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Chapter 41

Cultural Mapping, from Klang River transforming to be Muara Royale Restaurant

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on cultural mapping in Klang, a historically rich and multicultural city in Malaysia, with the aim of identifying cultural assets and aesthetic values that can inform the conceptual development of Muara Royale, a tourism-oriented restaurant proposed at Wyndham Acmar Hotel. Klang's vibrant heritage, multicultural identity, and evolving urban landscape offer unique opportunities for creating a dining experience rooted in local culture and environmental awareness. A central aspect of the study is the Klang River, which flows through the heart of the city and has long played a vital role in shaping Klang's identity. In 2024, the river is undergoing a major rejuvenation initiative led by Landasan Lumayan Sdn Bhd (LLSB), focusing on sustainability and riverine cleanup. This transformation serves as both an environmental milestone and a source of design inspiration for the project. The restaurant's concept is built around the theme of *Bendalir*, a word that symbolizes fluidity and reflects the dynamic, ever-changing nature of water. *Bendalir* is interpreted through architectural and interior elements that mimic the graceful rhythms of the river, promoting a sense of continuity, harmony, and movement throughout the space. The design seeks to capture the calming yet powerful energy of flowing water, offering guests a tranquil atmosphere infused with cultural and ecological storytelling. Furthermore, the concept celebrates the biodiversity of the Klang River, acknowledging the cultural significance of water-based food traditions among the local community. By integrating nature, heritage, and gastronomy, this research proposes a dining experience that not only enhances Klang's tourism appeal but also strengthens appreciation for its environmental and cultural landscapes.

Key Words: Cultural mapping, biodiversity, conceptual, identity, sustainability

1. INTRODUCTION

Klang, a historically significant city in Selangor, Malaysia, is renowned for its multicultural fabric and riverside heritage. This study explores how cultural mapping can inform the conceptual design of Muara Royale, a tourism-oriented restaurant proposed at the Wyndham Acmar Hotel. The restaurant concept draws inspiration from Klang's ecological and cultural identity, particularly the Klang River, which has shaped the city's socio-economic and environmental history. The study aims to identify and integrate cultural assets into a spatial and culinary experience that promotes both heritage appreciation and environmental awareness.

A key development in Klang's environmental revitalisation is the rejuvenation of the Klang River, with significant efforts spearheaded by Landasan Lumayan Sdn Bhd (LLSB). In addition, international advocacy has added momentum to these efforts. In 2023, the British band Coldplay collaborated with the Malaysian non-profit organisation The Ocean Cleanup to deploy an Interceptor in the Klang River, aimed at reducing plastic waste before it enters the ocean (The Star, 2023). Such initiatives underscore the growing global recognition of Klang River's environmental value and inform the sustainability-driven concept behind Muara Royale.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural mapping has emerged as a valuable tool in urban planning and place-making, enabling communities to identify and valorise their cultural and historical assets (Stevenson, 2014). It supports sustainable development by grounding tourism and urban projects in local identity. Klang's built environment and intangible cultural heritage—including religious diversity, food traditions, and vernacular architecture—offer rich material for place-based storytelling. River revitalisation efforts have increasingly influenced architectural and urban design narratives. The Klang River rejuvenation project, led by Landasan Lumayan Sdn Bhd (LLSB), focuses on restoring ecological balance and reconnecting people with their riverine environment (LLSB, 2023). Simultaneously, food heritage has been recognised as a powerful cultural marker, particularly in Malaysia's diverse ethnic landscape. Zainal Abidin et al. (2020) highlight the significance of traditional riverine recipes in reinforcing local identity and culinary sustainability.

Additionally, the integration of sustainable materials in design has become a growing trend within environmentally responsible architecture. Recycled plastic, particularly high-density polyethylene (HDPE), has demonstrated promise in furniture manufacturing for its strength, weather resistance, and recyclability. Sung et al. (2021) discuss the emergence of recycled plastic as a sustainable solution for design innovation in the context of a circular economy. Sustainability in furniture design emphasises low-impact materials, renewable resources, and efficient manufacturing techniques to reduce environmental harm (Fuad-Luke, 2009). Moreover, biodegradable, reclaimed, and rapidly renewable materials such as bamboo, cork, and bioplastics are increasingly explored in eco-conscious interiors (Chandrababu & Murthy, 2019). The concept of fluidity in architectural design has been notably explored by Zaha Hadid, whose work is characterised by organic, flowing forms that challenge conventional spatial boundaries. Hadid's designs often evoke the dynamics of water and natural landscapes, embodying a sense of movement and transformation

(Schumacher, 2010). This philosophy aligns with the *Bendalir* concept, providing a theoretical foundation for designing spaces that are both immersive and expressive of natural rhythm. This design approach also draws from the principles of Deconstructivism, an architectural movement that disrupts traditional geometry to reveal complexity and dynamic form. Architects such as Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman used fragmented and non-linear compositions to challenge perceptions of space and flow, thereby complementing the notion of fluidity through architectural disjunction and reinterpretation (Wigley, 1988).

Prominent figures like Frank O. Gehry have also played a vital role in shaping the Deconstructivist movement. Gehry's projects, including the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, demonstrate the expressive potential of non-traditional materials and sculptural form. His architectural language embraces unpredictability and visual tension, embodying the deconstructed yet cohesive spirit that aligns with the fluid narrative envisioned in Muara Royale (Jodidio, 2009). When considered alongside Zaha Hadid's biomorphic forms, Gehry's fragmented compositions contribute to a broader framework of dynamic and responsive architectural expression. By merging Deconstructivist strategies with biomorphic inspiration, Muara Royale aims to produce a space that is simultaneously organic, poetic, and intellectually provocative.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative cultural mapping as its primary method, involving visual surveys, site observation, and the review of historical records, media, and local narratives. Cultural mapping was used to identify physical and intangible assets across Klang, including architectural motifs, traditional practices, and biodiversity linked to the Klang River. The findings were then translated into a design brief for Muara Royale, where the concept of *Bendalir* (fluidity) was selected to represent the evolving nature of water and culture. Architectural interpretation was guided by biomimicry principles, with a focus on the Klang River's natural flow, biodiversity, and symbolism. As part of the project's sustainable design strategy, materials research was conducted to explore the use of recycled plastic waste collected from the Klang River, particularly for crafting custom furniture. This approach not only supports environmental cleanup efforts but also contributes to circular economy practices in design. Local gastronomy research further informed the proposed menu and customer experience design, ensuring alignment between spatial design and culinary storytelling.

Additionally, case studies were reviewed to guide the conceptual development of Muara Royale. The Heydar Aliyev Center by Zaha Hadid exemplifies fluidity in form through seamless curves and organic transitions, aligning with the *Bendalir* ethos. In terms of sustainable dining spaces, Silo in London serves as a zero-waste restaurant that uses recycled materials in its interiors, including furniture made from upcycled plastic and

compressed food packaging. These cases informed both the spatial fluidity and sustainable material strategies adopted in the project

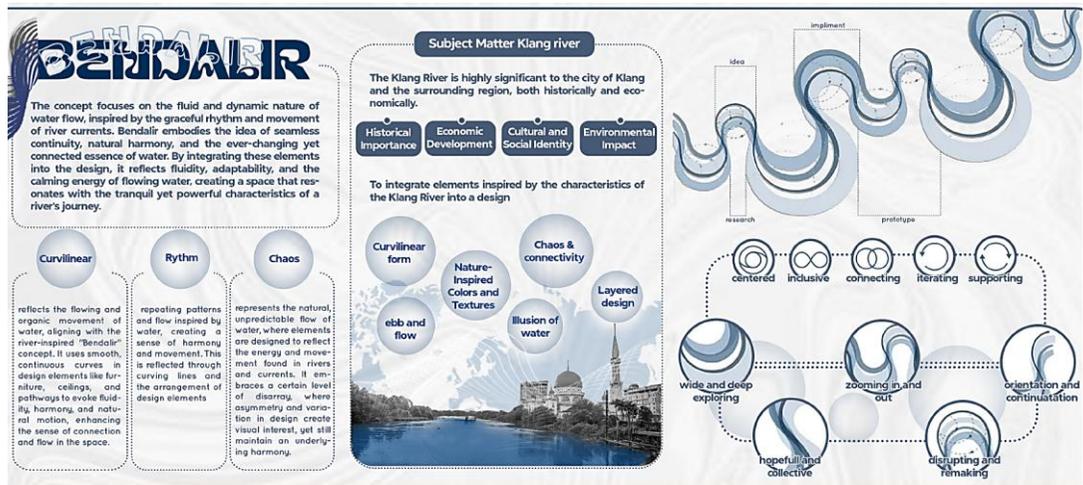


Figure 1: Conceptual Development for Muara Royale Restaurant

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The cultural mapping revealed a strong connection between the Klang River and local cultural identity. Heritage buildings, waterfront temples, and long-standing food stalls near the river reinforce the significance of this natural element. The concept of *Bendalir* was developed to embody fluidity, reflecting both environmental rhythms and cultural transitions. The restaurant's proposed layout features curvilinear forms and materials inspired by riverine textures—such as flowing wood grains and reflective surfaces—to evoke a sense of movement. Interior spaces are arranged to simulate a continuous flow, encouraging a calm and immersive experience. Water-themed elements are integrated without literal replication, maintaining subtlety and elegance.

A key innovation in the design is the use of recycled plastic waste retrieved from the Klang River in the fabrication of furniture and interior elements. Custom-designed chairs and tables incorporate this upcycled material, creating a unique visual language that ties back to the project's ecological theme. This strategy not only showcases environmental stewardship but also raises awareness among visitors about river pollution and the importance of sustainable practices. The integration of waste materials into high-end dining spaces challenges traditional perceptions of value and aesthetics in interior design. Research shows that recycled plastic, when properly processed, offers structural durability and aesthetic versatility, making it suitable for sustainable furniture design (Sung et al., 2021).

Culinary offerings are designed to highlight the biodiversity of the river, with an emphasis on traditional Malay, Chinese, and Indian recipes that use freshwater ingredients. Dishes like *asam pedas ikan sungai* and herbal soups demonstrate the project's commitment

to culinary heritage. This integration of design, nature, and food supports Klang's cultural tourism goals while addressing environmental sustainability.

5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATION

This research demonstrates that cultural mapping can be a vital tool in shaping meaningful, sustainable tourism experiences. The Muara Royale concept, rooted in Klang's riverine identity and expressed through the theme of *Bendalir*, offers a model for how design and gastronomy can reflect and reinforce cultural narratives. The incorporation of ecological and heritage elements fosters a sense of place, which is increasingly valuable in a globalised tourism market.

One of the project's key innovations—the use of recycled plastic waste from the Klang River in furniture design—illustrates how creative design practices can directly contribute to environmental restoration and awareness. It exemplifies how circular design thinking can be embedded in tourism development without compromising aesthetics or user experience.

It is recommended that similar projects engage in thorough cultural mapping at the early stages of design to ensure authenticity and relevance. Future research should include community engagement to further validate and enrich the cultural narratives incorporated into design proposals. Additionally, collaborations with environmental agencies and recycling initiatives are encouraged to enhance the impact of sustainable materials in design innovation.

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