

Malaysian Architectural Policy

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1. Introduction & Overall objectives

This report is prepared by Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia for the Government of Malaysia to assist the Government in creating a Malaysian built environment that is world-class-competitive, socially-beneficial and aesthetically-satisfying,

The Government has been successful in transforming the country's landscape from a traditional resource based economy to a modern industrialised economy. The citizens have benefited tremendously from the forward vision of the country's leadership and enjoyed better standard of living than most developing nations. This momentum has been sustained by the stable government and proactive leadership as manifested in its vision to make Malaysia a fully developed nation by year 2020

The spirit of wanting to achieve excellence has permeated among the populace and efforts are increasing among professionals to innovate and upgrade their role in contributing to the nation's vision. Therefore, PAM has taken the initiative to propose to the Government a Malaysian Architectural Policy (MAP) as it is the single largest "client" for buildings in Malaysia and worldwide. The adoption of a definitive policy on architecture by the Government would provide stimulus for more innovative designs of the built environment for the private sector to follow.

2. The Premises for a National Architectural Policy

The fundamental promise of an architectural policy is the basic right of the citizens of a country for a good built environment. This is more wanting in view of the rapid urbanisation of the population. The benefits are self-evident. A good built environment will engender national pride and a happy and productive community.

There is already an increasing environmental awareness and appreciation of the natural environment. This has changed the perception of the public on their living standards and aspirations. The rights of citizen for a safe and hygienic environment can be further enhanced through a policy which inculcates awareness and appreciation of the beauty and aesthetics of the natural and man-made environment. Similarly, this awareness shall influence the manner in which our cities are planned and the policies which govern land use planning and urban design

It is contended that a successful built environment and architecture is not the responsibility or the achievement of the architect alone. It is the result of a close and effective collaboration between a good architect and more importantly, an enlightened client.

For it is the enlightened client who determines the budget and writes the brief (sometimes with the help of the architect). As a service industry, the architect is the agent of the client. The client usually has the final say on how money is to be expended and what facilities are to be built. The architect advises and proposes what he considers best for the project, but it is the client who often insists on what is to be built as he is the one expending the money.

Whether the building projects are undertaken by the public or the private sector, the approvals of the project will be processed by the relevant departments of the Government. When completed, the buildings will impact upon the community and become its cultural heritage. The MAP is intended to provide the nation with a common mechanism which can be used to propagate enlightenment in design and aesthetics of buildings. Consequently administrators, contractors, developers and users can become enlightened clients and users of buildings.

3. The Benefits

The construction sector is a major contributor to the economy accounting for about 4% of the National GDP and employs about 9% of the total work force. During the lifespan of a building, other economic activities are generated within it. Good design adds value to the building both in financial and utility terms. Therefore, it adds value to the national assets.

A quality Malaysian built environment that is world-class-competitive will make our cities competitive with the best cities in the world. By being world-class-competitive as the consequences of implementing the MAP, will encourage more international companies to set up their headquarters in Malaysia and to invest in Malaysia.

As the community becomes enlightened on good environment and buildings, it will instill pride, civic mindedness and care. The citizens can become proactive and creative, making them not only happy but more productive.

The MAP means not only the creation of a quality built environment but also its maintenance. It should also bring about a higher level of the management and maintenance of private and public sector buildings and infrastructure.

The MAP should also encourage innovation through the promotion of the use of methods that will advance good architecture and high quality buildings. It should also engender innovation through professional architectural education and through research and development work.

The MAP should apply not only to the new built environment or to the man-made environment alone. It should bring benefits by the enhancement of conservation of our architectural heritage as part of our cultural history and architecture. It should also bring benefits by the protection of our natural environment, to seek a sustainable compatibility between development and the conservation of the natural environment.

4. The Objectives of the Architectural Policy

The principal objective of the MAP is to attain an ordered, sustainable and attractive environment which commensurates with the status of a fully developed society. Thus the strategies which may be adopted are as follows:

- Provide the broad architectural framework and goals for action to be taken by the clients and Public Authorities,
- Establish guidelines for the protection of our architectural heritage,
- Establish guidelines for the protection of our natural environment.
- Provide opportunities for further improving the standard of public and private sector architecture,
- Provide opportunities for further improving the quality of construction,
- Provide opportunities for further improving the quality of building maintenance,
- Provide opportunities for further improving the quality of the urban design in our cities and in new towns and urban developments.

5. Why Architecture?

The man-made environment is the built environments which includes of course not just architecture but other items such as infrastructure (e.g. roads, drains, street furniture, signages, etc.). The quality of all these shall of course contribute to a quality built environment. However for purposes of brevity in this report, the quality of the built environment is firstly directed here to architecture.

Briefly, architecture exists for either one or a composite of the following reasons:

- as a functional enclosure
- as a symbolic enclosure (e.g. cultural)
- as a financial investment

The primary function of architecture is to provide an enclosure for man's activities (whether for his habitation, for commercial uses, for manufacturing, etc.. This enclosure must be effective in offering protection to the climate and providing an acceptable level of internal comfort. It controls the physiological well being of the users.

Architecture has also a symbolic utility, and the level of importance depends on the building's purpose and function. For instance a National Museum will have an important symbolic role which needs to be shown on the outside of the building and for which a higher amount of the building budget needs to be allowed for. Whereas a simple factory need not have any symbolic function as it is only an enclosure for a manufacturing activity. However, an enlightened client may decide the importance of symbolism for his factory for marketing purposes.

All buildings exist as an investment of money of one sort or another and to a greater or lesser extent depending on the building type. For instance, a hotel or a secretariat building exists as a long term investment and hence a larger budget might be set aside for maintenance equipment for the building, for materials of greater durability and engineering systems that may have higher initial costs but will give long term savings, lower maintenance and require less replacements.

Most buildings are a composite of all the above three reasons, some to a greater extent than others. When combined, architecture is evolved which presents a monument which is functional, aesthetically pleasing and lasting. Therefore, it is important for an enlightened commissioner of buildings to be aware of the above three reasons for building and to budget appropriately for all these three factors and not just for one alone.

6. The Basic Properties of a Quality Built Environment

The commissioning client must understand that all architecture should at least have the following basic properties:

- functionality
- firmness
- delight
- environmental sustainability

'Functionality' means that the building must be practical and functional. It must work effectively for the purposes in which it was intended. No matter how aesthetically pleasing that a building may be, if it does not work, then it is a useless piece of architecture.

'Firmness' means that the building must be structurally stable and be environmentally effective in offering protection from the climatic elements as well as provide an acceptable level of internal comfort.

'Delight' means that it must be aesthetically pleasing. This is often difficult to prove or disprove but it should not be intentionally ugly.

There is no quantifiable standard to measure aesthetic value. Society cast values in accordance to their perception, cultural, experience and educational background. The enrichment of these values depends on the amount of exposure and inputs the society receives. If arts and cultures are not a priority, the level of sophistication is expectedly low. Conversely, if the society is already sophisticated in aesthetic, it demands higher standards of buildings and structures that are going to be put in its environment.

Environmental Sustainability' means that it should respect the natural environment. For example, its construction should not result in extensive devastation of the natural environment, extensive earthworks and siltation of rivers, its construction should use environmentally low-impact materials and systems, its operations must not pollute the environment and create heat-island effect, its internal engineering systems should engender recycling of materials, conservation of energy, etc.

7. Key Public Buildings

Key Public Buildings commissioned by the Government should set the prime example of quality built environment because of their high level of visibility. They are icons to represent the country's aspirations, achievements and unity. As such, they serve as paragon for other clients.

Such buildings include: general public buildings (e.g. State Secretariats, District Offices, etc.), special public buildings (e.g. airport buildings, museums, libraries, etc.), major public housing, signature public buildings (e.g. Headquarter Buildings of governmental corporations, convention centers, sports stadiums, telecommunication towers, etc.).

For this purpose, high standards and quality are to be expected of public buildings. They are to be commensurated by similar standards of maintenance and operation.

8. Incorporating Culture in Architecture

A quality built environment must be a reflection of the place and time and people of Malaysia. This is of course simple to do but difficult to do well. For to reduce culture to simple shapes and symbols can become a gross simplification of culture and can on occasions, have an adverse impact on the culture itself.

This is especially so where architecture is highly visible and can be interpreted as our culture and arts.

Incorporating culture in architecture essentially means engendering a sense of place in the design. For to reflect culture and sense of place in architecture, the architecture must nurture the following in the user:

- a sense of where he is (e.g. if the building is in Kedah, then the architecture must indicate its locality)
- a sense of who he is (i.e. the building must help the user be aware of who he is and not some other nationality),
- a sense of when he is (i.e. the building must inform user that he is in the 21st century and not in any other century).

The above is intentionally general to permit investigatively-focused creativity but still gives an essential guide to the creation of a quality built environment appropriate to the place and time in Malaysia.

We might adopt a varied but appropriate approach to using our architectural heritage for contemporary architecture purposes through:

- Replication
- Re-interpretation
- Abstraction
- Spirit of the place

We should use any of the above strategies where appropriate for the locality. For example, 'Replication' means replication of the existing architecture of the locality. This is appropriate for historical sensitive areas where the existing architectural style and construction need to be preserved.

'Re-interpretation' is for new buildings where we need to understand the underlying principles of our traditional architecture and culture and to re-interpret these in a contemporary and inventive way.

'Abstraction' means abstracting the symbolic aspects of the traditional culture (e.g. the 'tengelok') and utilising the symbolic aspects of this in the contemporary built environment where appropriate.

'Spirit of the Place' means employing the underlying spirit of the culture and traditional architecture in a new contemporary way (e.g. the 'spirit of the kampong community').

9. Educating the Public and Raising Awareness in Architecture

The communication of the MAP, the appreciation of architecture and quality built environment might be done in the following ways:

- At primary and secondary schools
- By having a permanent and developing exhibition on architecture in the National Museum and museums nationwide
- By a programme of Public Awareness
- Through Advertisements
- By International exhibitions
- By other publications and in the media

10. Architecture and the Quality of Buildings

The MAP also means carrying out endeavors to constantly encourage good architecture and quality in the following areas:

- design
- building construction
- building management and maintenance
- planning and urban design
- quality assurance

The perception of quality in all these areas must also be constantly improved and bench-marked with the best-in-the-world. It is crucial that the client and the contractors take pride in what they build and eventually pass down this service to the users.

11. Pursuit of Innovation in Design, Building Methods, Materials

For a country's architecture and quality built environment to progress there must be constant innovation. The role of the MAP must be to encourage innovation and research in:

- design
- construction methods
- materials
- building environmental engineering systems process
- Impact and application of VT in architecture

12. Urban and Civic Design

Architecture exists in the greater context of its urban environment and city context. The MAP in creating a quality built environment in the greater urban and city planning contexts should involve in the:

- preparation of Urban Design Guidelines for all new town centers (e.g. over 10 acres)
- creation of civic spaces in Malaysian towns and cities
- creation of pedestrian-friendly cities
- formulation of planning policies, building and planning legislations

13. Conservation

MAP must also encompass the existing built environment, the architectural heritage and the natural environment. It must encourage the conservation of:

- the architectural heritage
- traditional construction techniques
- the natural environment

14. Implementation of the Architectural Policy

For the MAP to be effectively implemented, the following are possible strategies to be developed for each of the above by:

- Implementation by mandatory bye-laws and legislation
- Implementation by incentives
- Implementation by education

15. Conclusion

This paper outlines our brief initial appraisal of the need of an architectural policy to guide the development of architecture through the next millennium. It is hoped that the paper would stimulate dialogue and feedback from the players in the building industry and the Government. A concerted effort can then be harnessed to arrive at a comprehensive architectural policy for the nation.

