, 1997). Despite the effort, gated, enclosed private residential areas have become increasingly common globally as well (Atkinson & Blandy, 2006).

Kuala Lumpur was divided into 4 (four) different areas by British colonization: leisure areas; housing and residential areas; retail areas; and production areas (Kow, 1976). It was found that neighbourhoods also became segregated by race, as seen in Sentul, Brickfields, (Yoshimura, 2003), as well as Batu and Lembah Pantai (Mohamad, 1992).

Moving forward into 2009, the government implemented a programme to heal the divided nation called “1Malaysia”. This programme envisioned “unity in diversity and inclusiveness while accepting and celebrating our differences, not mere tolerance or respect” (Harris & Han, 2020). The concept of the programme was to celebrate diversity and encourage togetherness but caused the internal divisions to grow and resulting in the failure to reform (Koh, 2015) (Noor & Leong, 2013). but structural segregation such as the Malaysian school system, divided ethnic groups by removing crucial interaction opportunities through providing education where each ethnic group only received education in its “own” language (Koh, 2017) (Joseph, 2014). Despite that, Esmeralda (interviewee) in Harris and Han’s study indicating that spatial separation by ethnicity roots as the major barrier to productive diversity, adding that she seen that people in lower income groups tend to stick with their own race while the better educated people seem to exceed the racial barriers (Harris & Han, 2020). Though there are spaces in Malaysia that promote culturally diverse inclusion, it is usually consumer spaces that are recognised as “western”, by providing a large multinational reach that is understood by all (Jones, et al., 2015).

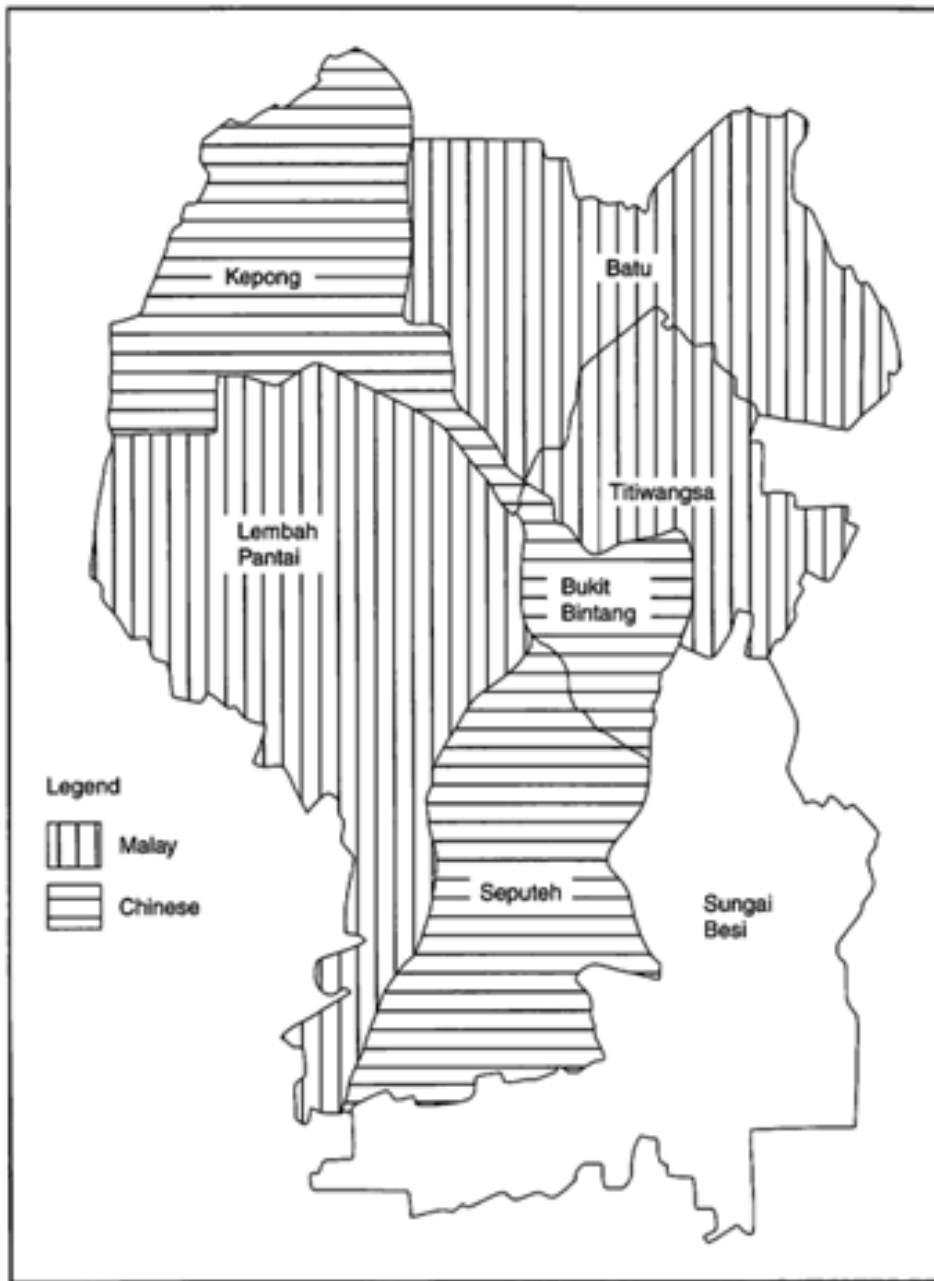


Figure 14 : Spatial segregation caused by British colonization - Kuala Lumpur divided by different ethnic.

## Perspective 01

Kay - 25 years old - ex-intern seeking for job experiences of Veritas Group located in Kuala Lumpur City Center.

Kay did her internship at a Malaysian architectural firm from late 2019 to early 2020 for 8 months. She commuted to Kuala Lumpur from Selangor 5 days a week for work. She admits that she mostly stayed within the area surrounding her office, and only made moderate use of the public infrastructure, facilities, and spaces despite being located directly in city centre next to Petronas Twin Towers and Suria KLCC.

The conversation started with her thoughts on the definition of public space and social value. She has an extremely broad view on what social value is, defining it simply as the contribution of an individual, group, or entity(ies) to society in different aspects including social, economic, and environmental. She believed these spaces do not particularly hinder social interaction since the current design caters to preferences of degrees of privacy. When prompted for her thoughts on the built environment, interestingly, she said that Kuala Lumpur does not have many public spaces to begin with and said that she mostly used shopping complexes as public spaces as it is more comfortable indoors than outdoors. She said that shopping complexes in some way can be considered as a kind of public space because they are mostly free to access by everyone.

She further put forward that those public spaces should be developed by private developers as their understanding on the social needs, reputation and funding are much more capable than the government. In the cases of Kampung Baru and TTDI Park, she expressed her sadness, stating that it didn't seem fair, and insisted that there should be more specialised areas with decent openness and nature as, compared to privatised spaces, as it would be more beneficial to the community by creating a sense of belonging and ownership developed by the users of the space.

When prompted, she shared her view on how different ethnic groups receive different treatment when it comes to owning properties and insisted that this law should be reviewed as times have changed. In terms of social inequality, she suggested that, ideally, government should play some role in private developments to perhaps build affordable housing from the profit gained from said high-end developments.

Kay has said that Kuala Lumpur is no longer a place for social engagement and interaction but a workspace, in par with the statement by Shamsuddin et al. (Shamsuddin, et al., 2012) (Shamsuddin, et al., 2018), and added that walking in the city is not comfortable with problems including the lack of transparency, disconnected pedestrian links, and general lack of proper infrastructure and facilities, in line with the research done by Veritas on the walkability in Kuala Lumpur (The Veritas Design Group, 2021).

Kay thinks protests are still held in Kuala Lumpur as the city has good accessibility and mobility. As the capital city of Malaysia, it furthermore adds the image of the city, identity and attachments of the citizens and protestors, and their sense of belonging. She believes that there should not be a space for protests, but instead designers should consider spaces for gatherings and infrastructure that accommodate the users, which would eventually be used as a space for protests when needed. Kay said she was not sure if public parks could be used as a protest space. Using Perdana Botanical Garden as an example, she described that the park itself would not be able to withstand the high capacity of people nor the possible escalation to violence due to the possible involvement of riot police.

## Perspective 02

Khor - 32 years old - working as advocate and solicitor in Kuala Lumpur.

Khor commutes to Kuala Lumpur for 5 days a week, and quite often makes use of the public infrastructure, facilities, and spaces available. As an advocate and solicitor, she was able to offer a passionate in-depth perspective on the problems that the *rakyat* faces, from a professional and personal level. She identified many key issues in recent events as well as deposited her thoughts on the evolution and comparison of spaces in Kuala Lumpur.

Khor's perspective differs from Kay's in that she thinks public spaces do hinder social interaction and mobility, which is in line with the statement from two papers (Worpole & Knox, 2007) (Mean & Tims, 2005), explaining that public spaces in Kuala Lumpur do not facilitate social interaction and are not conducive or comfortable for the disabled. Her definition of social value is more focused on the individual. She said, "social value is the added value to her life acquired from public transport or publicly available facilities and infrastructure". She regularly uses public transport as it benefits her productivity and satisfies her motivation to save the environment.

Khor seemed enthusiastic yet saddened by the case of private developments building over public spaces. Khor firmly said that the government are not being fair to the *rakyat* and continued, "these developments should be for a proper reason and with a fair compensation to the people affected by it". She mentioned that the population density is far too high in Kuala Lumpur and suggested that it would be more beneficial to everyone to build a public park, community space, or even a green zone because properties in Malaysia are either being left empty or owned by investors looking to rent out which would further widen the wealth gap in Malaysia. She proclaimed that architecture and urban planning in Kuala Lumpur lacks consideration in prioritizing the value of society and their needs and added that she thinks the *rakyat* is not fairly treated in terms of the availability of public spaces. When prompted on the urgency of affordable housing, Khor said that it is unfortunate and selfish that there is so much high-end development but nothing to contribute to the actual needs of the *rakyat*. She then elaborated that affordable housing would be a bad idea in a high population density area like Kuala Lumpur as it would just further increase the density.

On ethnic segregation, Khor believed that the problem has been persisting for years and will continue to persist in the future unless there is political will to solve it. She said that racism exists in Malaysia but depends on the industry and rank of an individual. She added that individuals are less likely to encounter racism if they are 'more privileged'. Khor said public spaces should be an area which is accessible to everyone without any restrictions, preferably not owned by a private entity but can be managed by one. Therefore, similarly to Kay, she also said that shopping complexes are kind of a public space as it is accessible to everyone, despite being owned by private entity.

She talked about the availability of prayer spaces or their general accessibility to public space not provided enough especially for foreign workers. She proclaimed that built environment in Kuala Lumpur lack the consideration in prioritizing the value of society and their needs. When prompted on the urgency of affordable housing, Khor said that it is unfortunate and selfish that there is so much high-end development but nothing to contributes to the actual needs of the *rakyat*. She mentioned that the formation of Malaysia's New Economic Policy has failed to meet the aims of reuniting the *rakyat*, that was supposed to ultimately eliminate spatial segregation. When asked about her thoughts on affordable housing in Kuala Lumpur, she suggested that by creating affordable housing in Kuala Lumpur would only further increase the density.

Khor disagreed that Kuala Lumpur is perceived as workspace thereby contradicting Kay's perspective and Shamsuddin's statement but agreed that strolling in city is considered as uncomfortable (Worpole & Knox, 2007) (Mean & Tims, 2005). However, Khor, agreed with Kay on the poor walkability of Kuala Lumpur She thinks that the rise of privatised establishments cause spaces to lose their function and identity as public spaces, like Kay said. Khor then added that this motion can create destructive impacts on the *rakyat* with increased spending and social segregation, for example. In addition, protests would benefit more when the image of the city is the background of the protest, further enhancing the identity attachments of the citizen and protestors and their sense of belonging. Khor believes there is no need in a space for protest if the government is functioning properly, though she said preparing a space for protests would seem like a defeatist act that would somehow invite the protests to happen. In the case of refused rights to protests in Dataran Merdeka, Khor said that it should not have happened as the space is firstly, a public space and secondly, a space with great historical significance for all Malaysians. However, when asked if protests should be moved to the available public park such as Perdana Botanical Park or KLCC Park, Khor said that these parks are not well equipped to withstand huge crowds which would potentially damage the facilities and infrastructure within the park, where she added that these parks do not have symbolic meaning that would benefit the message of these protests to be conveyed. She also mentioned that protests held in Kuala Lumpur were meant to disrupt the government to gain their attention but having the protests in an open public park does not do this successfully.

As her closing statement, she said there are still many problems affecting the public spaces in Malaysia. She claimed that the government is a key factor in changing things but instead, they choose to ignore the issues. She believes that the community built by the *rakyat* themselves and the actions taken by the government seemingly worsen segregation. However, she said, with an upset tone, that it is unclear how people from outside the industry of built environment influence these issues and that she was wishing that everything would get better soon.

## Perspective 03

Lucas - 28 years old - freelance working individual that often visit Kuala Lumpur for leisure.

Lucas is an independent, freelance photographer who considers himself a frequent user of the spaces, infrastructure, and facilities in Kuala Lumpur. He has explored most of the Kuala Lumpur area for work purposes, and sometimes for leisure, which allows him to be one of the candidates for this interview.

When spoken to, Lucas said that he thinks that public spaces allow the chance for people to have social interaction between one another. He believes that people's behaviour changes depending on how they choose to move around the space. He believes that social value refers to a space that is given value and ultimately value that is appreciated by the users, somewhat of a cycle. For travelling to and from Kuala Lumpur, he prefers driving as it is convenient, comfortable, and enjoyable. When prompted, he sees Kuala Lumpur as a work hub but often visits for leisure purposes. Despite Kuala Lumpur being a workspace, he mentioned that Kuala Lumpur lacks open spaces, and described the feeling of being in Kuala Lumpur as "stuffy".

Furthermore, he mentioned that there are pros and cons when it comes to privatised establishments taking over Kuala Lumpur's public spaces. He said that it would attract more people into the city and generate revenue from tourism and commerce, ultimately improving the economy. However, he added that this would also cause even more dense urban layouts that would create another set of problems such as pollution from traffic congestion and issues with transport infrastructure. He mentioned that the demand for new buildings will rise, and older buildings which hold historical significance will have to be demolished to facilitate bigger and better architectural styles and functions. He then said that Kuala Lumpur is largely a "business centre rather than the city centre of the capital city". Kampung Baru and TTDI Park were brought up to Lucas and he was not surprised about the problem. He said that these problems happen often in Malaysia, and furthermore that Kuala Lumpur is considered a prime land from a property investment standpoint. He said that the government must participate in these privatisations to limit the developers and that these developers must be transparent with their intentions and actions as well as to offer a fair compensation while ensuring that by demolishing a public space, the developers are responsible for integrating public space with easy accessibility to everyone. However, when asked if the *rakyat* should be provided more public spaces, Lucas said with public parks like Perdana Botanical Garden or KLCC Park being the open spaces provided, providing more public spaces similarly to those spaces does not necessarily benefit the *rakyat* because of the climate making the spaces uncomfortable unless said spaces are provided with facilities to keep the experience comfortable and accessible. On shopping complexes' potential identity as a public space, he explained that these shopping complexes are still managed by a private entity and that there are still various things that cannot be done as compared to in a public space. Despite shopping complexes being accessible and comfortable with great security and maintenance, he said that these spaces are not designed specifically for the public, but as a space of business where the *rakyat* are considered customers.

Lucas was then asked about ethnic segregation in Kuala Lumpur. Lucas said that ethnic segregation in Kuala Lumpur is not obvious but with Kuala Lumpur being a city centre, brings all kinds of people with different ethnic backgrounds together. He mentioned that areas outside of Kuala Lumpur were more segregated, where different ethnic groups have their own designated areas for residential housing and where it is rare to see, for example, a Malay in a Chinese saturated neighbourhood. He added that the government should be regulators or overseers ensuring the spaces are sold and designed equally among the ethnic groups and limiting the wealth gap. He emphasised that the government should resolve the issues straight on as avoiding it will only make things worse.

He explained that Kuala Lumpur is moderately walkable depending on the timing and weather but transportation within Kuala Lumpur is unbearable as it is too packed whether it is driving or taking public transport. He added that there are multiple disconnected pedestrian routes and a lack of proper facilities and infrastructure. He believes that because of the dense population in Kuala Lumpur and the tight urban layout, the *rakyat*, would resort to going into shopping complexes as they are generally more comfortable and well maintained. He then explained that privatised spaces would become the main attraction of Kuala Lumpur, mainly for leisure and commerce but in exchange, will cause some destructive impacts like increased spending and restrictions on expressions of freedom.

Lucas said that political protests should be held in Putrajaya where the higher ups are located, but he expressed his understanding on why the *rakyat* would hold protests in Kuala Lumpur as it is accessible, with the strong sense of belonging, and the historical attachment. Lucas shared that Kuala Lumpur should have a proper, open, and large space for the public that may be appropriate for those activities. Lucas explained that Perdana Botanical Park should never be the space for protests as it is designed for preserving and appreciating nature but admits that KLCC Park has the potential to be a protest space because the Twin Tower represents Malaysia and, historically, diverse ethnic groups.



## Conclusion

This research began as an investigation into how the rakyat of Kuala Lumpur are reflected in the current built environment based on government priorities. The research shows several issues on social inequality, ethnic segregation, and the capitalism of privatised developers creating changes in the identity of Kuala Lumpur by hindering the social interaction between the users of the spaces. The issues found in Kuala Lumpur's built environment are the consequences of colonialism and a manifestation of negligence of the government. The manipulation of communities' priorities in Kuala Lumpur were always to facilitate business to generate profit and were never to improve the people's lifestyle, creating a chaos among the already segregated ethnic groups. Efforts were made to eliminate racial differences after the riot of 1969 through racial harmony concept implementation and plans on housing mix policy but were revealed to be the selfish opportunism of the government. Developments in Kuala Lumpur were allowed without any repercussions as long as favours the wealthy. Today, Kuala Lumpur is no longer seen as a place for the rakyat. Even though privatised establishments generally have features that are much better at facilitating users, it creates negative impacts onto the users of the space. The loss of identity and quality of the public spaces are just a few of the effects created by the rise of privatised developments.

Protesting is an act of defiance which has become apparent mostly in Kuala Lumpur despite the move of ministries and government bodies to Putrajaya. The image, historical attachments, and sense of belonging are partly why Kuala Lumpur is consistently chosen as the location for protests. Accessibility and mobility are noted to be the most common deciding factors. Despite this, the spaces are arguably unfit to cater for such activities as the urban layout is already too dense. Spaces for protest were denied to the protestors by the authorities despite being a space for the public. These actions create a perception that the available public spaces are not as public as they seem.

To conclude, the built environment in Kuala Lumpur is the reflection of the priorities of the government in contrast to those of the rakyat. However, in the end, the city is still a symbol of unity and harmony the heart of Malaysia, despite the saturation of privatised developments. Time will tell whether Kuala Lumpur will improve.

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## List of Illustrations

Cover image, s.n. (s.d.) *Kuala Lumpur Skyline* [Photograph] At: [https://www.itl.cat/wallview/iowJxbx\\_botanical-garden-wallpaper-tropical-zoom-backgrounds/](https://www.itl.cat/wallview/iowJxbx_botanical-garden-wallpaper-tropical-zoom-backgrounds/)

Figure 1, Perawongmetha A. (s.d.) *High foot traffic within narrow road in Kuala Lumpur due to the rise of private developments.* [Photograph] At: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/25/world/asia/malaysia-bersih-yellow-t-shirts-ban.html>

Figure 2, Choo Choy M. (s.d.) *Spatial segregation as seen from skyline view - Urban city with working class people and lower income groups families divided by a highway.* [Photograph] At: <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2018/10/31/malaysia-is-8th-worst-country-for-freedom-of-thought-just-above-uae-pakista/1688406>

Figure 3, s.n. (s.d.) *Bukit Bintang, known for its shopping complexes, was once the focal point of the deadly 1969 riot, was rejuvenated as a the centre for retail cluster.* [Photograph] At: <https://www.viator.com/en-GB/Kuala-Lumpur-attractions/Bukit-Bintang/d335-a13509>

Figure 4 *Despite the fact that the segregation of space occurred more naturally, the British who arrived later did oppose the segregation.* [Map]  
In: Azlan, N. A., 2018. *Seditious Spaces. A+ BE | Architecture and the Built Environment*, 1(26), p. 66.

Figure 5, Yun Huang Y. (2007) *Petaling Street represent the Chinese.* [Photograph] At: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/goosmurf/2138087930/sizes/l/>

Figure 6, s.n (s.d) *Brickfield representing the Indians.* [Photograph] At: [https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/HotelsNear-g298570-d456587-Little\\_India\\_Brickfields-Kuala\\_Lumpur\\_Wilayah\\_Persekutuan.html](https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/HotelsNear-g298570-d456587-Little_India_Brickfields-Kuala_Lumpur_Wilayah_Persekutuan.html)

Figure 7, Sellies F. (2016) *'Padang' of Dataran Merdeka, a historical location that represents freedom and independence from the colonisation of the British, declared off-limit for BERSIH protest rally.* [Photograph] At: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/26849514@N06/30155841891>

Figure 8, Reduan H. (2016) *BERSIH* protestor shows his anger towards the government. [Photograph] At: <https://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/09/171439/bersih-5-rally-be-held-november>

Figure 9, Muhammad B. (s.d.) *Public road is occupied as the 'Padang' is closed for protest.* [Photograph] At: <https://ifex.org/malaysia-blocking-websites-to-prevent-protest-violates-international-law/>

Figure 10, s.n (1893) All Girls School of Bukit Bintang, before becoming a shopping complex known as The Pavilion Mall. [Photograph] At: <https://alchetron.com/Bukit-Bintang-Girls%27-School>

Figure 11, TkKurikawa (2019) *Present time of The Pavillion Mall.* [Photograph] At: <https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/shopping-mall-bukit-bintang-kuala-lumpur-malaysia-gm1078978454-289100180>

Figure 12, s.n. (s.d.) *Perdana Botanical Garden - Recreation Park in Kuala Lumpur.* [Photograph] At: <https://worldtradecentrek1.com/2018/05/29/perdana-botanical-garden-in-kuala-lumpur/>

Figure 13, s.n. (s.d.) *KLCC Park - Public Park located directly adjacent to Kuala Lumpur Twin Tower.* [Photograph] At: [https://www.petitgo.com/listing\\_display?listingid=1](https://www.petitgo.com/listing_display?listingid=1)

Figure 14, Razali Agus M. (1992) *Spatial segregation caused by British colonization - Kuala Lumpur divided by different ethnic.* [Map] At: Yoshimura, M., 2003. Urbanisation, Development and Sociocultural Changes in Malaysia. *Journal of International Economic Studies*, 17(1), pp. 110.

# Appendix 01

Kay (December 2021) Interview with Hock Yong, Gan [Interview over Skype]

## Category 1 : Community Spaces

Question 01 : Do you agree with the statement “public space, infrastructure, and landscapes hinders social interaction and mobility”, and why?

Response

- I don't think it particularly “hinders” social interaction, but instead, design nowadays caters to the contemporary preference to have a degree of privacy, even in public spaces. I also think social interaction can be found where it is wanted. I'm not sure if it is really ‘hindered’ by public space, infrastructure, or landscape.

Question 02 : What does the term “social value” means to you in the setting of Kuala Lumpur?

Response

- I think, social value is a degree or value of contribution of an individual to society in different forms like, for example, social contribution, economic contribution, and etc.

Question 03 : As an intern then, what mode of transportations do you take to Kuala Lumpur? Why? What are ther reasons you travel to Kuala Lumpur outside your work time?

Response

- I usually take my own car because it's convenient and availability of my own vehicle, although the traffic situation eaves some room to be desired during peak traffic hours. Other times, I would take the public transport whenever I feel lazy.
- I visit Kuala Lumpur quite often before and even after my internship programme with my friends and family for the leisure. Sometimes for special occasions like exhibition or fairs.

Question 04 : As an interior design intern with experience in built environment working in the city center, what are your thoughts on community spaces or public spaces in Kuala Lumpur?

Response

- There aren't many in the heart of KL (Kuala Lumpur), so most of the 'public spaces' I used were actually in shopping malls. I once walked through the large park-like public area in front of Petronas Twin Towers, but the weather was too hot and humid to consider eating or relaxing there. (Unsheltered)

### **Category 02 : Private Development Overtaking Public Spaces**

Question 05 : What are your thoughts on public spaces being overtaken by private developers to develop establishments in general?

Response

- Although not ideal, in Malaysia the current situation is that it should be better for public spaces to be developed by private companies (e.g. IOI, Sunway, etc.) as the reputation and funding of such companies are currently in a better position to provide better quality public spaces, than the Malaysian government is now.

Question 06 : Public spaces are being demolished to private establishment for developments by the government. Do you think is fair that the government to allow these actions? Why?

Response

- It's not fair. The situation at its base is fine, but the unfairness of it stems from the fact that residents are not offered proper or appropriate compensation for their troubles, and thus it is unfair that the government is not taking care of their citizens properly (i.e. taking care of their citizens in a way that ensures not only their past and present economic/ social/physiological/psychological wellbeing, but also that of their future wellbeing.)

Question 07 : Do you think that there are more private establishments in Kuala Lumpur than public spaces, and there should be more public spaces instead?

Response

- Yes, of course! A specialised area for residents to walk through, relax, and immerse themselves in some nature outside of private areas like shopping malls, is beneficial as residents (including working peoples) can have a heightened sense of both belonging and ownership, which will increase their willingness to protect, maintain, and have opinions on how their built environment should be developed and run.

Question 08 : What is a public space to you?

Response

- A space accessible to everyone regardless of race, gender, income level, social standing, or even nationality.

Question 09 : Despite shopping complexes like The Pavillion, Suria KLCC and etc. are developed and run by privatised establishments. Do you think in general that these establishments have the features of public spaces?

Response

- In some way yes. For example, Petronas Twin Towers and KLCC are often used not necessarily by patrons of the shops located there, but also by passers-by and travelers, as a midway point or indoor route on their way to their next destination. People would consider it elitist, strange, or remiss of shopping malls to turn away people from their shopping malls in the case of having to declare that the mall would only be a transit point in their journey.

### **Category 03 : Social Inequality**

Question 05 : Are you aware of the issues on ethnic segregation in Kuala Lumpur? What are your thoughts about them?

Response

- I am aware of housing areas/neighbourhoods which are seen as “predominantly Malay/Chinese”, but have never looked into it. I am also aware of bumiputera housing discounts, which is directly related to some laws which state that some percentage of developments must be sold only to bumiputera/Malay residents. Although this may or may not have been understandable two or so decades ago, I think society should be reviewing this opinion and benefits of the bumiputera, as now more than ever the bumiputera are actually in a better educational and economic standpoint as they have ever been. This concept of ‘competing with the Chinese’ (and notions such as not allowing any Chinese to run for government) should also be reviewed, but I am not knowledgeable enough to provide a deeper insight into the topic.

Question 06 : How about racism?

Response

- I do think racism exists to some degree but in many forms. However, it may or may not also be tied with systemic reasons, such as a lower income and education level associated with different ethnic groups. For example, it is commonly perceived that Chinese people are more highly educated and wealthier on the whole, compared to their Malay or Indian peers. Also, Indian people may also have a stigma of being less high educated or ‘only having specialized skills’, such as IT. I am not sure of the government views on this in current events.
- I generally think there are issues on social inequalities in Malaysia itself (not just within Kuala Lumpur), and I think it got to do with the neglect of the government. As an designer in built environment, there are definitely lack of consideration in prioritizing the value of the society.

Question 07 : What are your thoughts on the development of high-end properties, instead of affordable housing over public spaces?

Response

- I'm not sure. I think ideally, government should have some role to play in these private developments, and the money made from exorbitant prices of high end properties should be channeled back to the rakyat, to provide much needed affordable housing to people who need it, not just in more rural(kampung) areas where people so-called "definitely cannot afford housing without government help", but affordable housing should also be made available, perhaps through government schemes, in areas with higher demand such as KL or Genting.

#### **Category 4 : Perception of Kuala Lumpur**

Question 08 : Kuala Lumpur is said to be perceived as a work hub rather than a place for social engagement or interaction, and that there are arguments stating that strolling in the city is comfortable. Do you agree?

Response

- I actually agree that Kuala Lumpur is a workplace instead, especially with my experience working in the city itself shown me that most people visit Kuala Lumpur over the weekdays are mostly for work. Though, I have to disagree on the strolling because of the climate itself and the infrastructure and facilities does not provide comfort enough, in fact it lacks standard protection against the climate.
- Kuala Lumpur is quite difficult to walk to begin with. The paths are disconnected and that I have to share the path with vehicles on the road sometimes just to get from point A to point B. Despite having tunnels and bridges, they are hard to access as well.



Question 09 : There is a statement that says the public are being forced into private establishments to engage their “public” lifestyle like socializing and others. Do you think it is true? Why?

Response

- I think this is related to the lacking qualities of the transit and transport infrastructure in Kuala Lumpur, which is accommodating only to vehicular transport and places less importance on walkability in Malaysia’s weather which can range from scorching heat to torrential downpour. Even areas in private or public developments with sheltered walkways often do not consider the unsuitability of the walkway to heavy rain or harsh weather. Due to these reasons, it is difficult to travel through Kuala Lumpur by foot, and due to congestion it can be difficult also to find parking in a vehicle, so KL is sometimes suitable (due to the high density of shops, cafes, etc.) but not convenient at all for social interaction.

Question 10 : Do you agree that the rise of privatized establishments cause the element of sociocultural interactions to lose its function and identity as a public space? Why?

Response

- Not really, instead, I think with the rise of private establishments create new functions and identity. I, for one, recognise these establishments like shopping complexes are a kind of public space as long as it is accessible for free.

Question 11 : As you would know, protests like BERSIH, are always held in Kuala Lumpur eventhough the government offices have already migrated to Putrajaya. Why do you think Kuala Lumpur is still chosen to be a place for protests?

Response

- I mean, Kuala Lumpur is the capital city after all. The protests would mean more with Kuala Lumpur being the image of the protests. I do think that Kuala Lumpur still has a historical attachments to the people and also the sense of belonging.

Question 12 : It was commented by protesters that these protests would be held in Kuala Lumpur because Kuala Lumpur is considered more accessible and has better mobility compared to Putrajaya especially if the authorities were to take action to stop the demonstration. Putrajaya was estimated to have spent MYR 8.1 billion to build an “intelligent city”. Do you think government or private developers should have considered space for protests? and Why?

Response

- No, not necessarily specifically “space for protests”, but I think that the designers should have considered more space for gatherings, town hall, community areas, including infrastructure to accommodate transport to and from such built spaces (including walkability as well as vehicular transport), which would have naturally produced and provided spaces for protest in any case.

Question 13 : Do you think public spaces such as Perdana Botanical Park or KLCC Park would be a great place for protests? Why?

Response

- Not sure. Based on the image shown to me, I would say that maybe it is not a good place for protest as the use looks specialized for relaxation and recreation: in other words, it is expected for the area to have high turnover of foot traffic, instead of encouraging or accommodating for lingering or gathering. It also has features that may or may not suggest that the structures would not be able to withstand the possible violence that can result from protests. (NOTE: Even with the ideal of peaceful protests, one should always consider the possibility, in the case of Malaysia, that it escalates to the involvement of riot police and a flurry of the crowd.)

## Appendix 02

Khor (December 2021) Interview with Hock Yong, Gan [Interview over Skype]

### Category 1 : Community Spaces

Question 01 : Do you agree with the statement “public space, infrastructure, and landscapes hinders social interaction and mobility”, and why?

Response

- I agree! I mean public spaces in Kuala Lumpur do not facilitate social interaction, and not conducive or comfortable for the disabled.

Question 02 : What does the term “social value” means to you in the setting of Kuala Lumpur?

Response

- I think, social value is the added value to my life acquired from using public transport or publicly available facilities and infrastructure.

Question 03 : As an working individual, what mode of transportations do you take to Kuala Lumpur? Why? What are ther reasons you travel to Kuala Lumpur outside your work time?

Response

- Most of the time, I prefer to take public transport despite not being comfortable and feeling safe sometimes. I take the public transport with the intention to save the environment but most importantly, I get to be productive working on my tasks while on the train, especially when taking the MRT (public monorail) is much faster compared to other ways to travel into Kuala Lumpur.
- I do drive from time to time when its convenient especially for time when I visit my friends or to seek leisure.

## **Category 02 : Private Development Overtaking Public Spaces**

Question 04 : Public spaces are being demolished to private establishment for developments by the government (Cases of Kampung Baru and Taman TTDI were presented to Khor during interview). Do you think is fair that the government to allow these actions? Why?

Response

- No, I don't think it is fair. Even if it was the government's prerogative to re-acquire the land for future development, it should be (1) for a proper reason and (2) for fair compensation. There is literally no more need for more commercial housing projects within KL. The population density is far too high. I would feel better if they re-acquired that land to build a public park, a community space, or even just to make it a green zone. There are many ready-developed commercial housing areas in or around KL which are empty or owned by the mega-rich to rent out, driving the wealth gap in Malaysia deeper. As for fair compensation, I find it incredulous and an abuse of power that the compensation could only amount to RM200,000. Later news reports say it was about RM250,000 and the government minister said that more compensation would be awarded. The news has been silent on it for almost a month now. I wonder if more compensation was offered. But compensation aside, I am still against the development of yet another commercial housing development.

Question 05 : Do you think that there are more private establishments in Kuala Lumpur than public spaces, and there should be more public spaces instead?

Response

- Yes definitely! Kuala Lumpur is far too dense especially after the development of Bukit Bintang and after the migration of government offices that allow the private developers to take over the spaces. The roads in Kuala Lumpur is too narrow and there are not much public spaces available for the public because of the developments.

Question 06 : What is a public space to you?

Response

- An area which is accessible to the general public without payment of a fee or requiring any membership or registration, not owned by a private entity (although it may be managed by one).

Question 07 : Despite shopping complexes like The Pavillion, Suria KLCC and etc. are developed and run by privatised establishments. Do you think in general that these establishments has the features of public spaces?

Response

- Yes. based on my answers to the previous question on free accessibility.

### **Category 3 : Social Inequality**

Question 08 : Are you aware of the issues on ethnic segregation in Kuala Lumpur? What are your thoughts about them?

Response

- Yes I am aware of this issue - it is a problem that has persisted for years and will continue to persist as long as there is no political will to resolve it. I feel sad about the issue but quite powerless, as I don't work or have any influence in that field.

Question 09 : How about racism?

Response

- Yes, it exists, but it depends largely on which industry and your rank. I find that the more 'privileged' you are (M40 bracket and above, maybe completed tertiary education and/or educated overseas), the less likely you are to encounter racism (although sexism is blatant across all levels of prestige and privilege). But it can be much, much worse in certain industries than others - for example, foreign workers from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka etc. are treated worse than locals, even though they are technically expatriates! They 'foreigners working in Malaysia' just as much as the white, British CEO working in the KL HQ of some global MNC. But they are not respected because no one is considering the difference in culture, education and language between them and us. Let's not even touch on religion and the availability of prayer spaces or their accessibility to anyone not of the same religion. Religion and Race are conflated in Malaysia because of politics so it is difficult to say they are not related, at least in the context of Malaysian culture.

Question 10 : Are you aware of the issues on ethnic segregation in Kuala Lumpur? What are your thoughts about them?

Response

- I am aware of housing areas/neighbourhoods which are seen as “predominantly Malay/Chinese”, but have never looked into it. I am also aware of bumiputera housing discounts, which is directly related to some laws which state that some percentage of developments must be sold only to bumiputera/Malay residents. Although this may or may not have been understandable two or so decades ago, I think society should be reviewing this opinion and benefits of the bumiputera, as now more than ever the bumiputera are actually in a better educational and economic standpoint as they have ever been. This concept of ‘competing with the Chinese’ (and notions such as not allowing any Chinese to run for government) should also be reviewed, but I am not knowledgeable enough to provide a deeper insight into the topic.

Question 11 : What are your thoughts on the development of high-end properties, instead of affordable housing over public spaces?

Response

- I think it is unfortunate and selfish. Having said that, I don’t think that ‘affordable housing’ should be built in the center of the city because of transport accessibility and population density issues. Any further development in KL should be for communal, public spaces or green spaces, or used to improve traffic (maybe build and incorporate a park-and-ride system?). Affordable Housing should be moved to satellite towns away from the city.

Question 12 : As the result of the defiance riot act in 1969, consequences such as spatial segregation by ethnicity created the formation of Malaysia’s New Economic Policy that aims to eradicate poverty and restructure inter-ethnic differences. Do you think the aims and the policy succeeded?

Response

- Not at all. The aims were to achieve unity and harmony which failed, restructure the socio-economic of the society which also failed, and lastly the eradication of poverty? Definitely failed. The policy was just another selfish act for the government own gains.

#### **Category 4 : Perception of Kuala Lumpur**

Question 13 : Kuala Lumpur is said to be perceived as a work hub rather than a place for social engagement or interaction, and that there are arguments stating that strolling in the city is comfortable. Do you agree?

Response

- I generally think that Kuala Lumpur is not necessarily perceived as workplace but I understand why. Kuala Lumpur being the capital city still attracts tourism and with the shopping complexes and other leisure businesses, I can't say that Kuala Lumpur as a whole is a place for work only.
- Strolling in the city is literally nightmare, generally due to the climate and the infrastructure is not up to par. There are no linkage of pedestrian path and it lacks transparency.

Question 14 : There is a statement that says the public are being forced into private establishments to engage their "public" lifestyle like socializing and others. Do you think it is true? Why?

Response

- It definitely is. But I think moving the government offices to Putrajaya probably helped with the congestion at first. It's just that instead of building more residentials, the city planners should have focused on restructuring the city or its infrastructure and transport. We could have so much better and efficient use of the space. I read somewhere that KL is double the size of Paris, geographically, and yet only half as dense in terms of actual residents. And yet the traffic and foot congestion remains a constant problem. I think this goes to show how inefficient the city planning is.

Question 15 : Do you agree that the rise of privatized establishments cause the element of sociocultural interactions to lose its function and identity as a public space? Why?

Response

- Definitely. Public spaces no longer has the meaning with all these high-rise, high-end developments surrounding it. The high density urban layout caused the public space to become hard to access.

Question 16 : What are the main attraction for you to visit Kuala Lumpur instead of any other places?

Response

- Well, I usually visit Kuala Lumpur for commerce or to meet up with friends and have a chat. Commerce would be the main attraction I believe.

Question 17 : What are your thought on government accomodating commercial purposes?

Response

- I think the action alone create impacts to the people. By accomodating the commercial, you force the people to spend more money which limits the accessibility and restrict the walkability, ultimately causing social to be fragmented.

Question 17 : Protests in Kuala Lumpur should be held in Putrajaya with most of the government and minister offices located in Putrajaya. With the government and minister offices relocated to Putrajaya, why do you think most protests (e.g. BERSIH) are still held in Kuala Lumpur?

Response

- There are several reasons that might create the chance for the protests to move into Putrajaya, but generally speaking, Kuala Lumpur is still the best option as the city is free to access. Not to mention, Kuala Lumpur has the image of impactful portrayal as well as the symbolic meaning. Plus, people have the sense of belonging towards Kuala Lumpur as well. Putrajaya despite being an “intelligence city” still does not have the impacts that Kuala Lumpur can provide.



Question 18 : It was commented by protesters that these protests would be held in Kuala Lumpur because Kuala Lumpur is considered more accessible and has better mobility compared to Putrajaya especially if the authorities were to take action to stop the demonstration. Putrajaya was estimated to have spent MYR 8.1 billion to build an “intelligent city”. Do you think government or private developers should have considered space for protests? and Why?

Response

- I think government should have considered space for \_evacuation\_ of the residents in case of any emergency. I don't particularly think they should have considered space for protests in particular. If the government was functioning properly there would be no need for protests in the first place. Preparing a space for protests seems like a defeatist act, preparing for something to go horribly wrong.

Question 19 : Do you think public spaces such as Perdana Botanical Park or KLCC Park would be a great place for protests? Why?

Response

- (1) Unfortunately these parks are not well equipped to deal with huge crowds. In a worst case, people may be hurt or property damaged. In the best case, I would think that there would be not enough public toilets or trash bins to accommodate the waste left behind by a protest crowd. (2) There is no symbolism to the parks and it is easy for pro-government media to spin the story to say that these people 'were just hanging out in the park' and weren't really there for the protest. It risks diminishing the value of the subject of the protest. (3) Protesting in a public park doesn't inconvenience any government minister, official, or function, and does not force the issue in front of their eyes, so it risks not having any effect.

## Appendix 03

Lucas Lee (December 2021) Interview with Hock Yong, Gan [Interview over Skype]

### Category 1 : Community Spaces

Question 01 : Do you agree with the statement “public space, infrastructure, and landscapes hinders social interaction and mobility”, and why?

Response

- Yeah. I mean, in the sense that these are the spaces that allow ppl to have social interactions between one another. They allow the chance for the interactions to happen. In terms of mobility, I believe they change how we choose to move around the space (between/around/through these spaces). Without proper public space, infrastructure, and landscaping: the experience and walkability will be worse. There will be a lot of obstructions and obstacles for me to get from point A to B.

Question 02 : What does the term “social value” means to you in the setting of Kuala Lumpur?

Response

- Social value is, well, the value that is appreciated by society, contributed by people and spaces. A space is given value by people, to be appreciated by society (other people).

Question 03 : As a local, what mode of transportations do you take to Kuala Lumpur? Why? What are ther reasons you travel to Kuala Lumpur outside your work time?

Response

- I prefer to drive whenever I am visiting Kuala Lumpur, mainly because I find taking public transport aren't that comfortable sometimes especially the duration of travel. I generally like to drive and it's definitely more convenient, comfortable and, well, fun to drive.
- Sometimes, I would result to taking public transport to avoid the traffic jam and finding parking spaces is definitely a nightmare in Kuala Lumpur. Everywhere you go, you have to pay to park and the cost per hour is very high since it's the city center. I still visit Kuala Lumpur occasionally for staycation (vacation), cafe hopping (visit different cafes), but mostly for leisure and occasionally, exhibitions.

## Category 02 : Private Development Overtaking Public Spaces

Question 04 : Public spaces are being demolished to private establishment for developments by the government (Cases of Kampung Baru and Taman TTDI were presented to Khor during interview). Do you think is fair that the government to allow these actions? Why?

Response

- I mean there are definitely pros and cons. It does attract more people into the city, improving businesses and economy and so on. It's a city center area, so it should attract more people for tourism in any case. There's a certain cohesion for everyone to enjoy. However, it does create a very dense urban layout and brings up more issues like pollution (e.g. from traffic congestion) and issues with transport infrastructure. Eventually the space for new buildings will run out, and old buildings will remain so new developers will aim for places other than KL, so KL will not maintain their image as a city center and will have to downgrade to an 'older' image unless they knock down the old buildings and are replaced by new buildings to facilitate bigger and better architectural styles and functions. KL is largely a "business center" rather than "the city center of the capital city".

Question 05 : Do you think that there are more private establishments in Kuala Lumpur than public spaces, and there should be more public spaces instead?

Response

- They can proceed, but a set of rules should be in put in place for developers to follow. Based on the video from (1): those private housings are not really required, and the government/developers should listen more to the needs of wants of the locals instead of prioritizing profit. Public places should be preserved for their social benefits (attachment between people and the space itself) as well as the preservation of nature. These spaces can be used for private developments such as high-end commercial housing, but they should also propose an integrated public space to take the place of the one they are building over. As for (2), it's quite terrible. The people living in these multigenerational houses should compensated according to the value of the prime land that is wanted by the government and developers. Compensation must be transparent to the rakyat. Honesty is the key here. If you are honest with the rakyat, the rakyat will understand.

Question 06 : Do you think there should be more public spaces for the *rakyat*? Why?

Response

- Maybe. I think these kinds of public spaces like Perdana Botanical Garden or KLCC Park are very open spaces. However, temperatures are high in the daytime which makes it difficult to use. KL should have more public spaces but should consider the kinds of public spaces that can create a comfortable space for the rakyat even during the daytime. Opening a similar space to Perdana Botanical Garden or KLCC Park won't make any difference in terms of comfort or accessibility. I think it's good to have more public spaces in the capital city itself. But it depends on the public space.

Question 07 : What is a public space to you?

Response

- A space that is accessible, comfortable, and is meant for the public. It also needs to allow people to feel safe and be open to social interactions.

Question 08 : Despite shopping complexes like The Pavillion, Suria KLCC and etc. are developed and run by privatised establishments. Do you think in general that these establishments has the features of public spaces?

Response

- Maybe. Shopping malls are still managed and run by a private entity. There are still things you can't do in a mall, like skateboarding, that you would be able to do in a public space. However, shopping complexes are still a center/hub that allow people to partake in social and commercial activities. It's not exactly meant as a space 'for the public', it's more of a 'space for business'. But having said that, shopping malls do have the safety, accessibility and comfort for normal people, so maybe they can be considered a KIND of public space.

### **Category 3 : Social Inequality**

Question 09 : Are you aware of the issues on ethnic segregation in Kuala Lumpur? What are your thoughts about them?

Response

- The ethnic segregation isn't obvious, but you will see a lot of same-race groups eating and walking around together. Outside of KL, you can see that Indians, Chinese, and Malays have their own residential housing areas/ neighbourhoods. Petaling Street is seen as for the Chinese and Little India (in Brickfields) for the Indians. I think it's wrong that government bodies are having less participation in residential developments. They should be the regulators and overseers. With private properties rising every year and being unsold/kept empty, the government has not been stopping developments from overcrowding for the past few years. It's a density problem to do with profit-seeking capitalism.

Question 10 : Do you think racism exists within Kuala Lumpur especially in work environment? What do you think after reading the statement above?

Response

- Racism definitely exists, not only in KL but in other states too. But it's mostly found in older people and among the lower income classes. Those with high income and high educational level are less likely to experience racism first-hand. Different ethnic groups have different issues in the work environments in KL too. Racism often stems from unfair treatment and jealousy between the local races. However, with the younger generation become better educated, racism issues have been less frequent among the younger generation as well. The government has not put forth any effort to resolve these racism issues, keeping their mouth shut and making everything worse. If the drain isn't clogged and you don't clean it, eventually the pipe will burst.

Question 11 : Do you think architecture and urban planning in Kuala Lumpur lack the consideration in prioritizing the value of society and their needs?

Response

- Yes. Generally speaking, Kuala Lumpur being a tight urban setting shows how much these architects (or you may say built environment) does not care about the peoples' needs unless it is profitable to them. Everything is a business to them. By providing the people a benefit, they gain a lot more in business.

Question 12 : In your position, do you think “rakyat” is fairly treated in terms of the availability of built environment and public spaces?

Response

- Definitely no! If the built environment is being considered and planned fairly to the people of Malaysia, you would see less homeless people and less of the divided ethnic groups. I have seen people with different culture and background working in Kuala Lumpur working harmoniously together but it is not reflected on the spaces available.

Question 13 : With the increasing number of new high end properties being developed, instead of affordable housing that is needed urgently over public spaces. What are your thoughts on this issue?

Response

- It is a horrible idea. There are already multiple new development plans around Malaysia alone with most of those developed properties being empty because of the market value of properties are ridiculously high. No one can afford such houses with the economical state. Especially in Kuala Lumpur, the city itself is already packed with buildings and establishments but you still see multiple development plans being proposed just outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. I mean, like the example of Kampung Baru. It is too ridiculous.

#### **Category 4 : Perception of Kuala Lumpur**

Question 14 : Kuala Lumpur is said to be perceived as a work hub rather than a place for social engagement or interaction, and that there are arguments stating that strolling in the city is comfortable. Do you agree?

Response

- I agree, I mean, most people that visits Kuala Lumpur are mostly working individual. You see those large companies with international connections are located in Kuala Lumpur. Taking the public transport, almost 80% (giving a rough estimation) of the people are going to Kuala Lumpur for work. Traffic congestion is high during the peak hour when people going to work and going home after work.
- Walking in the city, on the other hand, I believe is not comfortable, if you were to consider the climate of course. Without the climate, I think the walkability is actually fine. With that said, the developers should consider how to make walking more comfortable knowing that the climate is uncomfortable.

Question 14 : There is a statement that says the public are being forced into private establishments to engage their “public” lifestyle like socializing and others. Do you think it is true? Why?

Response

- Yes, because these private establishments such as shopping malls are more comfortable and more accessible and have high levels of cleanliness as well as security.

Question 15 : Do you agree that the rise of privatized establishments cause the element of sociocultural interactions to lose its function and identity as a public space? Why?

Response

- Not really, I think instead of losing the function and identity, I think it generate a new function and identity as a public space. Malaysians are known to be very adaptable hence you don't see major complain about small issues like this as long as there is a replacement of identity. I believe it's the rakyat that creates the identity of the public space, which ultimately make functions.

Question 16 : What are your thoughts on government accommodating commercial purposes?

Response

- Government accommodation commercial purpose comes in advantages and disadvantages. Though, as a citizen of Kuala Lumpur, I do believe that it somewhat affects the people of Malaysia, especially those in lower income class. By accommodating the commercial, it also divides the space as well. Just an example that Kuala Lumpur itself is a busy capital city but just directly next to the city is a village situation housing.

Question 17 : Protests in Kuala Lumpur should be held in Putrajaya with most of the government and minister offices located in Putrajaya. With the government and minister offices relocated to Putrajaya, why do you think most protests (e.g. BERSIH) are still held in Kuala Lumpur?

Response

- I think yes, protests should be held in Putrajaya instead especially knowing that the amount they spent to build the city, it should be provided to the public and the public should utilise it more often. Although I understand why Kuala Lumpur is the chosen location for protests but I think the dense urban layout would not be sufficient to provide beneficial results of the protests. If you have something to say, say it to the right people in the right place. Kuala Lumpur despite still being a capital city, most of the government offices have gone to Putrajaya. I believe Kuala Lumpur is still the most ideal place for protests mainly for its accessibility, image and historical elements and how people have grown attachment with the city.

Question 18 : Do you think public spaces such as Perdana Botanical Park or KLCC Park would be a great place for protests? Why?

Response

- Public spaces like Perdana Botanical Park shouldn't be a space for protest because of its design and purpose for preserving and enjoying nature. However, KLCC Park has the potential to be a protest space because KLCC represents Malaysia's freedom, diverse ethnic groups, and so on.