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## Exploring the Challenges Facing in Sustaining the Malay Cultural Landscape Elements at Pantai Lido Waterfront, Johor Bahru, Malaysia

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### Abstract

In recent years, the urbanisation at Pantai Lido has undergone significant change in its Malay cultural landscape elements, thus has led to the decline of its symbolism of place. Most of the planned constructions at Pantai Lido undertake without any consideration to protect and conserve the local cultural landscape elements as part of the development design strategies. This is due to the regeneration or development blueprint at the waterfront area in Malaysia are still lack in emphasis on the importance of cultural landscape as part of its development and design guideline. The objective of the study to exploring the factors faced by the local stakeholders in maintaining the landscape elements of Malay Culture in Pantai Lido. The study was conducted through qualitative research methods to dismantle the implementation gap that still exists in sustaining the cultural landscape elements in Pantai Lido. The findings determined the Malay cultural landscape elements at Pantai Lido is not able to cope with the massive wave of transformation due to tremendous pressures from the development and weaknesses in planning and design blueprint by responsible authorities. At this point, perhaps Pantai Lido needs proper management and references, sympathetic to the people living in the area, rather than facilitating the flow of gigantic development within the Malay cultural landscape core of Pantai Lido. Thus, it is essential to recognise that time change is inevitable; this continued strain on the waterfront requires a set of principles for governance be to develop that will ensure future sustainability.

**Keywords:** Cultural landscape, The Symbolism of Place, Urban Waterfront, Pantai Lido, Malaysia.

### Introduction

One of the most distinctive elements of Pantai Lido is the waterfront its self, due to the water edge's importance in determining the strategic location of an urban centre in such a place. As noted by Hussain et al (2020b), the waterfront is an essential component of life where people

and commercial activities depend on it as a primal place of gathering. Meanwhile, Yassin and Masron (2013), explained that the waterfront serves as the most important of all valuable natural resources for living creatures to ensure sustainable development of human culture, with enormous potentials for a country's environmental balance and advancement. A waterfront also reflects dynamic, natural, and cultural resources with particular characteristics in encouraging recreational activities and strengthening the sense of place through its vibrant ambience (Shams et al., 2013; Hussain et al., 2015a). Yassin and Yahya (2018) opined that the waterfront is a unique and valuable, irreplaceable resource, a harmonious interface between the cultural landscape and the modern landscape in the urban area. Thus, the seafront becomes a definite edge that defines the city limit as well as giving a strong identity to the Pantai Lido and providing a panoramic view of the urban waterfront.

From that continuity, the cultural landscape plays an essential role in defining an urban waterfront's limitation in terms of activities transpiring at the waterfront, either physically, socially, or perceptually. However, a new development at Pantai Lido areas can impact existing cultural landscape elements. Such as traditional commercial streets, five-foot walkways, markets, open fields, and waterfronts, which will eventually demolish local traditional activities, as well as the *genius loci*, i.e., the protective spirit of a place (Ujang, 2010). As what has been happening at Pantai Lido, the Malay cultural landscape elements have been replaced by modern buildings, changing the current native landscape (Ismail, 2010). Therefore, it destroyed the existing Malay cultural landscape elements in Pantai Lido. The Malay cultural landscape elements at Pantai Lido underwent rapid changes with time. It is due to owing to city expansion and limited enforcement of rules and regulation in emphasising the importance of cultural landscape elements for urban waterfront development by responsible parties regard to the waterfront development.

Hence, this paper aimed to exploring the challenges faced by the local stakeholders regarding in sustaining Malay Cultural Landscape at Pantai Lido and its connection to the symbolism of place. Thus, the research was conducted in order to understand and classify the key functions of Pantai Lido's cultural landscape in planning for the revitalisation of urban waterfront in order to obtain reliable data, the authors used a technique of case studies focused on qualitative methods. This approach involves the study of records, evaluation of the participants, and in-depth semi structured interviews with the local stakeholders. This paper reveals that Malay cultural landscape at Pantai Lido influenced by the surrounding environment through the lens of cultural factors, such as the physical, social, and perceptual roles in creating a sustainable living. The findings data recommended using while planning the waterfront development and subsequently to improve waterfront development practices in Malaysia in the future.

### **Waterfront**

Goodwin (1999), in her study revealed that, the waterfront boundaries are difficult to determine due to the mixed uses of development which are relatively homogeneous. According to Yassin et al (2011), in Japan the urban waterfront development was endorsed in the third national development plan in 1977 as an addition to existing waterfront development in line with the development of governance. The development of the waterfront in Japan also emphasises on urban planning and design, which is more sustainable and functions more effectively to allow a cultural space to be alive in that communal place. Furthermore, Zhang and Taylor (2019) explained the waterfront as a place that integrates land

and water, has surrounded with natural attractions to people and suggests a living between cultural lifestyle and modern character. As indicated by Hussain et al., (2015b) waterfronts are “any place that has a strong visual or physical connection to water and culture character”. These features influence the sense of place due to the presence of physical characteristics and human activities related to the presence of the visitor.

### **Waterfront Development in Malaysia**

A water source is a valuable jewel for the nation and has an essential role for peoples in a million years of human history (Yassin et al., 2017). It marks the beginning of social placement around the world. In Malaysia, human civilisations have established along the water's edge since the Kedah Tua times until today (Manoharan & Othman, 2019). Malaysia water's edge shapes the life of the dwellers along the banks' area. Besides, most of the Malaysian population use the river or water edges for industries, economic sector, transportation, water resources, living area and recreation (Yassin et al., 2013).

Meanwhile, according to the Malaysia Department of Irrigation and Drainage (JPBD, 2002), in Malaysia, the history of waterfront expansion begins with the urbanisation process. Urbanisation has changed Malaysia from the slums to a modern and fast developing country (Shamsuddin et al., 2013). The rapid growth of population in urban areas has forced the water's edge to extended, whereby some of the water edges refilled by land (Moretti, 2008). This is due to the commercial site growth in fulfilling market demand (Shepard, 2018). The result discovers the modern development and rapid transformation of the waterfront in Malaysia is to show off a modern symbolic nation as well as a step to compete with neighbourhood country.

### **Waterfront Development Guidelines in Malaysia**

Presently, waterfront development guidelines in Malaysia provide general instructions for any development occurring in the waterfront areas around Malaysia, which are usually managed and administered separately according to district and precinct. The responsibilities for both fall under the Department of Town and Country Planning (JPBD). A waterfront development guideline enforced by JPBD through the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in 2002 was mainly to achieve the Government's mission to maintain sustainable development and the keep the environment well-maintained in the waterfront area. Most of the guideline is enforced as guidance to any permanent structure development at the waterfront edge or river edge and misconduct on law or water pollutions (Yassin & Yahya, 2018). Surprisingly, some of the guidelines are not gazetted and still lacks emphasis on the importance of cultural landscape as part of its development and design guidelines (Yassin & Yahya, 2018). In this case, the responsible parties are needed for initiating and facilitating the waterfront development process, by providing a firm blueprint for the development of urban waterfront areas coherence to protect and conserve the cultural and heritage value at said location.

### **Cultural and the Roles of Cultural Landscape**

According to Adeniran and Akinlabi (2011) the definition of culture is about human ideology. It is also composed of the process that is related to social lifestyle in shaping the hardscape, artefacts, art, customs, environment and culture (Richards, 2001). As described by Montgomery (2003), the landscape furniture, five-foot walkway, promenade and park are defined as cultural elements that lead to important aspects to creating the identity of a place. However, according to Ferdous and Nilufar (2008), besides those elements mentioned by

Montgomery (2003), there are a few cultural attributes that characterise a place, such as human activities, social behaviour and physical characters. At this point, they agreed that cultural elements have good potential in reconnecting people and place. Also, cultural factors are a collective phenomenon and a communal space to rebirth the variations in human activity (Lai et al., 2013). According to Hussain et al (2020a), the correlation of human (perception of the entity), space (a physical existence of place) and culture (personal interpretation of material) indicates the formation of cultural space. Thus, the spirit of the place and the concept of sense of belonging is very close to the cultural area, sociology, and economic vitality that forms the character of cultural elements (Hussain et al., 2016; Hernandez, 2017). In sum, the sustaining program can make the urban waterfront area a more desirable place to live. The locals not only enjoy the modern facilities, but they also have the privilege to live in an area that has a place in the history, culture, and heritage of their city. This paper is much needed to guide future development within the culture and heritage center to achieve the goals of conserving the character of the cultural landscape environment and its elements while allowing for more sustainable development to take place.

### **Methodology**

Based on the objectives of the study, the central question of the study required the authors to identify other barriers to the process of preserving local culture in terms of preservation context. The exploration can help the authors suggests that useful guidelines strengthen the cultural landscape in Pantai Lido. The authors should focus on natural exploration and translate explicit phenomena into the ontology, epistemology, and methodological aspects of the study through the gaps in this research. After reviewing the research questions based on the literature, the authors have chosen to use a qualitative research method based on the case study as a research method. Merriam and Tisdell (2001) state that a qualitative case study approach involves detailed descriptions of individuals, societies, or places followed by data analysis to form themes through a comprehensive data description process. Pantai Lido, a subject of a case study, enables the author to understand the meaning of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). The aim of the authors to use the case study approach is to explore the interactions between the functional factors and the features of the studied phenomena, namely how the cultural landscape can be maintained and to prevent the problems that arise from spreading. To help improve the sense of place and symbolize the place for urban waterfront development. As suggested by Yin (2003), case studies provide an opportunity for the author to examine several important issues at a time. The authors have space to explore every volume derived to describe the problems that occur and to study the primary function of cultural landscapes in Pantai Lido in contributing to the sense of place and thereby to raise public symbolism. Data collection was conducted directly through the informants to provide the author's understanding of social experiences and activities in the study area through different stages and phases. The authors collected a primary data from local stakeholders who lived through it and thus formed a set of findings for the essence of the construction guidelines in preserving cultural landscapes in Pantai Lido. The case study approach can capture the depth of the conclusions and enrich the research information from the informants' experience throughout their stay in Pantai Lido. The authors also provide various sources of information through observations, interviews, audio-visual materials, documents, and reports. The data used by the author is in line with the advice of Tobi (2016), which suggests that case studies need to be carried out in detail, in-depth data collection, and various sources of information.

From the in-depth semi structured interviews, the authors manage the disclosure of more specific information and contains details about the informants' experiences during their stay on Pantai Lido. Semi-structured interviews allow authors to learn how to prepare for unexpected information from informants—fifteen local stakeholders were selected, consisting of landscape architect, architect, and urban planner and local communities. Informants selected based on their extensive living experience on Pantai Lido. It ensures that the anonymity of the informants, all information on the subject matter is kept confidential by using pseudonyms for their identity (Tobi, 2016). The authors obtained cooperation in the form of relevant oral data from the officers representing the Johor Bahru City Council (JBCC); the verbal information recorded. JBCC also provided feedback on other informants throughout the process of data collection. The data collected from the meeting were transcribed and analysed in classifying, organising, coding, and placing them into a framework theme based on a checklist compiled as suggested in work of (Fusch et al., 2018).

Observations also performed at the six physical settings of the cultural landscape elements at Pantai Lido e.g., waterfront (Pantai Lido), a public park (Buki Tanjung Puteri), open space (Padang Seri Gelam), Traditional commercial street (Persiaran Tun Sri Lanang), culture market (Medan Tepian Tebrau) and five-foot walkways (Jalan Dhoby). The authors' observations are using to validate the issues or events discussed in the interviews and to facilitate data triangulation. In this study, the researcher cross-validated the primary and secondary sources to ensure that other activities, experiences, and details included in the informant's story. Indirect analysis of related documents can help the author build an organized research model and provide informational structure for interview questions. In conclusion, in-depth exploration can shed light on the patent and give answers to the research questions. It aims to increase the depth and enrichment of research information on the function of the cultural landscape elements of Pantai Lido that assist in the preservation of culture.

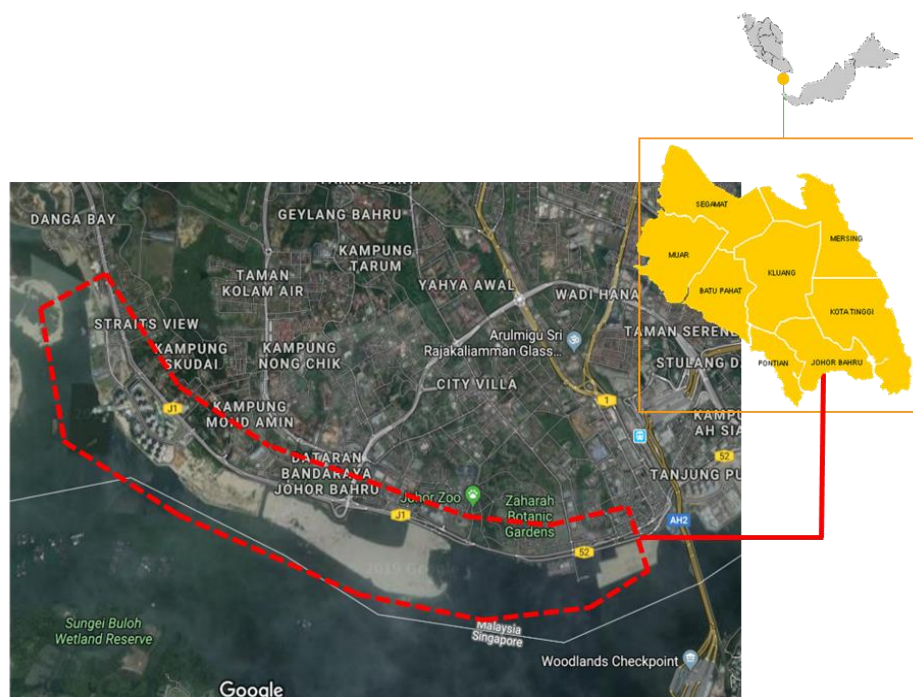


Figure 1. Pantai Lido territory in the red line boundary which is located in Johor Bahru, Johor (Source: Google Maps of Pantai Lido, 2018).

## Result and Discussion

The findings from this research objective to addresses the challenges faced by the local stakeholders regarding in sustaining the Malay Cultural Landscape elements at Pantai Lido. There are two themes formed based on the findings towards the problem faced in sustaining the Malay Cultural Landscape at Pantai Lido; the changes of Malay cultural landscape form and pattern and the functional dimension of Malay culture landscape. In the beginning, Pantai Lido started as a culturally-formed setting for the Malay people to live peacefully. The cultural landscape and identity of the nation are unseen in most places in the townscape due to natural and development processes, which were shaped by the mixed-use development, residential and recreational (Shepard, 2018). In between, the Malay cultural landscape elements at Pantai Lido faces rapid transformation in terms of the physical and social-cultural structure due to the impact of Johor Bahru's development (Woo et al., 2016). Local people were involved in the sociocultural system bounded by customs and traditions, while they were surviving in their surrounding of natural physics (Pedeliento, 2019). During data analysis, some of these changes so much welcomed by the informants. However, according to the local stallholders soon they had been slowly declining the Malay identity and tradition which had embedded with meaning and symbolism of the place that made Pantai Lido felt like a place to stay harmoniously. From the document analysis, the unplanning city expansion has seeped in, and Pantai Lido is a part it development (Shepard, 2018). Owing to that, the local stokeholds felt like they no longer 'live off the land' at present-day in Pantai Lido. From the participant's observation, some local stakeholders who still lives near development site locations have sold their fishing gear or have changed jobs from fishing to new situations that no longer require them to go out to sea. For example, as deliberated by reputable local digital news the Bernama (2019) which the traditional jobs involving aquaculture activities at Pantai Lido nowadays, are rarely continued due to the poor condition of seawater and the impact of the landfill along the beaches for the development purposes. Therefore, local stakeholders agree that the local cultural landscape as referred to Malay culture and heritage at Pantai Lido had changed from a traditional and casual environment into a mix of various, wired, and modern settings which against the local's need. From the site observation, the whole landscape and nature environments at Pantai Lido now filled by high-rise buildings and administrative industries whereby an impact of this situation has loosened the social ties among local citizens and dropped the local farmer financial sector when the sea does not return its profit due to the poor and murky conditions of seawater at Pantai Lido.

To date, from the interview session with the informants, fast action was taken by the responsible party in secured the native culture and heritage setting at Pantai Lido to keep preserve by relocating the setting to the other area or being built far away from the original places. However, this situation does not in line with the locals' voice, where they ask the responsible party to keep the original setting in its original places, due to the sentimental value in it. This transferring would indirectly eradicate local customs and traditional features such as traditional street vendors at Persiaran Tun Sri Lanang. At this moment, one of the local stakeholders explained;

“Traditional street vendors are one of the most important aspects of life in Pantai Lido, is something that we can talk over, discuss and everyone can join in. Traditional street vendors are my favourite place. Always like a feeling, like there's

a party going on. It's a kind of unifier, and Pantai Lido is one of the equal parts of Malay life".

(LS 3)

This finding and statement is in line with the document analysis, the urbanisation does not only affect the physical transformation of the Malay cultural landscape environment but also affects the character of social-cultural activities due to the changes in communities and their lifestyles. Apart from the speculative development that shows the potentials of the urban waterfront in terms of strategic location, the development project by local authorities have also unintentionally destroyed the Malay cultural landscape elements of Pantai Lido, such as road widening, and new commercial lots. This statement and finding are inline from the point of view of Yassin et al (2017) the lack of design guidance, policies, skilled personnel, political-will, together with inadequate statutory backing for preserving built cultural heritage, has resulted in Pantai Lido' cultural landscape fabric to be torn apart and replaced by totally indifferent development. This unintentional pressure from the uncontrol development will drive the locals away from living at Pantai Lido, as expressed by local stakeholders who feel that it is no longer convenient to live in a 'tourist zoo' such a definition for headaches and wired environment. This situation is in line during the observation at Pantai Lido, where the biggest threat comes from the massive city expansion and alienated design fabric along with the human-made reclaimed land that acts like cancer, engulfing the cultural landscape environment of Pantai Lido. In summary, the native cultural landscape elements at Pantai Lido is not able to cope with the massive wave of transformation due to weaknesses in planning and design by the responsible party. Therefore, Pantai Lido needs proper blueprint regard for conservation and preservation of cultural landscape elements along with the ideology of sympathetic to the people living in the area, rather than facilitating the flow of rapid development within the cultural landscape elements as the core of Pantai Lido.

### **The Changes of Cultural Landscape Form and Pattern**

The previous Malay cultural landscape at Pantai Lido was unique in terms of the elements and patterns of development. Nowadays, the texture along the waterfront has been affected by the invasion of office towers and large mall buildings. According to Bernama (2019), the development of mega-scale of commercial areas and harbor cities at Pantai Lido could be developed at other places, if there is a proper blueprint for protecting the core of culture and heritage in Pantai Lido. From this scenario, the uncontrol development will indicate the danger in the future once the most significant commercial growth in cultural spaces is not designed sensitively; hence, will destroy the whole fabric of the culture and traditional landscape environment.

From the document analysis shows that the rapid development at Pantai Lido perhaps can benefit the economic growth, however, this scenario will erode the quality of the original setting of cultural landscape elements at Pantai Lido (Ismail et al., 2015). These findings are in line with the statement by the local stakeholders during the in-depth semi-structured interview session where most of the informants agreed that Pantai Lido is a core for the existence of heritage, culture, and Malay tradition that has been a long time beneath at Pantai Lido. Some of the informants express about their feeling regard to the changes that happening at Pantai Lido. The local stakeholders 5 said:



“It’s the same as a modern city, nowadays Pantai Lido is just the same for other cities, no identity of the place, urbanisation has ruined everything. Previously, Pantai Lido was unique, waterfront is lively and its culture and traditions were different from other counterparts.”

(LS 5)

Moreover, one of the most glaring issues that relate to the challenges faced in sustaining the Malay cultural landscape elements at Pantai Lido due to the limitation of cultural spaces. As noted by informants, many of the new development buildings at Pantai Lido are not sympathetic to the native character of the cultural landscape fabric in terms of scale, design, and arrangement. They also add, most of the design and arrangement of spaces and physical elements is intentionally inspired the western design and neglected the local design in their planning development. The continuous disruption to the grain and texture of the local culture, heritage, and tradition has reduced the attraction of cultural and traditional environments at Pantai Lido. From the document analysis Shamsuddin (2011) expressed, that contextual design is not an essential consideration in many design approaches adopted by the environmental designer, which explained why many new models are alienated from the traditional and cultural context, hence against the local need. From the observation at Pantai Lido, the loss of the Malay cultural landscape elements at Pantai Lido is due to the demolition and dislocation of the original physical setting to other places which is far from its original site. Worth mentioning, the erosion of the cultural landscape setting at Pantai Lido is also due to the city expansion and enlargement of the highway. This threat needs immediate attention by the responsible party in a way to protect this setting from vanishing especially the local street hawker at Pantai Lido. From the interview with the local stakeholders, they said the responsible authority will restrict and penalty the local hawker's vendor who illegal sold their food and stuff along the promenade. As denoted by local stakeholders 7;

“They said the vendors were encroaching on taxpayer’s space and called the vendors ‘leeches. But the vendors are there because the locals want them there. So, it’s funny that, at the same time when authority trying to say vendors are just these parasites on society”.

(LS 7)

In reality, from the document analysis, the traditional hawker street or vendors can provide an opportunity for the sellers to display their merchandise in public space as one of the attractive factors for the touristy place (Shamsuddin, Bashri, & Amat, 2012). On the bright side, street food vendors will provide the mystical atmosphere toward such a place when the customer can be seated there, see the food preparation done on the street itself. This diorama would increase the degree of transparency as one was able to witness outside activities directly. Besides, the aroma from the food and the sound of wok they produced during the preparation of food will directly fill the air with a sense of festive and colour and enrich the sensory effects at this setting. Unfortunately, in this current situation, a modern development at Pantai Lido is bland and monotonous with odd proportions when compared to the ornate and charm of the Malay cultural landscape environment prior. Besides, the recent growth is mostly unsympathetic to local dwellers, especially to the elderly generation.

### The Changes of Functional Dimension at Pantai Lido

The charm of the cultural landscape elements at Pantai Lido was a great extent due to the variety of activities taking place. From the interviews, most of the informants express that the prior cultural landscape at Pantai Lido will generate and stimulate their sensory experiences i.e., the sense of colour, smell, sight, sound, and moods. As argued by informants, many of the previous social cultural activities at Pantai Lido occurred at the cultural spaces along the promenade. Back then, the socio-cultural activities at Pantai Lido mainly occurred along the waterfront and the street. Besides, the various economic activities plied at these areas associated with selling and trading of traditional goods and antique stuff from the locals. The informants pointed out that at one time, locals had more control over their lives and had a better voice in creating their living space at Pantai Lido. The former shape, function and environment of the old Pantai Lido do not pose any threat to their daily life. According to the informants it wouldn't be the same if Pantai Lido were compared as then and now. Now the environment of Pantai Lido is different, the fast pace of change towards modernisation has ignored the part of the old way of life here. The informants also added that it is the social and lifestyle differences that make Pantai Lido so unique and to have its own identity. But rapid modernisation has brought uncontrolled urban development and resulting in the mundane character throughout the place. From the participant observation and interview it is pointed out that, the socio-cultural spaces at Pantai Lido generated by the routine activities such as the dynamic socioeconomic, workplace, and neighbourhood activities. Through the interview, most of the favourite socio-cultural space at Pantai Lido is the waterfront itself. This is statement by LS 12 "Going to JB if you do not come to Pantai Lido is not complete ... you must come to the beach, find food and hang out." She also points out that the Pantai Lido beach no longer exist today as it has been reclaimed for development purposes (Figure 2). The findings from the above statement, and discussion were supported by LS 7 who expressed:

"Only memories remain ... no more fishermen go fishing ... I also feel what other informants feel ...looking for crabs during the leisure time but... today crabs are difficult catch here... I am so angry about the development that is happening... why ruin the nostalgia of the locals here?"



Figure 2: The reclamation project at Pantai Lido for development purposes (Source: Majlis Bandaraya Johor Bahru).

The Malay cultural landscape elements at Pantai Lido is an essential node of the urban waterfront and reflects the Malay socio-cultural character of Pantai Lido. The unstable

blueprint mainly focuses on commercial and economic growth, which has only led to an imbalanced environment for urban living in terms of services for the local dweller. Worth mentioning, the destruction of cultural landscape elements at Pantai Lido is due to the insufficient blueprint regard to the protection and conserving of the importance of cultural landscape elements at waterfront or coastal areas in Malaysia. In this sense, the proper blueprint regard to conservation and place protection is needed in a way to sustain the local diversity in terms of heritage, cultural and traditional values of the place. In sum, the restoration of the Malay cultural landscape elements at Pantai Lido requires the integration of a complex system among the planner, government, and developer, as well as a proper blueprint at different scales and levels of development. After all, when any development at the urban waterfront area is not taken into the importance of cultural landscape as part of development purposes, this situation of development will destruct the local cultural landscape at the said location and will affect the whole system of environment and ecological at urban waterfront areas.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated the challenges faced in sustaining the Malay cultural landscape elements at Pantai Lido. The cultural landscape at the urban waterfront is very precious and in a precarious position as a result of being subject to tremendous pressure from speculative commercial development. The challenge that is faced to ensure that future development of urban waterfront will not destroy the culture and heritage value that gives the places their uniqueness and heritage value. It is workable by adopting a sustainable approach when dealing with development in areas of historical, traditionally, architectural and culturally significant. Sustainable development defined as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves the protection of not only necessary resources but also the cultural heritage and thus conserving this precious environment will be leading towards a sustainable environment for a better future. A sustainable approach in preserving the Malay cultural landscape means that the interrelationship between the culture and natural environment need to give due consideration. The Malay cultural landscape environment also provides a sense of stability to the modern society, in which hectic lifestyle needs an environment to remind us of purpose in life. The Malay cultural landscape at urban waterfront consists of all elements such as traditional commercial streets, five-foot walkways, markets, open fields, and waterfronts that shape the urban fabric including the local people, their activities and the way of life. These elements have to be seen in total as they contribute to the character of the Pantai Lido. Thus, conservation effort must focus on maintaining these qualities so that the whole urban waterfront environment kept as an ensemble. Therefore, the implementation of sustainability management in cultural landscape element conservation recommended in this study since there is still lacking in Malaysia. In contrast, the involvement of the local community and local authority needed. The conservation initiatives in the urban waterfront at Malaysia are still at its infancy in term of its success in protecting the local cultural landscape and heritage. There should then be a shift in paradigm so that the culture and heritage value of the urban waterfront core seen in total and that protection and preservation should focus on maintaining the sense of place of our cultural landscape environment at the urban waterfront.

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