

4th International Conference on Sustainable Future for Human Security, SustaiN 2013
**City skyline conservation: sustaining the premier image
of Kuala Lumpur**

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Abstract

City skyline is a unique fingerprint and inherent abstract reflecting a city's image and identity in terms of its spatial, historical, social, cultural and economic structures over time. Acting as important components, skyscrapers intend to reflect premier image and status which have promotional and competitive benefits to a city. A rising city like Kuala Lumpur has aimed to improve its global standing through tall buildings and skyscrapers such as Petronas Towers and Kuala Lumpur Tower. The towers were designed to re-imaging the whole city and directly placed Kuala Lumpur on the world map as a world-class city. The city's skyline therefore, is instantly recognizable; distinctive assets which are important to be protected. However, due to improving technology and global city competition, many new tall buildings have been proposed with the intention to replace the iconic role of these two towers. The proposal and construction of these new buildings exceed the allowable maximum height and have given rise to the urge to re-image and re-brand the identity of this national capital city, eclipsing the iconic role of Petronas Towers and KL Tower. The study focused on how the potential impacts of new proposed tall buildings influence the existing Kuala Lumpur skylines. The aim was to investigate the quality and image of city skyline and its transformation due to new high-rise buildings. This research made use of the Geographical Information System (GIS) and its 3D modeling function to construct, assess and analyze the city silhouettes. It also showed that the effectiveness of these techniques for assessing and pre-test tall building proposals depends upon the local context of decision making.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the SustaiN conference committee and supported by Kyoto University; (RISH), (OPIR), (GCOE-ARS) and (GSS) as co-hosts

Keywords: City skyline, visual quality, views protection, city profile analysis, city image and identity conservation

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1. Introduction

In the fast pace of globalization process, Kuala Lumpur having experiencing rapid growth, seems to join the fray for competitiveness with other cities worldwide. The proliferation of physical development ever since Malaysia gained its independence from British occupation over more than five decades ago has never seemed to recede. Surrounded by the rapidly changing economy, based on sectors like technology-intensive production, business and financial services, and a broad range of new industries is rapidly coming to the fore. Much of the large scale urban transformation of this first national capital is greatly visible accompanying the premiership of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad [1], where socio-economic forces demand physical expansion from post-colonial setting to ultra-modern and sophisticated skyscrapers that change the overall city's skylines. Currently, researches in urban skyline have not received much attention in the physical planning and always been overshadowed by the need of other statutory spatial planning requirements especially in dealing with rapid growth [2].

Elsewhere in the world's major cities, especially in North America, city skyline is evidently the product of post-1960 boom in skyscrapers [3] which saw urban skyline emulated by tall building constructions that symbolized the signature of city abstraction which collectively represent cultural achievement with respect to accumulation of historical, socio-cultural and economic structure over time [4,5]. Significantly, most cities rhetorical stance embedded the concern of city regional image and identity as "world city" [5,6] with key positive impression to the tourist attraction [7]. Factors in skyline importance are ingrained in the urban function, regional image formation, site characteristic, and competing city's skyline image building capacity, urban design and centrality [3]. These 21st century urbanization trends are ramified in large cities and their surrounding regions. In fact, city-regions have now become one of the essential foundations of the new world order and phenomena of city expansion and growth [8].

In pursuit of becoming the "world city image", competing city's local authorities and mayors are becoming sensitive to plan responsibly for city growth to reflect this world premier city status as a stable global capital that balance economic gain and culture simultaneously. Impressive urban image and managed skyline consequently becoming very vital in planning and design. Many researchers in the cognitive and phenomenal paradigm in contemporary urbanization processes indicated that people share certain consensuality among their image of a certain location. Visual image relates intimately with mental image that retained in memory which in turn contributed to the environmental meanings in the evaluation of city image and sense of place [9]. This information leads to city planners and policy makers open to apparent new dimension in finding solutions to deal with the many threats and opportunities faced by cities in the current conjecture.

Experts and researchers in their seminal works in the concept of sense of place expediting intimate relationship between people and their surrounding or environmental setting [10,11,12]. Tuan [10] elaborated that the built environment is of equal importance as the natural environment in defining the character of a setting. He indicates that the Manhattan skyline symbolized and represented the city New York as a whole. Similarly, St. Louis Arch, Boston Commons, and Brooklyn Bridge are notably famous for their aesthetic dominance, but also because they respectively symbolize a gateway to the West, a sacred portion of the community, and the transition from one place to another. Tuan [10] further noted that how cities of European and Asian origin, posed a sense of mystery, the extent which visitor emotionally imagine the delight within the city center from the outside. The symbolic construction of the image of a place is commonly analyzed from two different perspectives: the insiders and the outsiders. For insiders (i.e. local residents), sense of place develops through everyday experiences in familiar settings. For outsiders, city image and sense of place are often particularly vague, abstract and simplistic. Such images are, however, important because they help people to make generalizations and finally decisions regarding, for example, their investments, residential locations or holiday destinations.

Due to the improving technology and global city competition, the dynamic growth of Kuala Lumpur city witnesses the increase in the number of high rise buildings. The urbanization of Kuala Lumpur exerts the new image and sign of the city with re-branding features such as the 452 meter Petronas Twin Towers in 1998 which stands out above all so far built by man, together with the Kuala Lumpur Tower or KL Tower (421 meter) in 1996. Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur City Centre and KL Tower in Bukit Nanas are two landmarks in the heart of the Golden Triangle of Kuala Lumpur; the iconic symbols that are synonymous to the city of Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia. These two landmarks located in the most strategic commercial district have been an evidently important symbol of pride and achievement. The phenomenal nuance of geometry and conical spires of Petronas Towers for instance,

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