

# Landscape Infrastructure Developments and Improvement in Malaysia: A review from 2000-2014

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## Abstract

Since 20 years ago, Malaysian has recognized the landscape architectural industries and acknowledged its functions as importance as other professions in builds environments such as planners and architects. Malaysia aimed and committed to be a 'tropical garden nation' by 2020. The vision has inspired the landscape infrastructure developments and industries. The aim of the paper is to review landscape infrastructure development in Malaysia from 2000 to 2014. The study investigates the data using qualitative content analysis. It explores newspaper collection from the National Landscape Department website under the Housing and Local Government Ministry (KPKT) between year 2000 and 2014. The articles have been reviewed and folder under a code/theme that represents similar idea and content description. Thus, the study has found seven categories of issues. The higher percentage with 40% (108 articles) is Tree Planting Campaign, 16% (44 articles) is about Malaysia Landscape Identity, while Greening the Nation, Green Project and Development of Public Park score 14%. However, only fewer articles were found related to Housing Act and Management and Maintenance. The study concludes that the concept of 'Garden Nation' is the main trust in landscape infrastructure development in Malaysia. The concept will anchor and envelope all initiatives to inculcate the awareness of Malaysian to appreciate its beautiful green living environment including planning, design and implementation.

**Keywords:** *Landscape Architecture, Garden Nation, Landscape Identity and Tree Planting Campaign*

## 1. Introduction

Physical developments in Malaysia have been regulated by the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Amendment 2001) by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. The National Physical Plan (NPP) for Malaysia has been finalized to ensure that the national vision will uphold the structure plan and local plans by the states and local governments. The NPP is to guide the country to become a sustainable nation through its economic, sectoral and physical planning policies (JPBD, 2005). The NPP's aim is for Malaysia to become a sustainable developing country by 2020. Therefore, the development of urban environments in a sustainable way or using sustainable approaches is given a high priority. There are four main objectives in the NPP to guide the nation: the fourth objective addresses the securing of spatial environmental quality and diversity for a high quality of life (JPBD, 2005). The objective, principles and policies have been addressed in the NPP and it also provides a focus on the urban environment and open space planning and conservation. Malaysia has shown its commitment to parks and garden development when it initiated the concept 'Garden Nation 2005' (Mustafa, 2007). The Garden Nation concept has increased participation by the states and local governments in landscape development by providing sufficient green spaces for recreational and leisure activities. For example, the city of Kuala Lumpur has targeted the provision of sufficient green spaces and a sustainable environment for its inhabitants through the concept of the 'Sustainable Tropical Garden City 2020' (CHKL, 2008). The national visions and objectives have been applied in the Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 (CHKL, 2008). The plan also includes open space planning and conservation.

The urban environment is rapidly growing and many green spaces are now urbanised: worldwide, the proportion of urban population is reached 75% (Melles, 2005, Chawla, 2002; & Tratalos et. 2007). The population of Malaysia is 27.73 million, with 4.5% of the population above 65 years old, 63.5% are between 15-64 years old and 32% are below 15 years of age (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2008). According to the 2000 population census, conducted by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the urban population comprised 62% of the total population (Jaafar, 2004). People are demanding more sustainable planning development and that their cities should be more comfortable, enjoyable and safe.

Urban green space planning is important because urban sprawl has implications for recreational and leisure activities. In the 21st century, carefully-planned urban green spaces are in high demand because they are perceived as being able to improve the quality of life, improve attitudes toward nature, regenerate economic performance, and improve the ecology and biodiversity of the environment (Pauleit, 2003, Balram & Dragicevic 2005; Swanwick, et. 2003).

## 2. Experimental

Activities in the landscape environment in Malaysia have received a lot of attention by many. However, rapid urbanisation has threatened the conservation of green space, especially public parks. For example, there are some who have no concern on the importance of preserving the urban greenery and spaces. Thus, the aim of the study is to examine the commitment of landscape industries in materialising Malaysia as a Garden Nation. The research is aimed to review the landscape infrastructure development and its improvement in Malaysia. The research has used qualitative content analysis method to explore the data (Zhang, Y. & Wildemuth B.M. (n.d.)). The study investigates newspaper cutting collections as a qualitative material from the National Landscape Department's website under the Housing and Local Government Ministry (KPKT) from year 2000 until 2014. The articles in the newspapers have been chosen as materials because the contents reported news, efforts and improvement between people and urban landscape environment, especially on green issues. The articles have been analysed using qualitative software, Nvivo 10. They have been reviewed and categorised under coding that represent similar idea/theme and content description. Some of the articles are in Malay language and others are in English. The articles came from many mainstream newspapers in Malaysia such as The New Straits Time, Malay Mail, The Sun, The Star, Berita Harian and Utusan Malaysia.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Thus the study has found seven categories of issues. The higher percentage with 40% (108 articles) is from Tree Planting Campaign, 16% (44 articles) is about Malaysia Landscape Identity, Greening the Nation, Green Project and Development of public park scores which score 14%. However, fewer articles were found related to the Housing Act and Management and Maintenance. (Refer to Table 1)

**Table 1:** Landscape infrastructure developments in Malaysia

	Categories of issues	No. Articles	Percentage
1	Housing Act	1	1%
2	Greening the Nation	40	14%
3	Malaysian Landscape Identity	44	16%
4	Tree Planting Campaign	108	40%
5	Development of Public Parks	39	14%
6	Green Project	40	14%
7	Management & Maintenance	1	1%
	Total	273	100%

### 3.1. Tree planting campaign

The author concluded that there are two important timeline of vision to greening the nation. Since year 2000, the government of Malaysia has planned the nation to be "Garden Nation" by the year 2005 and the second timeline is to be "Garden Nation" by the year 2020. Former, Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Azizah Mohamed Dun said the Government's target was to have 3.5 million trees planted nationwide by the end of 2005, or 700,000 each year (The Malay Mail, 2004). Meanwhile, Former, Housing and Local Government Minister Dato' Sri Ong Ka Ting was targeting about 23 million plants to be planted by year 2020 (Utusan Malaysia, 2006). He also said "this was the mark of success for the nationwide tree planting campaign launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on March 3, 1997" (New Straits Time, 2000).

The results of content analysis from the Department of National Landscape newspaper collection since year 2000 found that, tree planting campaign was the most reported landscape infrastructure development in Malaysia with 108 articles (40%). These show that the emphasis have been given to green the nation through planting more trees around the nation. In year 2000 the Housing and Local Government has pledged and encouraged Malaysian to participate in "Millennium Tree Planting" and planted 100,000 nationwide in conjunction with Word Habitat Day. (New Straits Time, 2000). There are 30 species planted and was recorded in the Guinness Book of World Records. The government believes that by planting more trees it could enhance green the quality of the environment by reducing urban heat, refresh the air quality and encourage people to appreciate their living environment. Ong also stressed that "deterioration of environment quality was often due to human action. The environment is under increasing pressure from expanding population and aspiration for better lives. Hence, it is the shared responsibility of all that counted in order to rationalise our action towards achieving a sustainable, harmonious and quality living environment for the survivals of mankind" (New Straits Time 2000). He also believed that "With this campaign, we felt that our objectives of improving public awareness and interest on quality, beautiful and healthy surroundings have been achieved" (New Straits Time, 2000).

The State of Johor has become the lead to plant 500,000 trees in 2005. The state of Johor has named as 'tree state' and monitored the programme effectively with participation came from 16 local governments. The tasks are "to cover landscaping and tree planting along roads leading to all towns and directed all housing schemes to reserve 10% of land for recreational purposes," (The Star, 2002). In 2008, Johor state managed to plant 92,861 trees and was targeting to plant continuously in ten years' time in order to achieve 1 million trees (New Straits Time, 2000).

Perak planned to plant 380,000 trees by the end of 2005 as part of efforts to make Malaysia a garden country. These activities involve the local authorities, housing developers, non-governmental organisations, schools and Government departments in the State to join in the tree-planting programme.

### 3.2. Malaysian landscape identity

The awareness toward garden with Malaysian Landscape Identity has alarmed more concern from the public, professionals and government. The study found that approximately about 44 articles (16%) have been reported highlighting on the importance of preserving and promoting the Malaysian Landscape Identity.

The author concludes that by organizing garden festival and landscape conferences, it has made dramatic changes in the images and perception of people about healthy living environment especially towards upholding Malaysian Landscape Identity. To realize the government vision to be Malaysia - a garden nation by 2005, there are many programmes organized by Government, local authorities and NGOs in order to increase people concern on local garden design and environmental attitude. Since year 2004, Botanical Perdana Lake Garden has hosted the Malaysian International Landscape and Garden Festival for every two years by which it has been renamed as Floria Putrajaya International Landscape and Garden Festival.

“Laman 2004, as it is called, covers 29 hectares and is the platform of not only innovative garden and floral displays but also a showcase for products and services, the event is expected to be the biggest garden festival in Asia. There are at least 150 garden designs on display, featuring works by local governments, city councils, companies and universities” (New Straits Time, 2000). The continuing year Laman 2006 had first time organised “the Malaysia Garden concept which is put together for display at The Malaysia International Landscape and Garden Festival in July 2006. The National Landscape Department is seen as an instrumental in conceptualising the identity of Malaysia Garden by incorporating plants and elements unique to the country”. The festival, themed "Oasis of Beauty", has other attractive displays of various gardens and events for visitors. There are more than 80 sculptured gardens presented and bargains at some 50 lots retailing garden related products” (Sunday Time, 2006). Then followed by Laman 2008 which have enhanced and flourished the people interest towards flowers and gardens.

However, in 2007 until recent 2015, Floria Putrajaya International Landscape and Garden Festival has taken place in national calendar for landscape exhibition and promoting Malaysian Landscape Identity. Sustainable development is about integrating economic, social and economic considerations, balancing short and long-term priorities. Hence, it is the shared responsibility of all to rationalise our action towards achieving a sustainable, harmonious and quality living environment for the survivals of mankind. In an attempt to safeguard and to further enhance the quality of the Malaysians environment, Ong said the Government has committed itself to maintaining 50 percent of the country under greenery (New Straits Time, 2000). In 2005, there are International Federation of Parks and Recreation Administration (IFPRA) 2005 Asia Pacific Congress at the Putra World Trade Centre. The conferences have brought forward many issues pertaining environment such as green infrastructure, urban life style, housing and universal design (The Sun 2005).

### 3.3. Green project and development of public parks

The green project and development of public parks have received each 40 articles (14%) of the landscape infrastructure development. The author believed that the development of green project and public park have significantly related to Malaysia Development Plan. The Economic Planning Unit is the principal government agency which is responsible for the preparation of development plans for the nation. There are series of Malaysian Plan since 1950 Draft Development Plan of Malaya until recently the 10th Malaysia Plan 2011-2015. This plan will also complement with the State Plan which will be focusing on social and economic growth including landscape infrastructure development. For example, the Government initiated a tree-planting campaign with allocation of RM200 million was set aside under the 8th Malaysia Plan (RMK-8). Under the campaign, each state is supposed to plant 750,000 trees annually but only a few states like the Federal Territory, Johor, Malacca and Pahang have achieved the target,” (The Star, 2004).

Furthermore, in 9th Malaysian Plan (RMK-9) local authorities such as Kuala Kangsar, Perak have received 51 million budget expenditures to enhance the local landscape especially for tourism activities. Under the Nine Malaysia Plan also “The Housing and local Government Ministry (KPKT) has announced that the government will built 12 more public parks nationwide such as in Sabah, Sarawak and Johore, costing a total of RM51 million and are expected to be ready by 2011” (New Straits Time, 2010). In 2007 KPKT have announced about RM250 million budget has been allocated to develop Large-Scale Public Park Taman Kiara which consist of 188.93ha and it also found to be one of the initiatives under the 10th Malaysia Plan (New Straits Time, 2010). The idea to have urban forest in the cities have encouraged other states to develop more green and public parks for example in 2009, Former Johor Minister, Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman have identified 272 ha of forest in Nusajaya, Skudai, Kulai, Senai and Pasir Gudang Johore, to be upgrade to be urban forest and public recreation area. They are also identified 120ha at Kota Iskandar to be developed as ‘Our Forest/Hutan Kita’ Utusan Malaysia 2009.

## 4. Conclusion

Year 2020 vision has initiated the great impact to Malaysian socially, economically, and environmentally. The National Plan of Malaysia has drafted and committed to achieve the status of Sustainable developing country by 2020. Meanwhile, the concept of Garden Nation has been identified as an important concept in landscape infrastructure development in Malaysia. From the study presented, there are four major activities and strategies were being identified such as Tree planting activities across the nation, uphold and promoting Malaysia landscape identity, Greening the Nation, Green project and Development of public parks.

Maruani and Cohen 2007 stated that there are varies of open space planning model that have been practice around the world including the theory of Garden City. The author believed that the concept of garden nation was inspired by the concept of ‘Garden Cities of Tomorrow’ by Ebenezer Howard. The garden city model has been evolved since 19 centuries and inspired in modern urban planning around the globe such as European, America and Asia (Maruani & Cohen, 2007, & Miller, 2002). Howard strongly believed that “ In building garden cities, town and country would be married, allowing for the integration of the social world into the surrounding environment by reorganizing social production and human interchanges with nature for long-term sustainability” (Clark, 2003). However, the author argued that in Malaysia this concept has fewer taken into consideration at structural scale such as at the states level, districts, cities and towns, neighbourhoods, rural and country sides. The transdisciplinary approach should be encouraged in Malaysia in the earlier stage of planning to cooperate build environment profession such planners, landscape architects, architects, land surveyors, engineers and others. This is to ensure that comprehensive planning could be implemented. Tree planting effort in the nation could be the biggest indicator for landscape activities in Malaysia. The issues such as carbon sequestration, thermal comfort, urban heat, air pollution could be reduced (Torabi, et. 2016). Thus, this will give great impact to the nation and provide a healthier urban environment for citizens in the future. Furthermore, Ramos, et. al (2016) highlight the importance of landscape identity that presents the richness of local culture and spirit of the places. The authors agreed that there are many potential improvements in the policy and design implementation. Furthermore, the government effort in greening the nation and cities such as through tree planting campaign, enhancing Malaysia landscape identity,

Greening the Nation, Green project and development of public park are considered as great achievements. With all commitment and participation from Malaysian it is greatly hope that the nation can achieve the aim to be 'Garden Nation' and Sustainable developing nation by 2020.

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