

Planning for City with Soul

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THE River of Life project is bound to revitalize and improve the Klang and Klang Valley areas along the 10.7km stretch within the city centre.

Significantly, Kuala Lumpur is the Malay capital 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.

Should it be a full-scale move to transform these rivers into linear waterways to get with waterways to cities like Amsterdam, London, Melbourne and Paris by 2020?

Perhaps a middle-ground 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 dirt and debris and leaving the rivers after a downpour. Until the 1980s, flood project was completed, flooding was a common occurrence.

The culture of the Klang river has remained dark yellow, much like our famous oil spill, from the time it was discovered in January 1987 that led to the founding of Kuala Lumpur.

The International Waterplanting Commission that attracted 12 bids with the intention of using the public will ensure the success of the river beautification and development.

However, the river planning commission 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 decrease 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 fishes and activities such as river cruises, recreational barges and boat-based tourism. The riverbanks should be paved for walking, jogging and cycling.

Overflow basins can run here instead of on city roads, disrupting traffic. With some imagination instead of money, any local authority can create a large media bank by making good use of rivers that run through their jurisdiction.

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



YONGKOP WATERPLANTING The proposed river beautification 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 worth to mention, planting the first tree and announcing to 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 Tropic 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 defined and contributions that make Kuala Lumpur what it is today are acknowledged, the city will be effectively immortal.

Whether the project is the River of Life or City of Life, our vote goes to the master planner that incorporates soul. People and nature stretch from more than anything else.

YS Chan