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Reviving Sydney Lake as the Historical Park of Kuala Lumpur

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Abstract

In 1888, a first recreational area was created in Kuala Lumpur as a place for the British residents. Now, after more than 120 years this lake area still exists. Reintroducing the Sydney Lake Garden as the historical park is not about enhancing the colonial heritage but more on the history that this area once had. With the used of Greater Kuala Lumpur/Klang Valley (GKL/KV) as one of the main references, this paper will try to relate it on reviving this recreational area as one of new tourist attraction of Kuala Lumpur, the Sydney Lake Historical Park.

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Keywords: Heritage conservation; historic park; heritage place; Greater Kuala Lumpur/Klang Valley (GKL/KV)

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the history of Sydney Lake and the ideas of enlivening it as the Historical Park of Kuala Lumpur. Thus, the discussion started with the history of the establishment of Sydney Lake in the

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1880s and its functions during the early years of its creation. The second part of the paper will study the conditions of Sydney Park in the era of modernity, the 2000s and the changes done ever since its existence. The last part of the paper will touch on the efforts taken by other conservation bodies especially in United States (National Park Service) and Great Britain (English Heritage). Sources from other international organizations such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) will also take into account in achieving the purpose of this research. Furthermore, discussions continue with the actions taken by the Malaysian Government and the local authority in conserving the originality of Sydney Lake Garden. It will relate to the implementation of the Greater Kuala Lumpur/Klang Valley (GKL/KL) and others relevant laws implemented in Malaysia and its impact on this historic park.

2. Sydney Lake: The beginning

The idea of the establishment of a recreational area in Kuala Lumpur started when Frank Athelstane Swettenham appointed as the Selangor Residents in 1882. During his early administration, he realized “the new capital city [Kuala Lumpur] was in urgent need of a facelift” (Sardar, 2000, p. 67). Swettenham’s vision started with the refurbishment of the old town area. Sharing the same views was Alfred Reid Venning, the Selangor State Treasurer. If Swettenham was concentrating more on the city redevelopment, A. R. Venning is more interested in creating a new recreational area for the Kuala Lumpur residents (Aziz, 2007). During the era, ‘Padang’ (now known as Dataran Kuala Lumpur or Merdeka Square) was the only “main center of European communal activity” (Gullick, 1998, p. 50). Thus, a new recreational area is urgently needed at that time.

With the support gathered from Swettenham, A. R. Venning took the first step in searching a suitable area that could cater the needs of the Kuala Lumpur’s residents especially the British and European communities. An appropriate site identified at the edge of the city, near the 15th mile of the old Damansara Road. This area consists of “a clear stream (Sungei Bras Bras) crossed the road after meandering through a valley that consisted of several acres of swamp” (Selangor Journal, II. p. 9, 22 September 1893, written by A. R. Venning) in (Gullick, 2007, p. 9). Filled with “briars and lalang, forest trees, screw pines and tree ferns” this area were “interspersed in picturesque confusion” (Gullick, 2007, p. 9). In 1888, the creation of a new lake garden began (Fig. 1).

A year later, in 1889, the area which previously overgrown with wild bushes has changed to the “finest amenity” for the use of the people of Kuala Lumpur (Gullick, 1998, p. 24). On May 13, 1889, this Lake was formally open to the Kuala Lumpur’s colonial elite by the Governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir Cecil Clementi Smith (Fatt, 2011, p. 165; The Kuala Lumpur Municipal Council, 1959, p. 17). Named after Mrs. Swettenham, Sydney, this area quickly became famous among the residents. This unique space that covered with greenery and flowering plants species is also enlivened with music played by the Police Band (Fatt, 2011, p. 165). The characteristic adds to the uniqueness of Sydney Lake to the residents of Kuala Lumpur.

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