Impacts of river of life project towards the conservation of urban heritage quarter in Kuala Lumpur: a preliminary study

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Abstract. The River of Life (RoL) is one project of Malaysia's Economic Transformation Programmes. RoL is a multi-year attempt that integrates high-impact programmes to help Malaysia achieve a status of a developed nation. This study discussed the components of the waterfront development packages in the River of Life (RoL) project implementation. As explained by urban planning theory, the growth of a city is affected by multiple factors. The word “urban regeneration” originated to define the social, economic, and environmental components that influence a city's growth. This study intended to examine the socioeconomic impact of the RoL project in the Kuala Lumpur heritage quarter in terms of development. A qualitative method approach combining interviews and document reviews were used in this study. The study revealed the impacts of RoL project within the heritage quarter from the perspectives of the local authorities, private sector as well as stakeholders involved in the project. The study findings will help numerous stakeholders to provide better urban living for the Kuala Lumpur heritage quarter.

1. Introduction
Since the dawn of civilization, there has been a strong link between cities and water, with most cities being located on or near a water source of some form. For example, the cities Uruk, Eridu, and Ur originated in Mesopotamia as an early settlement around 6000 years ago (400 SM). In addition, from the Greeks the Mesopotamia comes from the word “meso” that mean in the middle and “potamos” that means river. It was in the fertile valleys of modern-day Iraq, Kuwait, Turkey and Syria, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. In past the waterfront areas were mostly used as locations for factories, manufacturing plants, warehouses, port facilities and railways and were typically greatly isolated from the urban structure surrounding them. Depending on the landscape and environmental settings of urbanity, the terminology waterfront applies to a wide variety of meanings [1].

The waterfront was economically oriented in general, but this role has changed over the years, affecting the growth of river cities. The city's Central Business District declined and separated from the waterfront when the river was no longer operating. In Kuala Lumpur, the Klang and Gombak River, lost its position as a port due to rapid urbanization, leading to its abandonment [2]. Therefore, a new role for the harbor front had to be sought and regeneration led to this new role, namely waterfronts, over the years. The waterfront consists of elements that are social, environment and economic which contribute to a more integrated community. This steered growth in the direction of the restoration of the waterfront to provide connectivity with city regeneration. In these instances, the waterfront played a major role in the progress of the city's reconstruction.
In line with the economic and physical growth, the role of Kuala Lumpur have also changed from a major city into the capital of Malaysia and to the Federal Territory, and subsequently as a conurbation area comparable to the world's other urban regions and economies. The rapid economic and physical growth in Kuala Lumpur is not only based on the strength of the economy but also driven by a systematic planning and development guidelines as stipulated. Tourism is a major economic contributor to Kuala Lumpur as it provides world-class infrastructure and services due to its status as a capital city and the range of tourist attractions it offers. Kuala Lumpur will continue to concentrate on sustainable tourism-aligned operations. The foundation of improving local culture and heritage values as well as the protection of nature will also be part of the tourism. The RoL project is one of the most recent tourist sites in need of refurbishment to improve the tourism sector. The establishment of Kuala Lumpur's green network is considered as an attempt to transform the city's reputation as a green city and to connect people to the environment.

As an attraction for the tourism industry, the heritage and historical aspects of Kuala Lumpur will also be extended. The city centre of Kuala Lumpur is rich with numerous attractions such as Merdeka Square where tourist can explore the culture and heritage through the heritage trail located within the heritage quarter while also enjoying its recreational aspects. For future generations, the tangible history such as historic structures need care and maintenance to keep it in its original position. These heritage buildings are situated alongside the Klang River and are the source of Kuala Lumpur. Jamek Mosque and Central Market located at the junction of the two rivers that are Klang and Gombak River, these are the historic buildings located within the heritage quarter. As the centre of modern artistic industry and an international civic district, areas around Jamek Mosque will be redeveloped. As a result, more city’s residents will participate in recreational activities and will adapt active lifestyles, celebrate diversity in arts and culture and the heritage in the city will be more vibrant. To improve the quality and reputation of the heritage quarter region without losing its architectural value and beauty, successful guidelines need to be adopted. In harmony, development and conservation can coexist. When human beings use the environment in such ways that ensure that they have opportunities for the future is called sustainable development.

The study, therefore, discusses the components of the waterfront development packages used in the River of Life (RoL) project implementation. As explained by urban planning theory, the growth of a city is affected by multiple factors. The term “urban regeneration” evolved to describe the social, economic, and environment components that effect the growth of a city particularly in the case of coastal cities, the development of the waterfront could affect the city's growth. With a view to the development, this study aims to assess the socio-economic impact of the RoL project in the Kuala Lumpur heritage quarter.

2. Literature Review

In the late twentieth century, under an accelerating globalization of markets and cultures, many cities have been fundamentally transformed. Adapting to changing economic realities and competing for a more significant role in the world economy, they have reinvented themselves to attract new flows of capital investment. During this period, the formal imagery of cities has become more central to urban development; the 'spectacle' of the city, with its enticing surfaces and urban iconography, has been viewed as a key to wealth [3]. This alteration of urban images has frequently centred on waterfront sites, where there are fantastic chances to reclaim underutilised shoreline land and develop new forms of public amenity.

2.1. Concept of Waterfront Development and Urban Regeneration

According to Breen and Rigby [4], waterfront construction does not necessarily need to immediately front water but simply needs to appear to be related to the water. The authors further considered a property with a dominating view of the water to be waterfront property. While urban regeneration is a process that focuses on all aspects of a community that contributes to the development of a more sustainable city and environment. Regeneration is concerned with the re-growth of lost economic
activity, the restoration of social function where there has been dysfunction or social inclusion where there has been exclusion, and the restoration of environmental quality or ecological balance where it has been lost [5].

Similarly, Paul [6] define waterfronts as any property that has a strong visible or physical connection to water, with the water itself being any form of water body of any size, such as a lake, ocean, river, or a stream. In China, for example, developers classified two types of shoreline construction. The first is a "borrowed" water view, which incorporates buildings into an existing water system while the second is a "manufactured" water view, which includes man-made lakes and any other water feature (Figure 1). In this perspective, a waterfront is seen as a significant resource that provides numerous chances to a city due to its location at the confluence of land and water.

![Figure 1. River of Life project gives new life to the inner city of Kuala Lumpur.](image)

2.2. Categories of Urban Regeneration
There are four types of urban regeneration that are urban development, urban rehabilitation, urban preservation, and urban revitalization [7]. Urban development is the initial category in an urban generation. The group's goal is to rehabilitate an existing property holistically by implementing physical improvements such as site clean-up and building deconstruction. The second category is urban rehabilitation. The group's goal is to rehabilitate an old, abandoned, and dilapidated site by focusing on improving the activity, landscape and infrastructure of the site and to increase the economic activity based on the Transit Oriented Development philosophy.

The third type is urban preservation. The group's goal is to protect a heritage property or structure. Preservation and conservation work is done on a place or building to improve its appeal while retaining its aesthetic value. The fourth and last category is urban revitalization. The group's goal is to revitalize a property in an integrated and comprehensive manner by carrying out upgrading and maintenance work on the structure, which will result in a rise in economic worth and attractiveness.

2.3. Components of River of Life Project
This RoL project is organised into three primary components: River Cleaning, River Beautification as well as Commercialization and Tourism. The initial component of this initiative is River Cleaning, which is being directed by Department of Irrigation & Drainage Malaysia (DID). DID's responsibilities now include River Basin Management and Coastal Zone Management, Water Resources Management and Hydrology, Special Projects, Flood Management, and Eco-friendly
Drainage. The goal of this component is to clean and improve the water quality along the 110 kilometres of the Klang and Gombak Rivers from Class III - V (not appropriate for body contact) to Class IIb (acceptable for body contact and recreational use) by 2020. This taskforce formed of 26 federal entities from four ministries is led by DID.

The second component is River Beautification, which is led by DBKL. Today, DBKL's goal is to ensure and accelerate implementation of this component to achieve the status of developing country and great world-class city. The goal of this component is to beautify a 10.7-kilometer stretch of the Klang and Gombak River corridors. Commercialization and tourism, headed by Ministry of Federal Territories (KWP), is the final component of the RoL project. KWP’s current responsibilities include planning, managing, implementing, and monitoring the development of Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, and Labuan. The component goal is to optimise the Klang and Gombak Riverfronts' social and economic potential.

3. Materials and Methods
This section describes all the necessary information required to obtain the results of the study. For data collection a qualitative approach was applied, comprising structured and semi-structured interviews as well as a review of relevant documents. The research was based on the three steps as outlined in the research design below.

3.1. Research Design
First, the research problem was identified, which serves as the impetus for the researcher to carry out the investigation. The concerns and problems in the site focusing on the RoL project located in Kuala Lumpur's heritage area were highlighted as the study's formation and objectives. Structured and semi-structured interviews were undertaken with diverse stakeholders to supplement the study's data collection. Second, the documents from various sources such as media statements, reports, master and land use plans, and marketing strategies, were examined. As a secondary data source, some essential references were also available via online searches on the organization's official website.

3.2. Data Collection
The researcher contacted three individuals to gather the information needed for this study, two individuals from Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) and one from AECOM Malaysia Berhad (AECOM). All the respondents played an essential part in the RoL project's planning and development. Furthermore, documents from other sources, such as media statements, reports, master and land use plans, and marketing strategies have been analysed.

3.3. Data Analysis
The data acquired from interviews with stakeholders involved in the RoL, specifically inside the heritage quarter were analysed using the thematic analysis method. This analysis focused on a certain theme to learn more in-depth and proving something connected to a specific study.

4. Results and Discussions
This section presents the preliminary research output and data analysis produced from the study’s interviews and document analysis. The findings are summarized below.

4.1. Heritage Quarter More Vibrant and Attractive
Many parties have had a major impact because of the initiative. The shop owners in the project's surrounding region, including the heritage quarter have witnessed a beneficial influence because of the project. Connectivity, a vital measure of the built environment's link to the river makes the city appealing and liveable to a diverse population [8]. Since the project began there has been an increase in the activities in the area, which has resulted in greater sales for the shop owners.
According to AECOM, “When the River of Life (ROL) project has been started, the area that is once considered ugly is turning upside-down, the area near the river will be transformed into a place where there will be more interaction and public activity. It will be increase in the area. This act of river regeneration will help the city in a long-term period.” The RoL project's goal is to revitalise a neighbourhood that was previously abandoned and was deemed unappealing due to its filth and stench. This was because the location does not receive any maintenance work. DBKL hardly do any maintenance work to the area because there was no need to beautify the area.

Besides a worshipping place near the river has benefited from the project because of the increased number of visitors in the river; more and more visitors particularly tourists come to the worshipping place such as Masjid Jamek to experience the culture and to learn about the religions. Apart from that, tourists that come to the area have benefited because the services that have been developed and built have made their everyday lives easier. By expanding the region, visitors will be able to go more freely and comfortably from one location to another.

4.2. Provide Good Public Transport and Full Utilise Spaces

The Klang River waterfront revitalization in Kuala Lumpur is a model of a successful intervention involving both physical and economic integration of the waterfront with the heritage quarter. The fundamental aspects of this achievement may be found in the development plan's framework, which improves heritage quarter accessibility with a public space system [9]. Tourism has risen and with further work the pedestrian connectivity will spur growth and development in the area.

According to the DBKL, the RoL project will not only focus on the river's rehabilitation but also on the surrounding area, which includes the heritage quarter. Urban regeneration is crucial to the success of the RoL project; if the surrounding area activities enhanced, the value of the region will increase. “One of the ways in increasing the number of people in the area is by improving the public transportation services in the city; we are currently working on a plan to greatly improve the transportation services.” This reduces congestion by limiting the number of vehicles that can enter a certain region.

With the completion of the RoL project in the historic district, a continuous 10.7 km network of walkways and cycling paths will be established, improving pedestrian connectivity and river beautification in the historic area. Buildings at heritage sites will be preserved as important nodes of the heritage route, where the buildings will serve as the information centres, galleries and cafes. This heritage trail has the potential to become a tourism destination and information billboards will be supplied as guides to visitors visiting Kuala Lumpur's heritage monuments.

4.3. Increasing Active and Creative Use of Urban Space

Tourism is commonly considered as an ethical and sustainable form of tourism. Heritage tours are also important aspects of mass tourism, which has taken a toll on living and architectural culture for millennia. According to the views of sustainability tourism, resources must be protected but tourists must also be allowed to enjoy them [10]. Thus, a delicate balance between use and conservation needs to be developed.

The areas surrounding Kuala Lumpur's, Sultan Abdul Samad and Jamek Mosque will be renovated as the hub of a new creative sector and an international civic centre. This will be accomplished through techniques such as rebranding the city to improve the creative and cultural ecosystems, spatial activation and partnership with creative and cultural enterprises. DBKL pointed out that the team also focuses on getting the interest of outside investors by developing the area such as renovating the surrounding area to make it more visually appealing, planning strategic housing strategies and constructing more shops to bring more activities to the area, which will eventually attract more investors [11].

The existing environment will be upgraded as well by protecting existing heritage shop houses, lighting civic buildings at night, improving public areas and signage systems. These activities will bring more individuals to the area to live. The heritage shop houses' original architecture should be
preserved and conserved. The buildings are urged to be repurposed for tourist and entrepreneur-friendly activities. The programme provides opportunities for young and creative artists and professionals to express themselves.

5. Conclusion
The River of Life project has a substantial influence in terms of increased economic activities in the surrounding communities, particularly in retail outlets and companies. It has created a desirable site with quality streetscape components that are both lasting and aesthetically beautiful by renewing the neighbourhood. It has also increased pedestrian circulation by opening shaded streets for pedestrian usage. Furthermore, an emphasis on water-sensitive urban design in the streetscape and landscape aids in environmental restoration and flood mitigation through enhanced localised drainage. The project displays further conservation efforts while engaging a previously underutilised location.

Based on the study's findings, waterfront redevelopment and planning should be carried out under the frameworks and indicators of smart development that have been described globally. This is done to ensure that intellectual development takes place. This study focuses solely on the scope of early urban planning and development. It is predicted that the scope of the study will be expanded to include aspects of urban consumer acceptance as well as the roles of the parties engaged in the successful development of this waterfront.

Malaysia having a long coastal area, rich climate and a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, is a great opportunity for waterfront growth as a strategy to increase foreign investment in commercial and recreational projects. These investments will allow Malaysia to increase its capacity to attract more tourists and provide local people with new job opportunities. Development must however respect environmental concerns and local architecture and culture be able to represent Malaysia's reputation sustainably and compete with other countries.

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