

## The Emerging Kuala Lumpur Extended Mega Urban Region (KLEMUR): Implications on Urban Prosperity in Malaysia

Kemunculan Wilayah Perbandaran Mega Diperluas Kuala Lumpur (KLEMUR): Implikasi Terhadap Kemakmuran Bandar di Malaysia

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### ABSTRACT

*About half century ago urban scholars in Malaysia described urban areas and towns in the country as ‘sleepy hollows’, functioning more as extractors of riches than creating wealth for the people and the economic growth of the Malay states. Today the Malaysian nation-state is having vibrant towns and cities promoting growth and modernity, and it begins to grapple with issues related to the rise of large urban regions. The largest is the urban region centering on the Kuala Lumpur city which in the last four decades has witnessed urbanized edges extending outwards in all directions. The relative weights of the region’s importance in the Malaysian urban landscape can be substantiated through a range of indicators including land use changes over time, social, economic, infrastructural and quality of life. The Kuala Lumpur mega urban region with extended urbanized areas on all sides of its border is the outcome of overlapping drivers that coalesce in time, beginning with the world integration of trade on spices in the 16th century, then the integration through colonial investments, trade, colonial intervention and administration, the present integration of the space-time through the globalization process leveraged on by the Malaysian nation-state for accelerating the socio-economic development of the people framed within the developmental state paradigm. Malaysian cities become a window of the rising prosperity. The fact that the KLEMUR is compressed in time and space, there are challenges which the article will discuss.*

*Keywords: Urban transformation; urban livability; urban prosperity; extended mega urban region; Kuala Lumpur; Malaysia*

### ABSTRAK

*Kira-kira setengah abad yang lalu penyelidik di Malaysia menyifatkan bandar dan pekan di negara ini sebagai “kota lowongan” yang lebih berfungsi sebagai penyedut kekayaan berbanding dengan mencipta kekayaan untuk penduduk dan pertumbuhan ekonomi di negeri-negeri Melayu. Hari ini Malaysia memiliki bandar dan pekan yang rancak mempromosi pertumbuhan dan kemodenan, dan mula bergelut dengan isu yang berkaitan dengan peningkatan wilayah perbandaran luas itu. Wilayah perbandaran yang terbesar adalah Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur yang empat dekad lampau menyaksikan perluasan sempadan bandarnya menghala keluar dalam semua arah. Kekuatan relatif kepentingan wilayah dalam landskap perbandaran Malaysia boleh dibuktikan melalui rangkaian penunjuk termasuklah perubahan guna tanah mengikut masa, sosial, ekonomi, infrastruktur dan kualiti hidup. Wilayah perbandaran mega Kuala Lumpur dengan perluasan kawasan perbandaran dari semua sudut sempadannya adalah hasil daripada pemacu yang bertindanlapis yang digabungkan dalam satu masa, bermula dengan integrasi perdagangan rempah ratus dunia pada abad ke-16, diikuti dengan integrasi melalui pelaburan kolonial, perdagangan, campur tangan penjajah dan pentadbiran, terkini integrasi menerusi ruang-masa melalui proses globalisasi untuk memacu pembangunan sosioekonomi penduduk dalam kerangka dan paradigma negara pembangunan. Bandar-bandar di Malaysia menjadi jendela peningkatan kemakmuran. Hakikat bahawa KLEMUR yang dimampatkan dalam ruang-masa, terdapat cabaran yang dibincangkan di dalam artikel ini.*

*Kata kunci: Transformasi bandar; bandar berdayahuni; kemakmuran bandar; kawasan bandar mega; Kuala Lumpur; Malaysia*

### INTRODUCTION

This paper is to trace the emergence of the Kuala Lumpur Extended Mega Urban Region (KLEMUR) amidst the growing number of large urban agglomerations in Malaysia today.

Only as far back as the 1960s observers of urbanization and urban Malaysia described the urban centers in the country as mere ‘sleepy hollows’ with administrative functions but offering hopes for jobs in the modern market for rural people. Persistent in-migration of rural workers to the urban

areas contributed to excess of urban population in relation to the ability of the somewhat limited urban infrastructures, modern shelters and amenities and jobs, producing a condition of over-urbanization (McGee 1971 & Hamzah Sendut 1962a). Today these sleepy hollows of yesteryears have grown to become 'productive cities' (Gottman 1957), to show case Malaysia's attempt at embracing modernity. Urban regions consisting of urban centres from which urban land use spreads out far beyond the boundaries of the original urban centres have become visible on the Malaysian space economy. Indeed mega urban areas have emerged on the Malaysian urban landscape. The most dominant among these mega urban regions leveraged on the Greater Kuala Lumpur.

At present the KLEMUR leads the rest of mega urban areas and agglomerations in Malaysia as a centre of wealth creation through its export industries, educational hub, leading financial services, and infrastructural development among others. Indeed, the KLEMUR leads in the dimensions of the framework proposed for City Prosperity Index- Integrating productivity, infrastructure quality of life, equity, social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

#### URBAN GROWTH AND EXPANSION, AND THE EMERGING KLEMUR IN MALAYSIA

We shall begin by highlighting the founding, growth and spread of urban areas in Malaysia, to be followed by the rise of the KLEMUR. Overlapping drivers are responsible for the nature, growth and development of towns and cities and lately shaping the rise of the Kuala Lumpur Extended Mega-Urban Region. Spread over six centuries these drivers have contributed to the increasing visibility of urban growth and development in the country. Set within an historical framework, from the period of European engagement around the 16<sup>th</sup> century amidst the spices trading globalization, continuing into the western colonial intrusion and administration to post independent era, and then the world integration through the current globalization process.

In the pre European era traditional exchange markets must have been frequented by the local people (Gullick 1951). These weekly markets did not evolve into permanent urban centres as we know them today as there were no economic, social and consumption structure to support townships.

In the heyday of the spices trade however, the port town of Melaka grew into an important entrepot port on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia at the time. The global integration then did not however lead to the founding of a system of towns although as a command and control trading centre of spices in the area then it was a global port. Its fortune suffered subsequently after the successive invasions by first the Portuguese, in 1511, and by the Dutch in 1642 (Abdul Rahman Embong 2006).

Economic and political integration under the British East India Company at first and later on by the British colonial administration was possible, backed by a new found globally needed resource by industries in Britain, a mineral named tin. Tin deposits in river basins on the west coast of the Peninsula brought in British intervention into the interior Malay states in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. More importantly, the British intervention saw the founding of townships, mainly as administrative centres, to command and to control the Malay States- in the Peninsula, offering wholesaling and retailing for the workers and the villagers.

These towns increased in number with the establishments of rubber estates on foothills away from the tin mining in river basins. Rubber dealers in these towns added to the diversity of town functions of providing retailing, wholesaling and administrative functions. Later on these townships were connected by good roads and railway lines covering the whole Peninsula such that by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century a national system of towns had evolved in the Malayan space economy (Lim Heng Kow 1978).

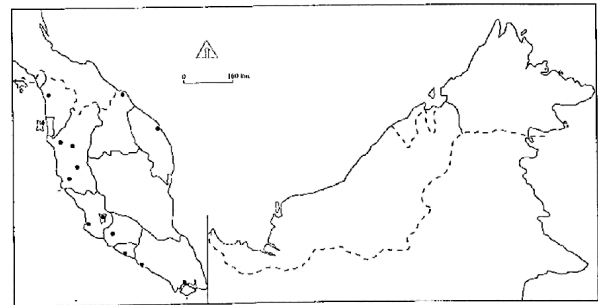
Independence from the British colonial control for the Federation of Malaya was in 1957, and the Federation was expanded when Sarawak, used to be ruled by the white Rajah-the Brook family, Sabah, under the North Borneo company and Singapore which left in 1964 while the oil rich Brunei deciding to opt out at the last minute, joined in an enlarged Federation of Malaysia in 1963. In both Sarawak and Sabah townships were already vibrant, serving their respective districts but at best then they were, like the towns in the Peninsula, mere sleepy hollows, known strongly for their administrative command for stability and security and safety in addition to act as local trading centres.

In 1970 the New Economic Policy with two related prongs was adopted by the country, aiming to eradicate poverty and to restructure the society such that no one race is identified with a particular

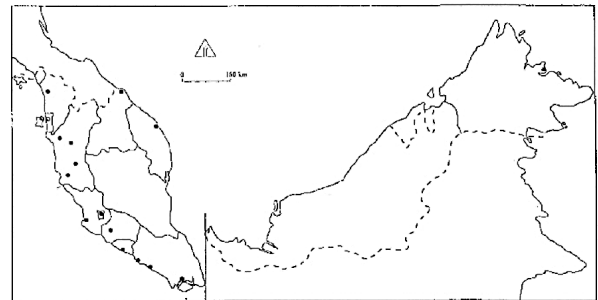
dominant economic activity (British Malaya 1930). This policy provided the framework in which the globalization of Malaysian development took roots and functioned. The immediate effect of the policy is seen in the rigorous urbanization strategy of pursuing to develop the country further. The active nation-state involvement in pushing the country's development has been summarized as the developmental state paradigm (Jomo Kwame Sundaram & Wee Chong Hui 2014), relegating the private sector to a secondary role at times and playing leading role at other times. Figures 1 provides a summary to the growth, development and distribution of these urban centres over those years. By 2010, the national Population Census reported that about 72 percent of the Malaysian people were already urban dwellers, with some states such as Selangor and Penang reaching almost entirely urban. If the authority defined 'urban' is relaxed to include the modern commercial agricultural areas, the rubber estates and the FELDA schemes and the urbanized urban-rural areas more Malaysian can be categorized as urban.

In the last two decades, continuous urbanized areas have spread out from major centers merging with smaller towns and new ones forming agglomerations that can be labeled as urban regions. The largest urban region is about the subject of this discussion, the KLEMUR.

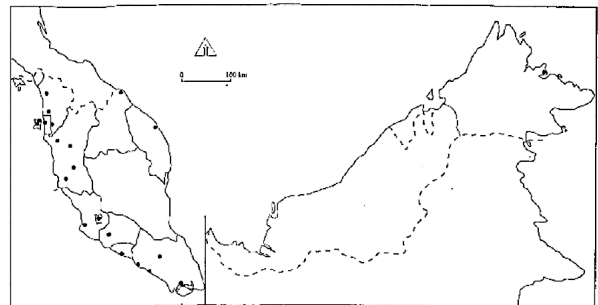
There is a need to look at this particular mega urban region with an extended areal urban inclusivity in history, functions and importance (McGee and Robinson 1995; McGee 2009). It has the built-up complexity and the social dynamics befitting its dominant role in the country. Moreover, the KLEMUR has become the centre of prosperity to which Malaysians and nowadays migrant workers from the surrounding countries move.



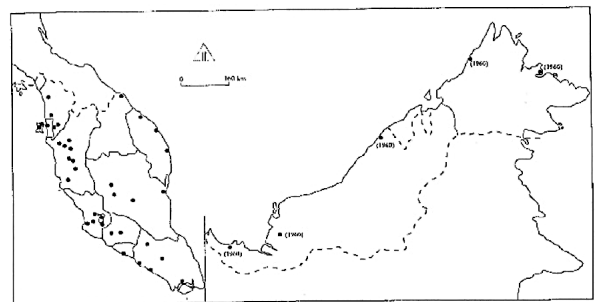
Urban Center 1921



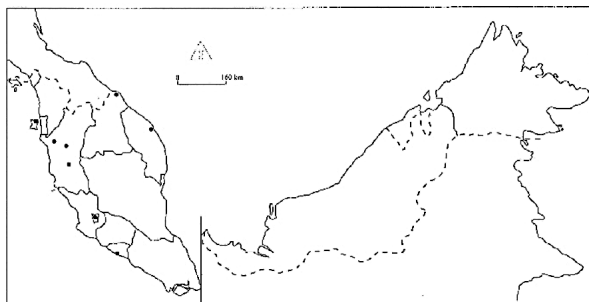
Urban Center 1931



Urban Center 1947



Urban Center 1957



Urban Center 1911

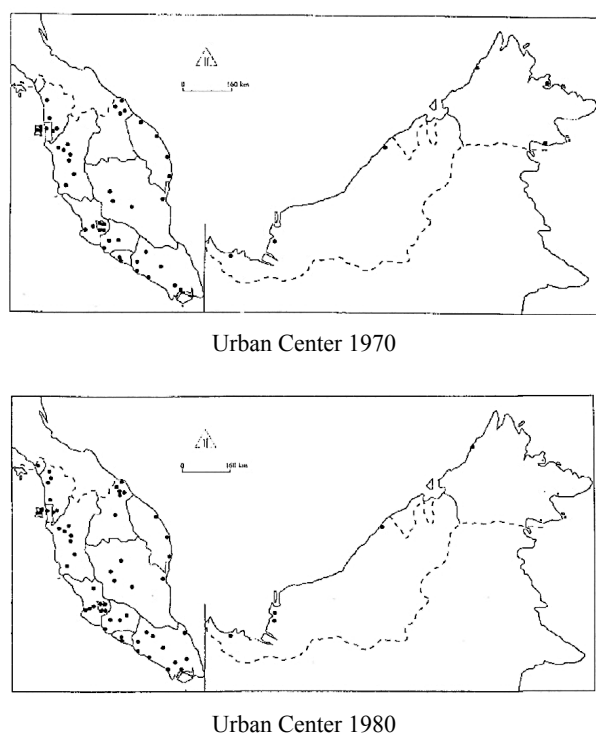


FIGURE 1. Development and Distribution of Urban Center in Malaysia

### THE KLEMUR IN FOCUS

The largest urban region as stated earlier in Malaysia is the KLEMUR. It stretches from the central mountain spine to the west coast, expanding all round to emerge as a potential mega urban region in the 1980's, covering the area from the Bernam river basin in south Perak to the Linggi river basin in Negeri Sembilan bounding an area of about 200 kilometers, north – south, and about 40 kilometers east-west, from the mountain spine to the Straits of Melaka with an estimated population today around 9 million people. The Bernam-Linggi embraces the combined drivers to propel the region into a prominent mega-urban region in Malaysia in coming years. Kuala Lumpur maintains its position as the national growth center commanding the dominant Klang valley conurbation. More development drivers entered the conurbation beyond the 1980s that bolstered spatial expansion of urban areas from the existing centers to the north and south following more people coming to make their homes in the area.

Historically, the seed to the growing prominence of the Bernam-Linggi mega urban region in the Malaysian urban landscape could be traced back to the rise of tin producing activities in the Lukut-

Sungai Ujung area in the Linggi river basin and later on in the Kanching area in the hinterland area of Selangor and also in the Klang valley around Ampang on a larger commercial scale in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Khoo Kay Kim 1972). Khoo Kay Kim stated also that from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century rubber growing in the areas after the failure of tapioca and coffee ventures became another economic driver to the growth of the urban areas. Khoo Kay Kim observed too that mercantile capitals from the established port town communities of Melaka, Penang and Singapore invested in these commercial activities that led to the founding and growing of those towns.

It should be pointed out also that the Bernam-Linggi region shares another common ground shown in its political system in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Again referring to Khoo Kay Kim (1972) the Sultan of Selangor had jurisdiction over the present Selangor and also the Lukut area stretching to the right bank of the Linggi river basin for most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The urbanization and urban spread in the KLEMUR via the evolution of land use change as shown in Figure 2 earlier. Gradually for several decades the urbanized areas in the KLEMUR became more dominant and spreading out in all directions in the last three decades. The Greater Kuala Lumpur is the focus of the spread. Along inter-city older federal highways and the new multi-lanes tolled highways urbanized land uses have sprawled. These urbanized extensions are mainly designed for residential areas, away from the town and city centres at first but soon to be followed by local commercial sub-centres, through infilling the spaces allocated for them to serve the needs of the neighbourhood. The townships founded during the British colonial administration have also over the decades accommodated for additional and new industrial areas and commercial functions. Supporting service functions have slowly moved in (Abdul Samad Hadi et al 2011).

Another influencing factor for the low density in the outer Greater Kuala Lumpur area is the availability of all weather roads connecting the kampongs, small towns, regional towns, state capital and of course Kuala Lumpur, about five decades ago. Private bus companies provided convenient public means of movement, the Len Bus Company connecting Tanjong Malim-Kuala Lumpur nearly hourly, another one linking Bentong with Kuala Lumpur (the Bentong Omnibus Company) also hourly and the Foh Hup Company providing almost

half-an hourly service from and to Kuala Lumpur to Seremban, the main town in the Linggi river basin. Some people could afford to remain far from the larger centre of opportunities in Kuala Lumpur then by staying in their small towns and Kampongs on the routes. Movements of people from Tanjong Malim or Seremban to Kuala Lumpur have become more fluid and convenient with the commuter trains since 1990s. Nowadays, commuter services are at 15 minutes interval at peak time, 5.30 to 8 o'clock in the morning and after work in the evening from 5 o'clock to about 8 p.m. from Seremban to Kuala Lumpur and hourly from and to Tanjong Malim. With the Negeri Sembilan promoting the policy of worker staying in Seremban 2-the new housing neighbourhood and work in Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya has helped to increase the concentration of people in Seremban rather than the intermediate areas to Kuala Lumpur.

The second weight of importance of the KLEMUR will clarify the urbanized nature of socio-economic activities among the kampong people in the region. Straddled between urban areas, kampong people is slowly finding themselves being engulfed by urban based activities to which they circulate daily or they still retain their rural agricultural works. But the nature of agriculture that they get involved in is more commercial.

In terms of social infrastructures, education, industrial concentration and others, the KLEMUR leads the rest of the urban region in importance in the peninsula and in the country. In this leading position the region can be projected to sustain its importance in decades to come. The sustaining drivers will be the fact that the region houses the national capital at Putrajaya, the largest port at Port Klang and the main industrial areas of the country, and the largest international airport, KLIA in Sepang. Foreign embassies and heads of some large corporations are firmly established in the region. Not least, foreign visitors, shoppers and tourists in the main will use the region as the entry door to the country.

Moreover, the KLEMUR has attracted about 45 percent of the total people in the Peninsula, and about 34 percent of the total Malaysian population. Such a large convergence of people can be related to the available opportunities in the forms of industries, services and retailing. The concentration of public and private universities and hospital further enhance the importance of the region. The KLEMUR is also having two out the three oldest universities, established from 1959 to 1970; Three out of four teaching (University) hospitals, and so on. All of these measures are to lend

support to the KLEMUR. Indeed, the KLEMUR is ahead on the dimensions of the city prosperity, stated at the beginning of the paper.

### CHALLENGES OF THE KUALA LUMPUR EXTENDED MEGA URBAN REGION

The Kuala Lumpur Extended Mega Urban Region is forced by local and global events to grow and commensurate with its position as capital of a fast developing country in a relatively short time. The KLEMUR has to face up to numerous challenges, accumulating partly from the time-space squeeze from the time of founding, growing, expanding capital city and partly by the robust expanding urban complexes in response to the globalization of finance and industries in Malaysia and all over East Asia in the last twenty years.

The challenges may be represented in a diagram as in Figure 2 from which the Malaysian nation-state and the KLEMUR act as the stand holding the 10 dimensions of challenges; two associated with the environment, two with social sustainability, two with economic sustainability, two spatial with governing requirement and institutional need as the core.

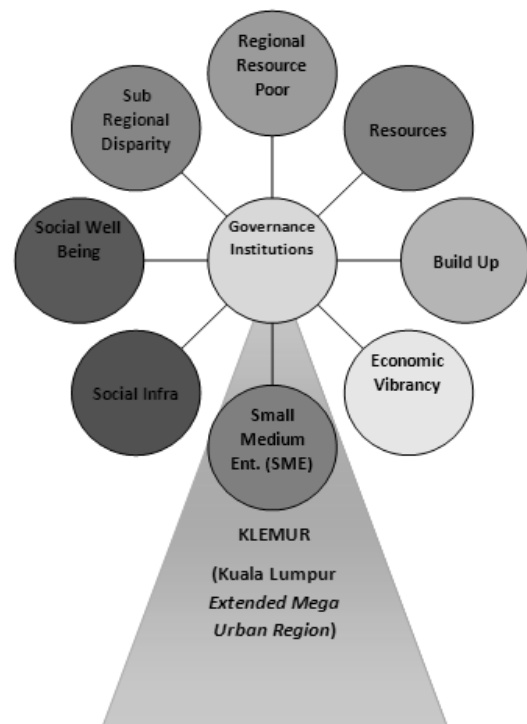


FIGURE 2. Petals of Challenges

With respect to the environmental dimension the KLEMUR has to pay attention to both the natural resources and the built environment. Both are intertwined. Expanding urban areas means more lands will be converted for housing, infrastructures, more minerals especially sands will be extracted for continuing building construction. More water supply and energy have to be made available to meet the increasing domestic, commercial and industrial consumption. In the built up environment more needs to be done to control the carbon foot prints through more greening landscape, green buildings, green infrastructures and carbon emission control including wastes from food base to chemical. As the country progresses economically and socially the invisible chemical dangers is everywhere threatening the health of the people and the ecosystems.

Moving next to the economic sustainability dimension, one dimension is to promote sustainability in economic vibrancy to meet the increase in demands for work among the youth. The second dimension in the economic sustainability should pay attention also to the small and medium production industries, including those small scale agricultural producers in the urban region outside the built up area, that currently involve a growing number of entrepreneurs; Their role is important in increasing the vibrancy of the industry and also in helping to increase the range of export products from Malaysia, and consequently providing more jobs.

What are challenges in the two social dimensions? One direction centres on the social infrastructures and the other on the inter-ethnic relations and the nagging issue of inclusivity that has troubled Malaysia in its quest for a truly multi-ethnic society living in harmony. With respect to the social infrastructures, there is a need for sufficient affordable housings, efficient services in health care which is getting expensive, access to education from the kindergarten to the institutions of higher learning, training institutes and centres to give a second chance to the school drop outs, and recreation and sports centres. On the challenges of the inter-ethnic issue, it is more difficult to handle because it leverages on many sensitivities related to religions, cultural norms, and habits. The concept of social inclusivity is useful and it has to be implemented with care. But to date the Malaysians have not gone on killing spree on streets and in open spaces. However, at issue is that all Malaysians need to embrace the culture of living in harmony to forge the country ahead in the global spaces.

Spatially in the KLEMUR and the country, there are still problems with sub-regional inequality. The industrial sub-regions perhaps, are able to showcase the accumulated wealth compared to other sub-regions. More opportunities are needed for the poorer sub-regions to enable the folks there realize their potentials in life. Closely related to the issue of regional inequality is the problem with resource scarce sub-regions. Such sub-regions need to be pushed out by specific programs.

At the core of the KLEMUR challenges are the governance with the relevant and right institutions to work for overall sustainability. What sort of governance should be in place in the KLEMUR? As it is the urban spread in all directions has put into question the overlapping responsible agencies in administering the whole urbanized stretch from the Bernam to the Linggi river basin. Can the existing governing structures cope with the urbanization process? Along with that question is the issue related to the kind of institutions that should be put in place to realize the sustainability of the KLEMUR.

Beyond the ten dimensions, there is a need to look to the future in the KLEMUR. First, it is about producing the quality of life commensurate with the region's leading position in the Malaysian urban landscape. This falls within the broader concept of city liveability; Second, it concerns with a search for a new way to come to grip with complex situations in the region, involving social and environmental interactions at the local level-the individuals, families and communities' in every day decision makings that have produced the temporal and spatial growth patterns within the mega urban region in the past. The attempt to understand the processes, physical and social, falls under the study of city complexity (Allen 1996; Batty 2005).

Looking into city liveability, a recurrent issue about city growth and development in the KLEMUR revolves around its sustainability in the context of sustainable development (WCED 1987). The framework has been contested widely but it still stands without rival and therefore remains useful (Gottman 1957). The sustainable development concept is somewhat less clear when applied to city sustainability especially with regard to complexity issues. A window to city sustainability is best captured through the concept of city liveability, about shaping the city people's quality of life, about the daily lives of city people, about their decision making, that all contribute to the people's daily life in the KLEMUR. We have articulated the concept

of city liveability for Malaysia elsewhere (Abdul Samad Hadi et al. 2007; 2009). The concept captures the essence of city economic vibrancy such that the city people can command jobs readily. The city is healthy, socially attractive to live in, safe, green with an enabling framework for an ethical living which is necessary in a world often gripped by extreme social, political, economic, and weather variability's. The city has essentially a collection of possibilities that can facilitate the progress towards realizing everyone's potential in the city life. This view goes beyond the activities prescribed by the agenda 21 of the sustainable development framework. The three pillars of the sustainable development framework are embedded in the liveability, the city quality of life. In short the KLEMUR should in the end embrace the liveability for the good of all dwellers since it embraces humanizing elements of urban life. Above all, the environmental problems and issues referred to earlier have to be solved in order for the liveability to emerge, finally the prosperity in the city reaches the KLEMUR people from all strata.

#### COMPLEXITY: URBAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

City liveability can be linked directly also to the issues of city complexity. Not only that the physical structure of the city is complex the city population offers more complexities. The daily demands for goods and services, and people's daily movements have structured within cities hierarchy of services. There is a need for a more efficient connecting service between neighbourhoods within cities, and between cities and towns.

Another issue related to city complexity is associated with the myriad decisions made by the people in the KLEMUR to live in their chosen neighbourhoods. We view that the people's behavioural responses to the urban condition and their subsequent decisions to stay influence the manner and patterns of city growth in the KLEMUR. It is widely held that city complexity is in parts path dependent, suggesting that past behaviour patterns tend to influence future direction. An understanding of the process shaping the subsequent urban growth patterns is important. The growth process from the city center to the periphery may not be necessarily linear. It may assume other patterns. Such scientific knowledge is crucial to our search for an understanding of the dynamic social processes

in urban growth and thus urban planning for orderly outcomes for a liveable KLEMUR.

Touching on the problem of managing the KLEMUR, beyond planning for the liveable mega urban region, there is a need to manage and govern the region. The main issue is who is to do what, and whether should there be sharing of responsibility in making decisions about many things in the mega urban region. There are options: one, to go on managing it as it is practiced at all levels of administration, or two, to develop partnership between the public, private and the mega urban region n citizen. Another option is to develop an entirely new governing structure with shared responsibilities among the whole hierarchy of institutions, stake holders and the government (Pierre 1999). While researching the Seremban urban area we argued for an entrepreneurship approach to managing the city (Abdul Samad Hadi et al. 2009).

If the entrepreneurial approach is cast in a more open multi-level partnerships with shared common core values for a liveable extended mega urban region ordered by a more ethical consideration of sharing the wealth, the KLEMUR may grow for all people in the area-the native city people, transients and visitors; The social dynamics can then be channelled to realize the promise of city liveability, showcasing urban citizen living amidst high quality of life.

#### WORKING TOWARDS SOLUTIONS

Through the viewing window of the KLEMUR we hope to showcase Malaysians going out in their everyday life immersed in the culture of sustainability. Across the social strata and spatial domains individual Malaysian will act in the interest of the commons to propel a sustainable life in a world full of contestations from the people. There is a need for behavior change to accommodate considerations for other people. Malaysia now is putting forth to the world communities the concept of 'wasatiyyah'-interpreted as an ideology of 'moderation', taking the middle path always, neither extremist nor one for oneself. The ideology of moderation fits rather well with the concept of mega urban region livability in which the emphasis is on creating a mega urban region with a quality of life that emanates from the essence of sustainable development.

City wellbeing should be connected with the wellbeing of their everyday life-about their neighborhood, their families and individual activities. All can be pursuit in an safe environment- safety for individual, family, house, neighborhood, accessible to work place, to schools, to health care centres, to green areas, to sport and to spaces for social interaction and networking. Ease to spatial and social mobility should also be a priority. In the end, what the city people requires is a happy atmosphere to bring up their children, free from the grip of fear.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Malaysia is now not only having urban agglomerations but also a KLEMUR centering on the Kuala Lumpur Metropolitan Area, albeit somewhat insignificant in terms of population concentration when compared with, for example, the greater Jakarta into which the entire Malaysian population numbers can fit into. Overlapping drivers for over four centuries support the formation of the area as a huge urbanization areal unit in our spatial imagination.

In relative terms the KLEMUR has become the most vibrant and most important urbanized area in the country. It will continue to attract people of all shades and origins, including foreign workers-legal and illegal. Above all the country has come face to face with layers of problems which are essentially urban in nature. These problems range from aspects of the environment, resources, social, economic, political, physical infra-structural and humanistic consideration. The KLEMUR holds a microcosm of all these layers of problems that has to be fine-tuned to the need of Malaysia.

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