

Planning for City with Soul

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THE River of Life project is framed by vegetation and trees from the Klang and Limbok areas along the 10.7km stretch within the city centre.

Importantly, Kuala Lumpur is the Malay state for a confidence where two muddy rivers meet.

A much earlier proposal to rehabilitate the rivers and restore their economic value was rejected under the KL Linear City project, which did not take off.

Would it be a tall order now to transform these rivers into linear waterfronts to go with highways to cities like Amsterdam, London, Melbourne and Paris by 2020?

Perhaps a reality check is in order. What we have are two small rivers, no wider than a canal. On dry days, it would be difficult to tow a small boat over some shallow parts. Moreover, the river is treated as open sewage by those lacking in civic consciousness.

Ironically, rain falls at regular intervals, washing away dust and debris and smothering the rivers after a downpour. Until the SMART tunnel project was completed, flooding was a common occurrence.

The colour of the Klang river has remained dark yellow, much like our tonnes of earth, from the time it was discovered in Ampang in 1857 that led to the founding of Kuala Lumpur.

The International Masterplanning Commission that attracted 17 bids with the shortlisted for voting by the public will ensure the success of the river revitalisation and development.

However, the river planning component may prove to be as challenging as maintaining a first-world infrastructure in our third-world mentality. It will have to start with the river upstream by educating the people and controlling the industries.

It would also be necessary to discuss private water within the city but allow the river to remain at its present deplorable condition downstream. As such, the State government and local authorities should act in tandem to upgrade the entire length of the Klang River.

The river can come to life with lakes and activities such as river cruises, recreational bridges and landscaped terraces. The riverbanks should be paved for walking, jogging and cycling.

Manhole covers can be replaced with city parks, disrupting traffic. With some imaginative use of money, any local authority can create a large water fund by making good use of rivers that run through their jurisdiction.

The stretches with little economic value, the riverbanks can be planted with mangrove trees. These unique trees have roots sprouting from their



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY: The proposed new revitalisation project area.

branches and upon reaching the ground, would grow into solid trunks.

As such, the branches can be led to grow sideways, running parallel to the river. It is forest to recover. Planting the first tree and witnessing in the world it will eventually be spread over a kilometre would generate great interest.

Over the past few decades, I have enjoyed watching the majestic rain trees at the Tajung Lake Gardens with

their huge branches arching across the road, almost touching the lake. This glorious image is etched permanently in my mind, deep in my soul.

We should carry on replanting trees to green our earth. It is also time to plant our love and history on selected riverbanks by planting "family trees". For an appropriate fee, a person can pay and plant a tree that will grow for a few hundred years.

Every plant is unique with

its own history and interests when it comes alive. However, if local history is abandoned and contributions that make Kuala Lumpur what it is today are abandoned, the city will be effectively lost.

Whether the project is the River of Life or City of Life, we owe grace to the master planner that incorporates soul. People and nature must flow more than anything else.

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