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Abstract

The spirit of KL - shaping city identity through Art and Culture.

A critical analysis of “Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur” and its potential contribution in branding Kuala Lumpur.

In this paper, the dynamics and driving factors of forming “city identity” will be reviewed and examined by applying theoretical frameworks of urban and cultural studies to Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur. A brief presentation of current research on city identity will show that besides infrastructure, media coverage and architectural landmarks, a vivid cultural sphere is an essential part in the internal and external perception and imagination of a city. As Kuala Lumpur is aiming in developing into a competitive global city, symbolising the general progress of Malaysia as a nation, efforts have been done in branding the city in economic and touristic terms. Reviewing these past attempts of shaping Kuala Lumpur’s identity, it will be argued that greater focus should be put on nurturing the cultural and artistic sphere in order to meet the various challenges the city itself, the nation in general and the world as a whole is facing. Furthermore, the cultural event “Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur” will be introduced, serving as an example for a newly establishing institution of Kuala Lumpur’s art scene. It will be questioned in how far this particular event bears the twofold potential of allowing firstly for a discourse among local creatives and citizens and secondly, of increasing the attention of the international Art world on Kuala Lumpur. Highlighting the local and international dynamics of Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur, it will be shown that it bears identity-establishing potential for the city of Kuala Lumpur and should develop accordingly. It will be concluded that artistic and cultural events of the like are to be supported by the economy and political actors as they are of economic, political and social need and benefit.