

Balancing Tradition and Development: Preserving the Skyline of Kampung Baru Urban Village, Kuala Lumpur

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 17 November 2025
Revised 28 May 2026
Accepted 02 June 2026
Online first
Published 01 July 2026

Keywords:
Urban Village
Skyline
Cultural Landmark
Preservation
Street Character

DOI:
[10.24191/bej.v23i2.9582](https://doi.org/10.24191/bej.v23i2.9582)

ABSTRACT

Urban skylines constitute an important dimension of urban identity, functioning not only as visual profiles but also as cultural landscapes where memory, heritage, and development intersect. However, existing scholarship has largely focused on iconic city skylines and high-rise aesthetics, with limited attention to urban village skylines as living heritage environments. This study addresses this gap by examining Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur, a historic Malay enclave where traditional houses, mosques, food streets, vegetation, and village-scale streetscapes coexist with surrounding high-rise development. The aim is to investigate how Kampung Baru's cultural identity, as expressed through its urban village skyline, can be safeguarded within ongoing urban growth pressures. The objectives are (i) to examine how skyline conditions (traditional, mixed, and modern-dominant) and cultural landscape elements contribute to Kampung Baru's identity, and (ii) to propose integrated preservation strategies balancing heritage conservation with contemporary urban development. Methodologically, the study adopts a convergent mixed-methods design underpinned by convergent triangulation, integrating site observations (VOP1–VOP10), stakeholder interviews (N=4), and a survey (N=55). Data were analysed separately and then integrated to enable cross-validation between spatial conditions, institutional perspectives, and community perceptions, strengthening interpretive reliability. The findings reveal three (3) skyline conditions—traditional-dominant, balanced traditional-modern, and modern-dominant—showing how high-rise development reshapes heritage visibility and cultural continuity. The study recommends height control, preservation zoning, restoration of traditional houses, landscape management, and community-based planning. It reframes the urban village skyline as a living cultural archive and supports heritage-sensitive urban development aligned with Sustainable

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<https://doi.org/10.24191/bej.v23i2.9582>

Development Goals (SDGs), Goal 11 for sustainable cities and communities.

INTRODUCTION

Urban skylines are significant expressions of city identity, visually negotiating heritage, built form, and landmarks. In historic urban areas, the skyline is a cultural landscape communicating memory, continuity, and place identity (Rosnan et al., 2021). However, rapid vertical development increasingly threatens the visibility of traditional settlements when high-rise buildings dominate local roofscapes and village-scale environments (Puspitasari & Kwon, 2020). Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur, represents a critical case of this tension; as one (1) of the oldest surviving Malay urban villages, its traditional timber houses, mosques, vegetation, and intimate streetscapes shape a distinctive skyline (Suzaini, 2015). This forms a visual and symbolic counterpoint to the surrounding high-rise city, reinforcing its role as a living Malay cultural enclave. Yet, increasing redevelopment pressure and urban intensification continue to challenge its traditional character, cultural visibility, and community identity.

Although Kampung Baru is widely discussed regarding redevelopment, tourism, and socio-cultural change, limited attention has been given to the skyline as a medium of heritage preservation, despite evidence that urban growth can generate economic value while weakening cultural visibility and place identity (Puspitasari & Kwon, 2020). This study addresses this gap through a convergent mixed-methods approach integrating spatial observations, structured interviews, and survey data to examine how skyline elements contribute to urban village identity. Hence, the aim is to investigate how Kampung Baru's cultural identity, as expressed through its urban village skyline, can be safeguarded within ongoing urban growth. The objectives are (i) to examine how skyline elements contribute to Kampung Baru's identity as an urban village, and (ii) to propose strategies that balance heritage preservation with contemporary urban development in Kampung Baru.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The preservation of cultural heritage in rapidly modernising cities requires a conceptual shift from the conservation of individual buildings to the management of wider urban landscapes, visual settings, and cultural meanings. Within this broader perspective, the skyline becomes an important component of urban identity because it represents the visual relationship between built form, landmarks, landscape, historical continuity, and collective memory. Lynch (1960) argues that the imageability of a city is shaped by identifiable elements such as landmarks, edges, paths, nodes, and districts, while Attoe (1981) positions the skyline as an urban silhouette through which the symbolic and historical character of a city can be read. This suggests that skylines should not be treated merely as aesthetic profiles but as culturally embedded urban forms that influence how cities are perceived, remembered, and valued.

This perspective is particularly relevant to traditional urban villages located within metropolitan cores, where development pressure often transforms both the physical fabric and the symbolic visibility of heritage. The Historic Urban Landscape approach introduced by UNESCO (2011) provides a useful framework because it emphasises the integration of heritage conservation with urban development, governance, community values, and environmental quality. Rather than separating preservation from modernisation, the approach recognises historic urban areas as dynamic landscapes that must evolve while retaining their cultural significance. In line with this, Ripp and Clifford (2025) argue that heritage-based urban development positions cultural heritage as an active driver of planning and development processes,

rather than a limiting constraint, thereby reinforcing more integrated and sustainability-oriented urban transformation. In Kampung Baru, this relationship is especially important because the area's identity is expressed through the coexistence of traditional Malay houses, mosques, food streets, vegetation, and surrounding high-rise development, making its skyline a critical site where heritage and urban growth are continuously negotiated.

Urban Villages as Bridging Spaces

Urban villages have been widely discussed as transitional spaces that mediate between inherited settlement patterns and contemporary urban transformation. Franklin and Tait (2002) argue that the urban village concept carries both social and spatial ambitions, particularly in relation to community cohesion, mixed use, and local identity. Biddulph et al. (2003) further caution that this ideal is often difficult to sustain under market-led development and planning constraints. In Asian contexts, Kochan (2015) and Wang (2022) highlight urban villages as complex socio-spatial formations shaped by land histories, informal economies, local networks, and evolving governance structures. Collectively, these studies suggest that urban villages should be understood not as obsolete settlements, but as culturally embedded landscapes that maintain continuity between traditional life and contemporary urban systems.

In the case of Kampung Baru, this bridging role is particularly significant as it represents one (1) of Kuala Lumpur's most prominent Malay urban enclaves. Ujang and Abdul Aziz (2016) describe it as a living Malay tradition, while Hashim et al. (2017) emphasise its role in sustaining the "soul" of the city. Its value, therefore, extends beyond strategic urban land, encompassing mosque-centred community life, food culture, traditional housing, and collective memory within a high-density metropolitan context. The erosion of such urban villages may lead to a homogenised skyline, weakened place identity, and disrupted community networks at the visual, social, and cultural levels. As Pan and Du (2021) note, redevelopment must therefore be carefully balanced with cultural preservation and social equity to avoid reducing Kampung Baru into fragmented heritage remnants rather than a coherent living cultural landscape.

Visual Complexity and Urban Skylines

Urban skylines are central to the formation of a city's image because they shape how urban environments are visually recognised, emotionally experienced, and symbolically interpreted. Lynch (1960) emphasises the role of landmarks and spatial legibility in creating memorable urban images, while Attoe (1981) argues that skylines communicate the character, aspirations, and historical depth of cities. Kropf (2017) further highlights the importance of urban morphology in understanding how cities achieve visual coherence. Together, these perspectives suggest that skyline analysis must extend beyond building height to include silhouette, scale, rhythm, roofscape, landmark visibility, and the relationship between old and new urban forms.

The importance of visual complexity is further supported by empirical studies on skyline preference. Heath et al. (2000) show that preference for tall-building skylines is shaped by silhouette articulation and compositional balance, while Karimimoshaver et al. (2021) demonstrate that skylines integrating traditional and natural elements are often perceived more positively than purely contemporary forms. In Kampung Baru, this is reflected in the coexistence of mosques, timber houses, roofscapes, vegetation, and food streets against a high-rise metropolitan backdrop. However, uncontrolled vertical development can disrupt this balance. Puspitasari and Kwon (2020) highlight how high-rise clusters can diminish skyline visibility and weaken landmark prominence. In Kampung Baru, similar pressures risk transforming a layered cultural skyline into a modern-dominant profile where heritage elements become visually marginal, weakening cultural memory, identity, and emotional attachment. Accordingly, skyline preservation should incorporate

height control, view corridor protection, roofscape continuity, and sensitive integration of new development within the existing visual structure.

Cultural Heritage and Community Engagement

Cultural heritage is sustained through the interrelationship between physical form, social practice, collective memory, and everyday use. In historic urban areas, heritage extends beyond monuments and façades to include the cultural processes that give meaning to place. The UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape framework (2011) supports this broader view by integrating physical, social, cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions in heritage conservation. Ginzarly et al. (2019) further argue that heritage management is most effective when embedded within governance systems, planning tools, community participation, and sustainable development strategies. This is highly relevant to Kampung Baru, where heritage is expressed through lived elements such as traditional houses, mosques, food stalls, trees, pedestrian streets, and neighbourhood ties. Hashim and Razy (2017) emphasise safeguarding its socio-cultural identity, while Ujang and Abdul Aziz (2016) highlight its role as a living Malay enclave. Collectively, these studies show that skyline preservation must extend beyond architectural conservation to protect the cultural practices and social relations that sustain its meaning.

Community engagement is therefore central to heritage-sensitive skyline planning. Booth (2012) stresses that public participation is essential in shaping meaningful urban environments, while Elwazani (2024) highlights its role in operationalising the Historic Urban Landscape approach. In Kampung Baru, residents, traders, mosque committees, and landowners hold key knowledge of valued streets, views, and acceptable change. Without their involvement, redevelopment risks producing “decorative heritage,” where traditional elements are visually retained but disconnected from lived culture. This may also lead to the commodification of Malay identity for branding or tourism, while marginalising the community that sustains it. These concerns highlight the need for community-based governance as a core component of skyline preservation, ensuring development decisions are grounded in local memory, cultural values, and everyday experience.

Balancing Modernisation with Sustainable Urban Design

Modernisation and heritage preservation are often positioned as competing agendas, yet sustainable urban design provides a means of reconciling urban growth with cultural continuity. The key issue is not whether Kampung Baru should change, but how change can be managed so that development does not erase the area’s visual, social, and cultural distinctiveness. Bostancı (2021) argues that skyline analysis is essential in understanding the visual character of cities, while Oktay (2024) emphasises that sustainable urbanism must be connected to identity, place quality, and cultural continuity. These perspectives suggest that sustainability should not be limited to environmental performance but must also include heritage, social inclusion, and urban meaning.

The Historic Urban Landscape approach provides an important basis for this integration. UNESCO (2011) promotes the management of historic areas as evolving landscapes, while Guzman et al. (2020) demonstrate that local indicators can be used to assess the relationship between historic urban landscapes and sustainable development. This is directly relevant to Kampung Baru because skyline preservation should not be understood as an attempt to freeze the village in time. Instead, it should guide the form, scale, and character of development so that urban growth strengthens rather than weakens Malay urban identity. In practical terms, this requires height transition zones, sensitive massing, protected view corridors, mosque landmark protection, roofscape continuity, landscape enhancement, pedestrian-friendly streets, and restoration of traditional houses. Rosnan et al. (2021) show that improvements to streetscape organisation, pedestrian networks, and landscape quality can reinforce the sociability and cultural vitality of Jalan Raja

Alang in Kampung Baru. Such interventions suggest that preservation and development can be integrated when design strategies respond to local culture and everyday use.

SITE STUDY

Kampung Baru, one of Kuala Lumpur's most significant urban villages, was established in the late 19th century as a Malay enclave amid the city's rapid growth. Defined by traditional wooden houses, mosques, and local markets, it remains a strong symbol of Malay cultural continuity. Located in the city centre and facing intense development pressure (Hashim & Yaacob, 2011), its skyline reflects a striking contrast between low-rise heritage structures and emerging high-rises. This layered urban form, combined with its cultural and spatial richness, makes Kampung Baru an important case for examining skyline preservation. As a living Malay urban village, it also provides insights into balancing heritage conservation with rapid urbanisation in similar cities across Southeast Asia.

The selection of Kampung Baru is based on three (3) key factors. First, it is a major urban village and a living repository of Malay cultural identity within a 300-acre low- to medium-density enclave (Figure 1). Second, its flat topography and immediate proximity to the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) across the Akleh Highway create unobstructed views of surrounding high-rises, intensifying visual contrast between heritage and modern development. Third, this strong spatial juxtaposition makes Kampung Baru a relevant comparative case for other Southeast Asian urban villages, including those in Jakarta, Bangkok, and Manila. Overall, it provides a critical setting to study how heritage identity and skyline character can be sustained under rapid vertical urban growth.

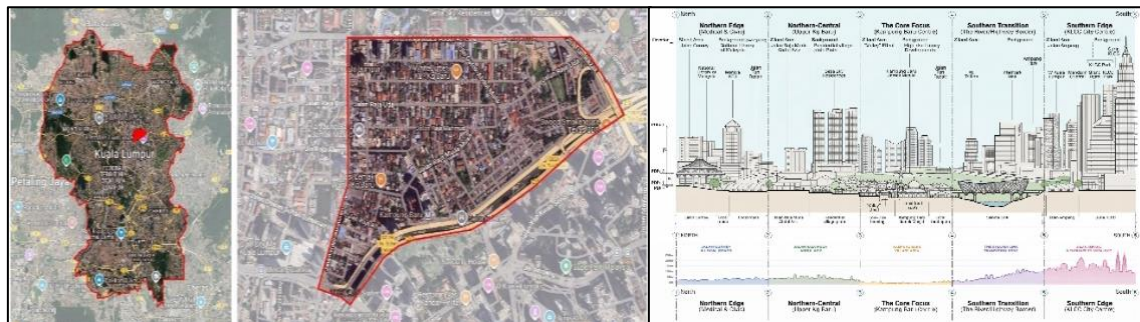


Fig. 1. Location of the 300-acre Study Site and The Contrasting Low-density, Traditional Malay Urban Village Character of Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur

Source: Authors (2025)

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a convergent mixed-methods research design underpinned by convergent triangulation to examine how Kampung Baru's cultural identity and urban village skyline can be safeguarded amidst rapid urban transformation. In this design, site observations (VOP1–VOP10), structured interviews, and a purposive survey (N = 55) were collected within the same research phase, analysed independently, and then systematically compared and integrated. This approach enables cross-validation between physical spatial evidence, professional institutional knowledge, and community perceptions, strengthening the reliability and depth of interpretation. By integrating empirical visual analysis with qualitative narratives and quantitative data, the study ensures a holistic, human-centred understanding of skyline transformation.

Spatial Baseline and Skyline Assessment Using Viewer Observation Points (VOP)

The spatial baseline and skyline assessment was grounded in Wayne Attoe's (1981) urban skyline framework, which conceptualises the skyline as a legible expression of cultural and economic identity. Based on this framework, fieldwork was conducted across ten (10) purposively selected streets in Kampung Baru, with standardised street-level photographs taken from Viewer Observation Points (VOP1–VOP10) to document the relationship between internal village structures and surrounding high-rise development. This establishes a consistent empirical baseline across three (3) typologies—Traditional, Mixed, and Modern Dominant—supporting comparative visual analysis (Figure 2).

The VOP framework is appropriate for skyline studies as it integrates spatial form, visual structure, and human perception. Evidence shows that spatial indicators such as street enclosure ratios influence skyline complexity and visual coherence (Akbarishahabi, 2021), while user viewing behaviour shapes perception of skyline experience (Hiçsönmezler et al., 2024). This approach aligns with street-level and viewshed-based urban analysis methods (Sun et al., 2023; Hou et al., 2024) and supports repeatable, objective interpretation of skyline conditions. By applying VOPs, skyline analysis is grounded in observable viewsheds rather than subjective interpretation, strengthening spatial validity and aligning with established urban visual assessment approaches (Kong et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2025).



Fig. 2. Map of The Kampung Baru Study Area Illustrating the Locations of the ten (10) Viewer Observation Points (VOPs) and Their Corresponding Street-Level Viewshed Orientations Across Three (3) Streets Typology Categories

Source: Authors (2025)

Triangulated Structured Key Informant Interviews with Institutional and Community Stakeholders

Structured interviews were conducted with four (4) purposively selected stakeholders ($N = 4$) to capture institutional and community perspectives on skyline preservation. A senior Landscape Architect (LA) from Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) was included due to their direct involvement in urban planning, policy implementation, and development control in Kampung Baru. Three (3) residents were selected to ensure multi-generational representation: a 60-year-old elderly resident (historical landscape change), a 32-year-old small business owner (current economic and commercial pressures), and a 47-year-old office worker and community figure (bridging community experience and urban development dynamics). This purposive sampling aligns with qualitative research practices prioritising information-rich cases for depth and contextual understanding (Wong et al., 2023).

Interview data were analysed using a line-by-line reflexive thematic approach, involving systematic coding, categorisation, and synthesis into broader themes (Byrne, 2022; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Six (6) key themes emerged: uniqueness, skyline change and urban pressure, perception of development, benefits of modernisation, importance of preservation, and key heritage elements. The process followed established standards for rigour and trustworthiness through transparent coding and theme development (Nowell et al., 2017). Overall, the findings indicate a shared recognition of Kampung Baru's cultural and historical significance across institutional and community perspectives, with triangulation strengthening the credibility and interpretive depth of the analysis.

Purposive Sampling and Mixed-Methods Survey Design for Skyline Perception Analysis

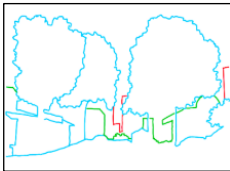
A purposive quantitative perception survey was conducted with 55 local respondents ($N = 55$), recruited through the verified Kampung Baru Facebook platform over a three (3) week period (14 December 2024–3 January 2025). The survey captured community perceptions of skyline character, visual order, and development pressure across three (3) street typologies aligned with the Viewer Observation Point (VOP) framework (Traditional, Mixed, and Modern Dominant areas). This design ensures direct comparability between perceived experiences and spatial conditions identified in the VOP fieldwork.

The purposive sampling strategy targeted respondents familiar with Kampung Baru's built environment, enabling informed evaluation of skyline conditions rather than random general population inference (Campbell et al., 2020). While the sample size ($N = 55$) limits statistical generalisability, this limitation is addressed through methodological triangulation with VOP spatial analysis and semi-structured interviews. This mixed-methods integration follows established principles of convergence, where multiple data sources are combined to strengthen interpretation and validity (Tashakkori et al., 2026; Sharma et al., 2023). Together, these methods enhance the credibility and depth of findings by linking quantified perceptions with observed spatial patterns and lived experiences.

DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

Site Observation

Table 1. Summary of Three (3) Viewpoints in Kampung Baru Showing a Gradient from Strong Heritage Preservation (VOP1), to Transitional Urban Conflict (VOP2), and Stable, Protected Heritage Corridors (VOP3)

Category	Site Evidence	Cross Analysis and Planning Implication
Traditional-Dominant	Foreground Middle-ground Background  	This street keeps its authentic village feel. Residents value the trees that block out nearby tall buildings. New buildings must stay below the tree line to maintain the street's low-rise, pedestrian-friendly character

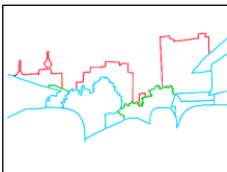
Jalan Raja Mahmud (VOP2) 3.164580, 101.708735			Here, modern high-rises overpower traditional homes, causing residents to feel a loss of open sky and cultural identity. Planners should enforce height step-backs and increase setbacks for new tall buildings to protect the area's traditional look
Jalan Raja Abdullah (VOP3) 3.164245, 101.702938			This area has a successful visual balance. Both planners and residents value how the mosque's minaret stands out among the greenery. This view should be officially protected with a strict two-storey height limit to ensure the minaret remains the main focus

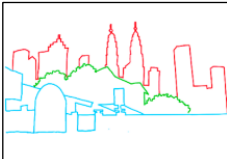
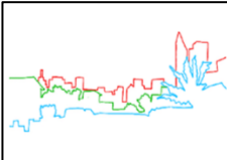
Source: Authors (2025)

Across the three (3) VOP1 to VOP3 shown in Table 1, a clear gradient emerges between heritage preservation and urban pressure in Kampung Baru. VOP1 (Jalan Raja Alang) retains the strongest traditional character, with tree cover and low-rise buildings preserving an authentic streetscape, supporting strict height control. VOP2 (Jalan Raja Mahmud) reflects a transitional condition, where high-rises clash with traditional houses, highlighting tension between development goals and community identity. VOP3 (Jalan Raja Abdullah) is the most visually stable, with the mosque and greenery anchoring the skyline, making it suitable for formal heritage protection. Overall, the three (3) viewpoints illustrate a shift from strict preservation (VOP1) to managed integration (VOP2) and protected landmark corridors (VOP3).

Through VOP4 to VOP6 in Table 2, a clear transition is observed in how heritage character interacts with urban growth in Kampung Baru. VOP4 reflects a transitional condition where mixed-use intensification is beginning to strain the traditional low-rise village fabric, creating concern over the loss of human-scale streetscape and calling for strict height control and building envelope regulations. VOP5 represents the most critical conflict zone, where high-rise development sharply contrasts with historic fabric, leading to strong community concern over visual and cultural displacement, requiring protected viewsheds and strict non-encroachment buffers. In contrast, VOP6 demonstrates a more balanced and stable condition, where natural screening successfully mediates between old and new forms, and both institutional and community perspectives align on maintaining this equilibrium. Collectively, the three (3) viewpoints highlight a gradient from emerging pressure (VOP4), to acute conflict (VOP5), to managed coexistence (VOP6), emphasising the need for scaled, context-sensitive planning controls to protect skyline continuity and heritage identity.

Table 2. VOP4 to VOP6 Analysis Showing a Shift from Emerging Urban Pressure, to Strong Heritage–Development Conflict, and Finally to a More Balanced Coexistence in Kampung Baru

Category	Site Evidence	Cross Analysis and Planning Implication		
Balanced mix of traditional and modern		Foreground 	Middle-ground 	Background 
Jalan Datuk Abdullah Yassin (VOP4) <u>3.163761</u> , <u>101.710907</u>			High-rise growth is disrupting the traditional village scale in this area. To save the street's human-scale character, new developments must follow strict height limits and setbacks to blend in with the existing low-rise surroundings.	

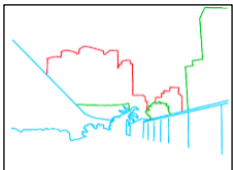
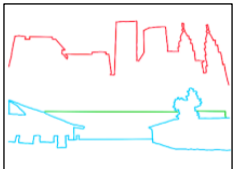
Jalan Raja Muda Musa (VOP5) <u>3.163554,</u> <u>101.707354</u>			Nearby high-rises create a strong visual clash, threatening this street's potential as a heritage corridor. Buffer zones and strict development controls are needed to protect key heritage views and preserve local identity.
Jalan Raja Uda (VOP6) 3.165446, 101.704966			This area successfully uses greenery to soften the transition between traditional and modern buildings. Future developments should follow this balanced model by maintaining landscape buffers and a similar proportion of low-rise buildings.

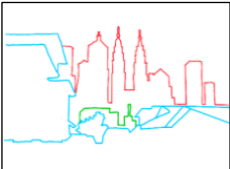
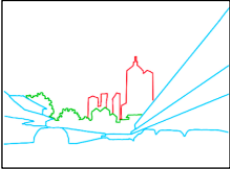
Source: Authors (2025)

From VOP7 to VOP10, an evident evolution is observed, where Kampung Baru shifts from partial heritage loss to near-complete redevelopment. VOP7 shows a fully modernised streetscape where historic identity has been erased, shifting planning focus toward improving street-level livability (Table 3). VOP8 and VOP9 reflect increasing high-rise dominance over the remaining village fabric, creating strong visual pressure and community concern, requiring height control and more sensitive building massing to reduce skyline impact.

By VOP10, the traditional character has largely disappeared, with urban infrastructure taking over, meaning planning priorities move away from skyline preservation toward enhancing public space quality, greenery, and environmental comfort.

Table 3. Progressive Transformation of Kampung Baru from Partial Heritage Loss (VOP7) to Full Redevelopment (VOP10), Showing Increasing High-Rise Dominance and a Shift in Planning Focus from Skyline Preservation to Public Space Quality

Category	Site Evidence	Cross Analysis and Planning Implication		
Modern-dominant		Foreground 	Middle-ground 	Background 
Jalan Sungai Baru (VOP7) 3.162197, 101.710024			Modern buildings completely dominate the skyline, erasing the area's historic identity. Since the old fabric is gone, planning should shift focus to improving the street-level experience with pedestrian-friendly designs and active frontages.	
Jalan Datuk Abdul Malik (VOP8) 3.163640, 101.711346			Corporate towers overpower the traditional character, reflecting a clear imbalance between development and heritage. Height controls and varied building shapes are needed to reduce skyline dominance and improve visual openness.	

Lorong Raja Musa 4 (VOP9) 3.162438, 101.708717			The original village character has been replaced by dense urban infrastructure. Instead of skyline protection, future efforts should focus on improving public spaces and the local microclimate using greenery and plazas.
Jalan Hassan Salleh (VOP10) 3.161023, 101.706097			The original village character has largely disappeared, replaced by dense urban infrastructure with minimal natural or heritage elements remaining. Focus on improving public space quality and microclimate through greenery, plazas, and environmental design rather than skyline protection.

Source: Authors (2025)

A Thematic Analysis of Stakeholder Perspectives from Structured Interviews in Kampung Baru

This section compares structured interviews with a DBKL Landscape Architect (LA), representing the institutional planning authority, and local residents in Kampung Baru. The community sample was purposively selected to reflect multi-generational and socio-economic perspectives: LR1 (60-year-old long-term resident) provides historical insight into landscape change; LR2 (32-year-old small business owner) reflects commercial and tourism pressures; and LR3 (47-year-old corporate worker and community figure) bridges everyday lived experience with broader urban development dynamics.

Six (6) key themes structure the analysis—uniqueness, skyline change and urban pressure, perception of development, benefits of modernisation, importance of preservation, and key heritage elements—revealing how institutional and community perspectives both converge and diverge in shaping Kampung Baru's transformation.

(i) Uniqueness

Both LA and residents recognise Kampung Baru as a rare urban village. LA emphasises regulatory protection of its low-rise identity, while residents highlight lived identity through ancestral ties (LR1), economic-cultural value (LR2), and visual contrast with high-rises (LR3).

(ii) Skyline Change & Urban Pressure

Both acknowledge change but differ in framing. LA focuses on height control and viewshed management, while residents stress emotional loss, land value pressure, and weak buffering.

(iii) Perception of Development

LA views development as structured planning, while residents show mixed responses: displacement concerns (LR1), economic opportunity (LR2), and calls for participation (LR3).

(iv) Benefits of Modernisation

Both recognise benefits such as infrastructure and urban efficiency, though residents highlight uneven impacts between opportunity and displacement risk.

(v) Importance of Preservation

There is strong agreement on preservation, but LA stresses zoning tools while residents emphasise adaptive reuse and continuity of community life.

(vi) Key Heritage Elements

LA prioritises roofscapes, trees, and spatial continuity, while residents emphasise lived elements such as homes, food culture, and street life, reinforcing Kampung Baru as a living cultural landscape.

Quantitative Analysis of Community Perceptions and Skyline Preferences from Survey Data

This survey captures the views of 55 respondents on skyline changes in Kampung Baru, focusing on community preferences, street-level visual conditions, and perceived development challenges. Overall, the findings show a consistent pattern: residents value cultural identity, prefer balanced development, and expect stronger control over future change.

(i) Preference for Strengthening Traditional Identity

Although 54.5% perceive the current skyline as a balanced mix of old and new, future preferences shift slightly toward tradition. About 30.9% prefer a stronger traditional presence compared to 27.3% who favour a fully modern skyline, indicating acceptance of the current condition but a desire to reinforce heritage character.

(ii) Identity Rooted in Visual Balance and Heritage

A strong 83.6% associate Kampung Baru's identity with the coexistence of traditional and modern elements, while 41.8%–85.4% highlight the importance of historical landmarks. Over 60% rate heritage preservation as highly important, showing that identity is grounded in balance rather than replacement.

(iii) Fragmented Skyline and Sensitive Transitions

Street-level findings show uneven conditions, with traditional areas reaching up to 63.6% and modern-dominant streets up to 55.7%. Balanced zones exist but remain fragile, where small changes could easily disrupt visual harmony.

(iv) Cultural and Urban Impact Concerns

More than half (50.9%) view high-rise development as a cultural threat. Key concerns include loss of identity (74.5%), loss of village character (72.7%), traffic congestion (63.6%), and rising property prices (47.3%), reflecting both cultural and everyday pressures.

(v) Demand for Stronger Control and Inclusive Planning

There is strong support for intervention, with 70.9% calling for stricter regulations. Preferred strategies include height limits (69.1%), design guidelines (63.6%), heritage housing support (54.5%), and community-based planning (52.7%), reflecting a clear demand for controlled and inclusive development.

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

This section presents five (5) key findings derived from convergent triangulation, integrating site observations across VOP1–VOP10 with stakeholder interviews and survey data (N = 55). The approach enables systematic cross-validation between spatial evidence, institutional perspectives, and community experiences, producing a coherent interpretation of Kampung Baru's skyline transformation. Overall, the findings reveal consistent alignment between physical conditions, lived perceptions, and quantified responses, highlighting key patterns of change, tension, and governance challenges.

(i) Verified Skyline Gradient Across VOP1–VOP10

A clear transition is observed from traditional streets (VOP1, VOP3) to modern-dominant corridors (VOP7, VOP8, VOP10). Interviews confirm differing interpretations: LA frames it as planned zoning, while residents describe lived contrast. The survey supports this pattern, with 54.5% perceiving a mixed skyline; VOP6 is seen as balanced (58.0%) and VOP7 as modern-dominant (55.7%).

(ii) Green Buffers Strengthen Balance (VOP2, VOP4, VOP6)

These streets maintain visual harmony through mature vegetation and soft landscape buffers. This is reinforced by LA perspectives on greenery as a planning tool and residents lived appreciation. Survey data further confirms this, with 65.5% prioritising visual harmony and 30.9% identifying natural surroundings as key.

(iii) Transitional Tension at VOP5 and VOP1

These streets show direct conflict between high-rise and low-rise forms without buffering. Residents report discomfort and intrusion, while planners view them as development gateways. VOP5 shows a split perception (38.2% traditional vs 38.2% modern), highlighting fragile equilibrium.

(iv) Loss of Traditional Fabric (VOP7, VOP8, VOP10)

These streets are dominated by modern development, with strong agreement among residents on cultural displacement and identity loss. This aligns with survey findings where 50.9% see high-rises as a threat, and 74.5%–72.7% report loss of identity and village character.

(v) Demand for Stronger Control

Across all VOPs, governance gaps are evident. Both interviews and survey (70.9%) strongly support stricter regulation, including height limits (69.1%) and design guidelines (63.6%), confirming a shared need for enforceable planning control.

DISCUSSIONS

Kampung Baru's Skyline as a Living Expression of Cultural Identity

The triangulated findings show that Kampung Baru's skyline is not merely a visual backdrop, but a living cultural landscape where Malay urban identity is produced, recognised, and contested. Site observations highlight that timber houses, mosques, vegetation, food stalls, and low-rise streetscapes remain strong foreground and middle-ground elements, especially along Jalan Raja Alang, Jalan Raja Mahmud, and Jalan Raja Abdullah. These form a distinctive village silhouette contrasting with the surrounding high-rises and sustaining visual legibility. Silhouettes, rooflines, and spatial composition strongly shape cityscape identity (Keire & Vugule, 2022). This is reinforced by DBKL's Landscape Architect and community interviews identifying mosques, traditional houses, and food culture as key markers, while survey findings link skyline identity to the coexistence of traditional-modern elements and street character.

These findings align with literature describing cultural landscapes and urban villages as anchors of identity and place attachment (Chen et al., 2021; Marpaung, 2017; Yusoff et al., 2014). In Kampung Baru, the skyline operates as a relational system where built form, memory, religion, food culture, and everyday life interweave, framing it as a living Malay tradition rather than a static heritage site (Hashim et al., 2017; Ujang & Abdul Aziz, 2016). Urban villages mediate between continuity and transformation (Kochan, 2015; Wang, 2022), where skyline elements anchor collective memory and urban meaning (Ahmed & Ashour, 2023). Safeguarding Kampung Baru's skyline requires protecting the wider cultural landscape that sustains its visual, social, and symbolic legibility.

Contrasting Skyline Characters: From Traditional to Modern-Dominant

Findings show Kampung Baru's skyline is a layered cultural landscape where heritage and modernity coexist at varying intensities across three (3) observed conditions: traditional-dominant, balanced, and modern-dominant. Traditional-dominant areas retain low-rise Malay village character through timber houses, mosques, and food stalls. Balanced streets (e.g., Jalan Datuk Abdullah Yassin) show coexisting traditional and modern forms, whereas modern-dominant streets (e.g., Jalan Sungai Baru) are shaped by high-rise developments that reduce traditional elements to fragmented background traces (UNESCO, 2023).

Survey findings indicate that perception does not always align with physical conditions. Lorong Raja Musa 4 is still perceived as traditional despite modern pressure, suggesting skyline identity is anchored by memory, familiarity, and emotional attachment (Wan, 2014). This links visual form and perception. While skyline preference depends on complexity and spatial relationships rather than height alone (Heath et al., 2000), attachment to traditional and natural elements remains strong despite high-rise pressure (Karimimoshaver et al., 2021). However, urban village identity remains fragile under market forces (Biddulph et al., 2003). Consequently, remembered heritage sustained through memory and reinterpretation is essential for protecting identity beyond physical change (Kayikci & Sehlirkoglu, 2025).

Urban Development Pressures and Community Concerns

Kampung Baru's skyline is shaped not only by physical development but also by imbalances between land value, planning authority, market pressure, and community heritage (Abd Razak & Yin, 2021). While DBKL's Landscape Architects' emphasis on phased development, consultation, compensation, and approval procedures reflects institutional efforts to manage change, procedural consultation alone is insufficient. Engaging residents only after key development decisions are made risks turning participation administrative rather than genuinely influential, limiting its impact on skyline outcomes.

This concern aligns with wider redevelopment debates. Abd Malek and Mahat (2020) show that redevelopment alters Kampung Baru's physical character and residential typologies, while Hanafiah et al. (2021) caution that tourism-driven economic gains intensify pressure on local communities. Similarly, Li et al. (2014) demonstrate in Guangzhou's Liede Village that redevelopment produces tensions between modernisation, land value, and continuity. The urban village ideal weakens when planning visions are overtaken by development imperatives (Franklin & Tait, 2002), highlighting Kampung Baru within a political economy where heritage, land ownership, and state-led growth intertwine (King, 2020). Consequently, the skyline reflects community anxiety over belonging, memory, and cultural survival. Residents act as cultural custodians whose situated knowledge of traditional houses, mosque visibility, and village life is essential to understanding skyline meaning.

Strategies for Balancing Heritage and Development

Despite growing pressures from modernisation, triangulated findings from site observations (VOP1–VOP10), interviews, and survey responses indicate that Kampung Baru's skyline can still be safeguarded through an integrated, context-sensitive approach (Tan, 2025). Field observations show that traditional streetscapes, mosques, timber houses, vegetation, food stalls, and village-scale spatial patterns remain key visual anchors of Malay urban identity, although increasingly disrupted by surrounding high-rise development. These patterns are reinforced by interviews with DBKL's Landscape Architect and community stakeholders, who emphasise preservation zones, landscape management, phased development, and stricter control of vertical growth. Survey findings further support this, with strong approval for height controls, restoration of traditional houses, stricter regulations, and community-based planning (Dong et al., 2025). Collectively, the findings confirm the skyline as a living cultural landscape rather than a static backdrop for redevelopment.

Overall, the study argues that Kampung Baru's future should not be framed as a binary choice between preservation and development, but as a managed process where development enhances rather than diminishes cultural visibility. A comprehensive strategy is therefore required, integrating zoning controls, height regulation, view corridor protection, adaptive reuse of traditional houses, landscape management, streetscape enhancement, and community-based governance. This aligns with Shehata (2022), who emphasises adaptive heritage conservation under urban pressure, and Ujang (2016), who highlights stakeholder coordination, land governance, and participatory planning in Kampung Baru's transformation. Complementing this, Lee and Baccelli (2026) show that skyline geometry and building form significantly influence sky visibility and visual continuity in dense urban contexts. Together, these perspectives support a balanced planning approach that preserves Kampung Baru's cultural skyline identity while accommodating controlled urban growth within Kuala Lumpur's evolving metropolitan landscape.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study demonstrates that Kampung Baru's skyline is more than a visual arrangement of buildings; it is a living cultural landscape where Malay urban identity, collective memory, and metropolitan development pressures are continuously negotiated. Through convergent triangulation of site observations across ten (10) VOP streets (traditional-dominant, mixed, and modern-dominant conditions), structured interviews with one (1) DBKL's Landscape Architect and three (3) residents, and a survey of 55 respondents, the findings show that skyline conditions emerge from interactions between timber houses, mosques, vegetation, food streets, village-scale streetscapes, and surrounding high-rise development. These interactions produce three (3) skyline conditions, reflecting uneven heritage visibility and differing development pressures that require differentiated planning responses.

The main contribution of this study is reframing skyline preservation as a cultural landscape and governance issue rather than a purely visual or architectural concern. Findings highlight strong community concern over identity loss and consistent support for height control, zoning enforcement, and protection of visual harmony. This positions Kampung Baru's skyline as a dynamic system where spatial form, policy direction, and community perception must be integrated rather than treated separately.

At the VOP level, analysis across ten (10) streets establishes a clear gradient from traditional to modern-dominant conditions, while interviews with four (4) stakeholders provide institutional and lived perspectives on development pressure, heritage value, and planning constraints. The survey (N=55) validates these patterns by quantifying perceptions of skyline change, identity loss, and support for regulation. To address study limitations, future research should expand VOP coverage using GIS-based mapping, include wider stakeholder groups such as planners and developers, and apply stratified sampling for stronger generalisability. These enhancements will support more robust, evidence-based planning aligned with SDG 11 for inclusive, heritage-sensitive, and sustainable urban development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alyaa Syahirah Azmi conducted the site observations, structured interviews, and survey administration from October 2024 through January 2025 under the guidance of the first author. Her contributions were integral to the completion of this study. This research was self-funded.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts, and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Raziah Ahmad conceptualised the research framework, developed the core ideas, and led the writing and critical revision of the manuscript. Alyaa Syahirah Azmi conducted the data collection, including site observations, structured interviews, and survey administration. Rafiuddin Roslan, as the corresponding author, managed manuscript preparation, including graphics, formatting, and submission, ensuring clarity and consistency throughout. Nor Zalina Harun contributed to reviewing and refining the manuscript to ensure overall coherence and academic rigour. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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