



THE SUBURBANISATION OF THE KUALA LUMPUR METROPOLITAN REGION

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Abstract

The Klang Valley has been experiencing rapid urbanisation especially during the past two decades. The area has expanded to become a larger entity known as the Kuala Lumpur Metropolitan Region (KLMR). But this development comes at the expense of Kuala Lumpur. The city had consistently recorded net-out migration during the period. This development has consequences on the urban fabric of the city and can lead to the problem of urban sprawl and a host of problems, especially those relating to the environment.

Key words: Industrialisation, Urbanisation, Suburbanisation, Urban Sprawl, Privatization, Urban Planning.

INDUSTRIALISATION AND URBANISATION IN MALAYSIA

In 1992, Malaysia officially became an urban nation when more than 50 percent of her population resided in urban areas. This trend has continued and by the year 2000, the urbanisation rate of Malaysia had reached 61.8 percent (8th Malaysia Plan, 2000). It was estimated that by the year 2002 more than 75 percent of her population would be urbanites.

This is in contrast to much of the history of the nation where the country was rural in nature relying on agricultural commodities such as palm oil and rubber for exports. The urbanisation trend follows closely the economic strategies of Malaysia where manufacturing was actively promoted especially since the 1980s. It was a strategic switch from import-substitution to export-oriented industrialisation (Jomo, 1990). In 1980, Manufacturing constituted only 15.7 percent of total employment in the country. By the year 2000, it made up the largest percentage of employment at 47.6 percent. During the same period, the percentage of the people employed in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing dropped drastically from 40 percent to a mere 15.2 percent. In 1987, Manufacturing, for the first time in history, replaced Agriculture as the main

contributor of the Gross Domestic Products (GDP). These changes are illustrated in Table 1.

Sector	1957	1965	1970	1980	1995	2000
Agriculture Forestry & Fishing	1245 (58.5%)	1,350 (52.1)	1,915 (47.6)	1,911 (39.7%)	1,493 (18.7%)	1,408 (15.2%)
Mining & Quarrying	59 (2.8%)	66 (2.5%)	88 (2.2%)	80 (1.7%)	40 (0.5%)	41.2 (0.4%)
Manufacturing	136 (6.4%)	217 (8.4%)	448 (11.1)	755 (15.7%)	2,028 (23.3%)	2,558 (47.6%)
Construction	68 (3.2%)	90 (3.5%)	160 (4.0)	188 (4.4%)	717 (9.0%)	755 (8.1%)
Electricity, Gas & Water	12 (0.5%)	16 (0.6%)	24 (0.6%)	270 (5.6%)	67 (0.8%)	75 (0.8%)
Transport, Storage & Communication	75 (3.5%)	101 (3.9%)	181 (4.5%)	31 (0.6%)	395 (4.9%)	462 (5.0%)
Wholesale & Retail Trade, Hotel & Restaurant	195 (9.2%)	287 (11.1%)	482 (12.0%)	210 (4.3%)	1,324 (16.5%)	1,584 (17.1%)
Finance, Insura- nce & Real Est.			39 (1.0%)	78 (1.6%)	373 (4.7%)	509 (5.5%)
Government	320 (15.7%)	463 (17.9%)	520 (12.9%)	658 (13.7%)	886 (11.1%)	981 (10.6%)
Other Services			163 (4.1%)	147 (3.1%)	677 (8.5%)	899 (9.7%)
Total Employed	2,126	2,590	4,020	4,817	7,999	9,271

Sources: Jomo, 1990 &
Government of Malaysia, 8th Malaysia Plan, 2000

In terms of total employment growth, the agriculture sector grew by a mere 13.1 percent while manufacturing grew by a whopping 1781 percent between 1957 and 2000. More importantly, between 1995 and 2005, while manufacturing is expected to account for 40 percent of the net job creations, the agriculture sector would experience a job reduction of 6.5 percent. In between the two extremes, the Wholesale and Retail Trade, and Hotels and Restaurants would grow by 18.7 percent while the "Other Services" sector is projected to record a similar growth of 18.5 percent. Since these activities are mostly urban based, the flock into urban areas is expected to continue. On the other hand, jobs in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing which are rural-based are expected to decrease by 101,000 resulting in a further reduction in the percentage of rural-based population (Malaysia, 2000).

As the economy grows it is only natural that more people would flock to the urban areas. This is due to the theory of elasticity of demand of which the Services sector has the greatest elasticity followed by Manufacturing and lastly Agriculture. This means that as the income of the people increases they would spend the largest proportion of the increased income on service products followed by manufactured goods. Both of these sectors are located mainly in urban areas, a pull factor that encourages migration into urban areas.

The economic growth of the Manufacturing and Services sectors naturally lead to further urbanisation of the country. As expected the Klang Valley experienced most of this urban growth since it is the economic centre of the nation. However, what is interesting is that most of the population growth since the 1980s in the Klang Valley did not occur within the City of Kuala Lumpur itself. Rather, the growth occurred mostly in areas outside the cities especially within the State of Selangor (refer Table 2). This process is called the suburbanisation of the Klang Valley.

Between 1980 and 1991, Kuala Lumpur grew from a population of 919,610 to 1,145,342. Its population growth rate was 2.00 percent per year. This rate declined to 1.39 percent per year between 1991 and 2000. On the other hand, the Selangor State population grew by 4.33 percent per annum between 1980 and 1991 and 6.02 percent per annum in the following decade (1991 and 2000). Thus, the State of Selangor grew at a rate which was more than three times higher than that of the City of Kuala Lumpur.

In 1980, the Petaling District population was only a third of Kuala Lumpur's (360,056 for Petaling compared to 919,610 for Kuala Lumpur). Twenty years later, Petaling had caught up with Kuala Lumpur in terms of total population (1.18 million for Petaling and 1.30 million for Kuala Lumpur). In the past

decade, while Kuala Lumpur grew by a mere 1.39 percent per annum, Petaling District grew by 6.47 per annum and the Petaling District is expected to surpass Kuala Lumpur's population by 2005 (Table 3).

TABLE 2:
Urbanisation Rate by States, 1995 – 2005

STATES	Urbanisation Rate (%)			Average Annual Growth Rate of Urban Population (%)	
	1995	2000	2005	7MP	8MP
More Developed State:	66.5	73.4	77.7	4.9	3.8
W.P. Kuala Lumpur	100	100	100	2.0	2.2
Selangor	80.8	88.3	92.7	7.3	5.0
Penang	77	79.5	83.3	2.7	3.1
Malacca	49.5	67.3	75.3	7.5	3.2
Johore	54.4	63.9	69.1	5.7	3.8
Perak	56.2	59.5	65.3	1.9	3.0
Negeri Sembilan	47.3	55.0	58.2	4.4	2.3
Less Developed States:	37.4	42.1	45.9	4.7	3.9
Sarawak	41.8	47.9	54.6	4.4	4.8
Sabah	39.8	49.1	53.2	7.7	4.9
Trengganu	46.6	49.4	50.1	2.7	1.6
Pahang	35.0	42.1	44.0	5.2	2.2
Kedah	35.1	38.7	43.3	3.9	3.9
Perlis	29.6	33.8	38.9	3.5	3.7
Kelantan	33.5	33.5	36.7	0.5	2.8
Malaysia:	55.1	61.8	66.9	4.8	3.8

Source: 8th Malaysia Plan, 2000

Another high growth area in the Klang Valley is the Ulu Langat District in the State of Selangor. Its population grew from a mere 177,877 in 1980 to 865,514 in 2000. Its population growth rate during the two decades was around 8 percent per annum. In the 1990s, it grew more than four times faster than Kuala Lumpur. Should this trend continue, and there is not much evidence to suggest otherwise, Ulu Langat District would be able to boast of a population higher than that of Kuala Lumpur in the next census. Sepang is another district which grew rapidly since the 1991 census, averaging 6.47 percent per annum. However, its population in 2000 was still relatively small at 97,896. The

Gombak and Klang Districts grew at rather rapid rates as well, at 5.01 and 5.18 percent per annum, respectively.

TABLE 2:
 Population and Annual Growth Rate, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur,
 1980–2000

State & District	Population			Average Growth	Annual Rate
	1980	1991	2000	1980-1991	1991-2000
SELANGOR	1,436,250	2,297,159	3,947,527	4.33	6.02
Gombak	166,059	352,649	553,410	6.85	5.01
Klang	279,349	406,994	648,918	3.42	5.18
Kuala Langat	101,578	130,090	189,983	2.25	4.21
Kuala Selangor	110,366	123,052	157,288	0.99	2.73
Petaling	360,056	633,165	1,181,034	5.13	6.93
Sabak Bernam	103,261	99,824	110,713	-0.31	1.15
Sepang	46,025	54,671	97,896	1.56	6.47
Ulu Langat	177,877	413,900	865,514	7.68	8.20
Ulu Selangor	81,679	82,814	142,771	0.13	6.05
W.P. KUALA LUMPUR	919,610	1,145,342	1,297,526	2.00	1.39
MALAYSIA	12,136,109	17,563,420	22,202,614	2.64	2.60

Source: Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2000

The high growth rates of these suburban populations are due mainly to the out migration of Kuala Lumpur residents. The 1991 Census determined that one third of out-of-state migrants into Selangor between 1986 and 1991 were from Kuala Lumpur (109,334 out of 290,000 migrants). Also, during the same period, for every resident of Selangor whom Kuala Lumpur gained, it lost two of its own to the State.

Based on inter-state migration between 1986 and 1991, Kuala Lumpur had a net migration of -3.7 percent which was the second highest net out-migration after Perak at -3.8 percent. On the other hand, Selangor had a net in-migration of 6.8 percent during the same period. According to the Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan, there was a reversal in net in-migration of about 9,000 people for the period 1975 to 1980 to a net out-migration of about 4,280 persons per annum for the

period 1991 to 1997. Between 1982 (when the out-migration trend started) and 1997, Kuala Lumpur had a net out-migration of about 125,000 people. The Draft Structure Plan Kuala Lumpur 2020 identifies “the high rate of net out-migration and low population growth rate” as the main issue for the population sector (page 4-3).

TABLE 4:
Distribution of Ex-Kuala Lumpur Residents in Selangor, 1986 - 1991

DISTRICT	Migrants from Kuala Lumpur
Gombak	25,351
Klang	4,978
Kuala Langat	785
Kuala Selangor	1,034
Petaling	31,925
Sabak Bernam	501
Sepang	656
Ulu Langat	43,123
Ulu Selangor	955
Unknown	26
Total:	109,334

Source: Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2000

Due to the high migration rates, the Petaling District which was only a third the size of Kuala Lumpur in 1980 is now almost equal the size of the city population; Ulu Langat grew from only 20 percent the size of Kuala Lumpur to about 75 percent of the size of the nation’s capital during the same twenty-year period.

This trend which started in 1982 is expected to continue in the future as more land is opened up in the Klang Valley and better transportation infrastructure is put in place.

CONSEQUENCES OF SUBURBANISATION

The process of suburbanisation, especially in the Klang Valley, had started in the 1980s and picked up momentum in the 1990s. The trend is expected to continue in the 21st Century due to the building of more efficient transportation access, such as the New Klang Valley Expressway, and the KESAS and ELITE Highways in areas surrounding Kuala Lumpur and the opening of new areas such as Putrajaya, Cyberjaya as well as vast tracts of land in Ulu Langat and

Sepang. The opening up of these areas had expanded the urbanisation process beyond the Klang Valley to other new growth areas. These newly urbanised areas are referred to in the Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2000 as the Kuala Lumpur Metropolitan Area (KLMR). Its physical size is about 40 percent larger than the size of the Klang Valley.

Suburbanisation can be said to be fueled by three factors that are abundant in the Klang Valley since the 1980s. These are supply, demand and accessibility. The demand for housing and other land developments is the result of the higher income of the Malaysian population as well as increase in the population. The population of Klang Valley as a whole grew faster than the Malaysian average. Supply comes from the opening up of more areas made available through the building of better and more efficient transportation networks. These transportation networks had improved accessibility into many parts of the Klang Valley previously considered too remote to be developed.

These are the same factors that led to the suburbanisation of the United States after World War II. The building of highways for defense purposes, the demand for housing by the newly-affluent post war population and the opening up of vast tracts of land after the completion of the highways were ingredients for rapid suburbanisation which led to the problems of urban sprawl in that nation.

It should be noted that suburbanisation in the Klang Valley picked up pace after the introduction of privatization by the Mahathir administration in the mid 1980s. While the interstate highways in the U.S. were built by the government for defense purposes, those built by the private companies in Malaysia were mostly for commercial reasons, supported by government policies for private sectors initiatives. Capitalizing on greater demand for real estate by the increasingly middle class society of Malaysia, many private developers actively developed more areas especially outside Kuala Lumpur due to low land prices in these areas and opportunities to create new townships and integrated urban development. Consequently, incidences of leapfrogging in urban developments became inevitable in this process of urbanisation which was largely influenced by capitalist motivations.

The immediate concern for urban planning is how to reconcile the private sector appetite for profit against the public planning desired for the common good of the society. While in some respects the two may share common goals, in terms of suburbanisation and the resultant urban sprawl, there may be urgent needs to slow its spread.

Urban sprawl leads to wastage of resources. Leapfrogging of urban development requires more infrastructure and take up more open spaces. Some of these areas were traditionally the water catchment areas of the city. A good example is the Ulu Langat District which experienced population boom and loss of agricultural land and open spaces to other land uses.

Suburbanisation and urban sprawl also lead to the situation where certain older parts of the cities are abandoned and become haven for undesirable activities. While some may argue that it is part of the natural process of the urban ecology, planners should take cognizance that in our zeal to approve as many development projects as possible in the outer areas of the cities, the inner parts are likely to be abandoned. New shopping complexes, with the exception of Suria KLCC, were built outside of the Kuala Lumpur city centre. These included the Sunway Pyramid, One Utama, the Mines and the Mid-Valley Shopping Complex. Most of the shopping centres expansions announced recently are in the suburbs, not in the middle of Kuala Lumpur. American cities which have struggled since the 1970s to revive their inner cities to their former glory have almost always ended up in failure. Kuala Lumpur may experience the same problem if the current trend is continued unabated.

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