Abstract: This paper suggests the rethinking on the approaches and architectural experimentation that had been conducted by the Malaysian architectural profession towards the search for a national identity in architecture towards a sustainable community. The first part will discussed on the attempt and discourse that had been conducted which involved the public and private sectors. Since achieving our independence, architects, patrons and the public had conducted experimentation on the various approaches and aspects pertaining to the issue of a Malaysian architectural identity through discourse, writings and architectural design. Comments and critiques were received from the public as well as from architectural commentators and architectural historians from locals and abroad. It was critically claimed that architectural practice in our country still lacks depth in its theoretical approach and weak in it construction implementation which lead to a crisis in the profession. The crisis on the Built Environments’ education programmes over the last two decades also has led the professional practice of architecture having reached sub standard level with no proper philosophical and theoretical approach. The failure on the quest for an identity in architecture for the last four decades was attributed to architects and other implementers failing to disseminate the ideas and intentions to the grass roots level. No records or evident can be found to support the notion that the ideas of searching for a national identity in architecture has been delivered to grass root or public level. It is imperative that current generation of architects and implementers of the profession re-evaluating the idea and making further mission successful.

Keywords: national identity in architecture, sustainable community, architectural crisis, re-evaluating of identity.

1 INTRODUCTION

The issue of a national identity has been a subject long discussed ever since Malaysia gained its independence. A national identity in architecture is also an abstract and subjective topic to be discussed because it’s depends on one’s individual perceptions and outlook. According to Lukman Z. Mohammad (2001), each individual embrace three types of identity throughout his life. Those are his personal identity, ethnic identity and national identity. All these three identities will not be embraced simultaneously. Within the same ethnic group; he will compete and strive for his own personal identity. Whilst in a diverse ethnic cluster, he will compete for his ethnic identity and in the global cluster pushes for his national identity. All these is solely to establish individuality when compare with others.

An Architectural identity can also be discussed in the same manner whilst referring to its context, place, time, consumerism’s status etc.

This paper intends to discuss the issues related to the quest for a national identity in Malaysia’s architecture. Early discussion will look at various attempts, discourses, approaches and design experimentation that have been practice by Malaysian architects and other implementers related to the profession. Noted during the process, crisis in the profession of architecture, architectural practices and build environments’ education programmes which led to the failure of the mission. A lack of managing approach on disseminating the ideas to the grass root has been identified as one of the key the issues that made the mission a failure. This idea has been stagnant for more than two decades without any analysis conducted to look at its failure. Therefore this paper suggests that all Malaysian architects or anyone of a specific interest in the profession re-examined the issue and rethink its objectives and importance for the betterment of the architectural and built environment development in our country.

The issue of a national identity has been a subject long discussed ever since Malaysia gained its independence. A national identity in architecture is also an abstract and subjective topic to be discussed because it’s depends on one’s individual perceptions and outlook. According to Lukman Z. Mohammad (2001), each individual embrace three types of identity throughout his life. Those are his personal identity, ethnic identity and national identity. All these three identities will not be embraced simultaneously. Within the same ethnic group; he will compete and strive for his own personal identity. Whilst in a diverse ethnic cluster, he will compete for his ethnic identity and in the global cluster pushes for his national identity. All these is solely to establish individuality when compare with others. An Architectural identity can also be discussed in the same manner whilst referring to its context, place, time, consumerism’s status etc.

This paper intends to discuss the issues related to the quest for a national identity in Malaysia’s architecture. Early discussion will look at various attempts, discourses, approaches and design experimentation that have been practice by Malaysian architects and other implementers related to the profession. Noted during the process, crisis in the profession of architecture, architectural practices and build environments’ education programmes which led to the failure of the mission. A lack of managing approach on
disseminating the ideas to the grass root has been identified as one of the key the issues that made the mission a failure. This idea has been stagnant for more than two decades without any analysis conducted to look at its failure. Therefore this paper suggests that all Malaysian architects or anyone of a specific interest in the profession re-examined the issue and rethink its objectives and importance for the betterment of the architectural and built environment development in our country.

Looking at most architectural development on the threshold of new millennium, it seems that not much control was reflected on the architectural style and developments. Eclectic architectural approaches with combination of styles between India, Greek and Roman Classic, Turkey and Persian, Postmodern, Nusantara and International had rampantly contaminated the ideas of national identity. Environmental, human and socio cultural factors as well as context with ‘time and place’ no longer bear any consideration in the architectural building design. The elements of pride, richness, greatness, sophistication etc became the preferred factors without take into consideration the environment, human comfort, security, privacy and accessibility to end users and persons with disability. The search for a national identity in architecture no longer became an important pursuit to be discussed and considered during design process. Consequently, confusion developed within the public and all feelings of pride for their own heritage became lost. Urban developments and architectural works disregarded the environment and natural resources and created various difficulties to the public which included the impact of heat dome, flash flood, crimes and etc. in urban areas.

Public life became more crucial with various social and life’s tension as living area no longer became comfortable and safe to live due to improper planning, design faults and disputes over construction activities. Developers, patrons and other respective parties involved in the development were only concerned about their own self interests and profits. Architecture and urban developments became commodities and issues of comfort became second to none. The issue of a national architectural identity was no longer an agenda of development.

2 THE ARCHITECTURAL CRISIS

Most of the architectural developments in Malaysia are seen as not being practiced in the manner it should have. Malaysian’s are constantly highlighted on various problems and difficulties pertaining to built environment, be it social, environmental, thermal or even technical. Building collapses, land slides, flash flood, children fallen from buildings, architectural style that is unpleasant to the eyes, problems on thermal comfort, neighbouring hood issues, imitating building image, and the lists goes on. These are outright crisis which is one of the main reasons why the search for a national identity in architecture is inevitable. Responsibilities of the works on the built environment are not restricted to only technocrat person such as architects, town planners, engineers, quantity surveyors etc. but should also includes birocrats groups such as patrons and developers of such development projects. In many occasions, their voice is louder than the voice of the architect. In the current phenomena it seems, the architect’s has lost his voice as more development projects are being treated as commodity for economic reasons rather than complying to various users need. Many new younger generation architects merely became tools of the system with design philosophies became secondary objectives.

Common to the crisis and constantly criticised are the architect’s profession, imitation of foreign architectural style, revival of traditional Malay architecture and heritage, style of Islamic architecture and various issues on housing. Should there be no action taken by the respective parties to overcome the problems, the issues will further continue to pose threat to the nation. The public or the end users will continue receiving shoddy quality of works as humanistic values be sacrificed for materialistic values and developments of the built environment become commodities rather than social obligation.

Mastor Surat (2007) discussed four main problems related the issues in the architectural profession in Malaysia. The first is regarding our architectural direction towards identity, the second is with regards to the lack of architectural discourse to guide the movement, third is regarding the architect’s roles and obligations and the forth is regarding management of the architectural developments. All four main problems created a chain reaction impact to the architectural profession that contributes the crisis become worsened.

After 51 years of independence, the quality and moral values of the architectural and built environment developments in Malaysia has decline to an extent that the architectural profession becomes insignificant to the well being of the community. The main factor of course is due to the lack of built environment and architectural discourse and unclear path to visualise the identity. The architectural approach practiced were merely imitation of architectural elements and styles from the past be it from local heritage or overseas especially from European, Central Asia and Western Asia. Any approach considered which is related to the understanding of local context such as climate and socio-culture is only done with little consideration and thinking.

Image of architectural developments in the late 20th century in Malaysia showed that most Malaysian architects, patrons and communities lacks fresh ideas and have conflicts. Foreign approach such as Eclectic Post-Modernism with revival of Neo-Classic, Gothic Revival, ancient Egypt and Mogul buildings’ elements has been applied to new building without any control and these has resulted in the spolit images and degraded environment of our city. Formation of style and form became the main agenda of the design ignoring function and the socio-culture of the users. Architects and architectural commentator seems to have lost their credibility to overcome the problems due to
powerful patrons and the naive ness of the public about the truth in architecture.

Introduction of irrelevant ethnic identity to buildings facade such as the Bursa Saham building in Kuala Lumpur, Sunway Piramid shopping complex in Subang Jaya, Federal Court Complex in Kuala Lumpur etc., which has no connection with culture and history of the Malaysian community shows a critical conflict in the mind of architects and patrons of the developments. They do not respect or appreciate culture, civilization and belief of the local community but rather applied their own personal symbolism.

In developing the idea of each development, end user’s way of life and socio culture is always ignored by the profession. In addition, it become more sadly as end users are also naive about the kind of developments that they should have received compared to the value of money that they have invested. Failure of the built environment to take into consideration a few factors e.g. socio culture of the end users, climatic, site and environment of the project location and other factors that related to materials and the technology that are suitable to the project requirements has led to failure in the development to provide a sustainable, thermally comfortable and safe environment to humanity.

The most possible reason for this issue is due to misperception of human about dynamism of their socio culture and way of life. In the past, carpenter, patron and end users appreciate that cultural value, local climate and environment need to be considered in the architectural development because they live in the same culture, era and locality. In this modern era architects, technocrats, patron and end users do not understand other people’s culture and their way of life and they do not consider climate and environment during architecture development because the profession has become part of the globalization issues. Most of them do not know values and ritual of the same ethnic because they have been educated in a different kind of education system. In addition, status has become more important in the community. Therefore, one of the ways to resolve the problem is to include architectural development programs in the syllabus of education program so that each of the community will understand the issues besides understanding on the process of designing architecture which is unique and complex.

3 CRISIS IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Built Environment Program discussed in this topic should cover all programs normally involve with the construction industries such as architecture, urban and regional planning, engineering, interior design, quantity surveying, land surveying, property development, building surveying etc. The other programs which indirectly related to built environment such as law, account, banking, property management etc. that form the generic knowledge in their programme, also be part of this writing.

This issue also been discussed by Mohammad Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi (2005) when he was the visiting fellow at Institut Alam Dan Tamadun Melayu (ATMA), UKM. According to Tajuddin, the built environment education programmes in this country were really in the crisis and we should be really concerned about it. The main thing that we should consider in the programme is the education philosophy. This is because a good education philosophy will instill good guidance to our students who are the future generation in developing the country. The next question to ask is whether or not our graduates are able to take up greater responsibilities when our built environment developments and professions are still in the crisis. Until to date universities only produce ‘skill worker’ and not ‘thinker’. Skill worker can be equalized as robot where robots only know how to do work with no creativity to improve productivity. This issue also had been discussed by Frank Lloyd Wright in his critique to the United States of Americas’ universities in his speech ‘Truth against the World’. The following is part of his speech:-

“Now what does ‘university’ mean? Our state university is chiefly a trade school. You go down there for some specialized training. You are there just in line to learn to make a living. You don’t go to the university to learn about the verities of nature, the truths of the ‘universal’ for which ‘university’ is the name. True education is a matter of ‘seeing in’, not merely ‘seeing at’.

In Wright opinion, most of the students of the United State of America of that time had only been taught to ‘look the problem’ and not been taught on ‘how to solve the problem’. Sadly, the same situation is happening in our local universities today. Our graduates do not seem to have real capacity to look thoroughly and analyses certain problem especially on built environment issues so as to be able to resolved problems with our own ‘mould’ that suit our conditions.

Previous promotion system in universities did not emphasize or require journals as prerequisite prior to promotion. As a result there were not many writings done by the academicians. Upon retirement or death of the academicians it has become a great loss to our education programme as they did not leave their valuable knowledge and experiences in terms of write ups. Our education programme is in the crisis when subjects on environmental education, architectural anthropology, architectural critique and sustainable architecture had not been taught or considered for the last two decade and the office practice where graduates’ works also do not consider those matters

---

in the development exercise.

According to Mohammad Tajuddin (2003)\(^1\), most of the students don’t have any direction during the learning process in the university. They were uncertain about the objective of the program because there were burdened with syllabus and academic achievement. This has resulted in lack of exposure of the real life situation that made them unable to provide ideas on community development. When they were asked to design Islamic architecture, they only manage to draw Muslim geometric pattern rather than looking at the Islamic values itself and the life of Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. After they graduated and become architects, developer or patron, they will use other Muslim symbols of architecture such as dome, arch, mukarnas etc without referring to historiography and civilization. It was sad because they don’t even know the meaning of certain symbol which may contaminate the built environment, skyline and image of our city.

Our country built environment programme will not improve unless academicians make an effort to review their education program so that the students will become ‘humane and thinker’. Built environment education programme should be taught to every student in universities to develop understanding and awareness about good architectural and built environment practice. Our community also needs to be informed about good architectural and built environment practice so that they can appreciate or criticized the product that has delivered to them. Good architectural and built environment practice should reflect our existence in our own environment or in other word it must have ‘spirit of place and spirit of time’ that will become our identity in global context.

4 FAILURE OF THE MISSION

From the above architectural profession and education crisis, we should question ourselves on what is actually the problem which makes the mission a failure. We should identify the real problem or issues that hindered the vision. We may also need to ask on methods and approaches that had been carried out so far and we can just ask ourselves whether we had done something to overcome the issues. Some of the question that we might ask ourselves is as the following:-

i. What is the mechanism that been used by the executor of search for national identity in architecture on disseminating the architectural ideas since the last four decade.

ii. is it the process of disseminating the architectural ideas had considering the target groups.

iii. Should there any different target groups, what was the approach that had been used to disseminate the ideas. Is it the approach was same or otherwise.

iv. Was there any target, guidelines or certain basic policy provided by the executor of search for national identity in architecture on disseminating the architectural ideas for reference?

v. How was the respond from the grass root members about the architectural ideas that had been introduced?

Should we be unable to answer the above question fairly, then we should the first mission a failure. Failure of the vision towards national identity in architecture after four decades it been formalized is not because of lack of effort from the patronage and executor of search for national identity in architecture to realize the vision through various discourse and experiments. Through critics and comments from public and architectural journalist it can be summarized that most of the experiments that had been done does not followed or visualized the ideas and intention of the vision. Should the ideas and the architectural products have complement the target groups there might not much comments by them. From the issues that been raised there might be no continuity on implementation of the architectural approaches. Some of the comments that been given to address the issues are as the following:-

“ Whilst appreciating all the sentiments expressed in support for the above identity issue, it is equally true that there exist presently in the minds of the public, a lack of the general knowledge and understanding on the basic subject matter of architecture itself, least to mention the more sophisticated aspect concerning the national identity sectors”\(^1\) (W.Y. Chin, Towards A National Identity In Architecture, Majalah Akitek 1:81.)

The word ‘architecture’ had been abused and misused by the mass media and the public so much so that, to the most of them ‘architecture’ has been reduced to nothing more than ‘building style’.

\(\text{Ahmad Nizam Radzi, Strong Stuff, Weak Presentation: A personal view of the Post-Merdeka Architecture Exhibition, Majalah Akitek 2 &3:87}\)

Lack of managing on dissemination of architectural ideas may become the main reason that hindering the process of continuation of idea development, experimental process and public response to the searching of the identity. Managing on dissemination of ideas to grass root of public is one of factors that played very importance role in organization or certain strive. Study on identifying the managing lack of architectural ideas dissemination will help on establish the architectural identity’s framework in further undertaking the issues. From the initial studies on opinion of chief executive directors from various companies, shows that process of dissemination idea is

---

\(^1\) ibid
important for development of their organization or companies.

5 CONCLUSION
This study was done to analyze the problems related to the dissemination of architecture ideas and design approach in our nation’s quest for a national architectural identity. Questions about this failure were gathered from numerous critics hurled by prominent Malaysia’s architecture figures as well as international. It was noted that no continuity between the architecture idea that was introduced and the experimentation process implemented and were evident in the many struggles encountered. Poor management was identified as one of the possible cause. This statement was further strengthened due to the fact that there are no complete recorded data or any documentation that can clearly explain how this idea was disseminated to the public.

The Malay civilization has developed since the early A.D and its development was shaken during the presence of colonization. The English colonial period was especially instrumental in trying to eliminate the Malay people’s identity and introducing their own culture to Malay’s. After the independence, many intellectual pursued their studies abroad and returned to establish their role in Malaysia’s nation development as architects, engineers, accountants, lawyers, politicians, entrepreneurs and many others. However, the philosophy and approach brought back by these Western trained architects did not in any way coincide with the aspiration of creating a national identity based on locality and context. They were carried away by the ideas that they have been exposed to throughout their stints overseas and has resulted in the ‘internationalism’ of our nation’s development. More distressing was the fact that the traditional architectural values which have achieved a level of excellence were now left neglected. There was no pride to our own culture, of which symbolized the civilization, time, place and pattern of our community life.

Indeed the traditional Malay architecture is one of the best architecture ever produced by our community filled with its own aspiration and local spirit. It is the embodiment of the technology, culture and economy of that time. The architecture and Malay culture exist as a symbiosis which is united to accentuate its unique identity. As a new independent generation it is our responsibility to produce an architecture that is new and fresh with distinctive qualities by studying and perceiving methods used by our ancestors in efforts to further develop the civilization. The traditional Malay architecture is not merely something just to be looked but, it must to be analyzed and reinterpreted to carry the spirit of its time, place and culture.

Realizing how necessary it is for the Malaysian society to develop a national architecture identity by following a distinctive mould, several approaches were committed since in the early independence. Various seminar and conference were organized at national or international level to restore the Malaysian society’s mind towards the direction of a national architecture identity. The government too played their role in promoting the creation or design of building with national identity on government buildings, commercial developments as well as other type of buildings. However, the lack of community support especially from private organizations such as developers was a major reason why there was a setback in the realization towards the national architecture identity. In an effort to get an appropriate architecture concepts and philosophy in Malaysia, the history of the traditional Malay architecture is to be made a core study. The history of the traditional Malay architecture and its cultural, social and environmental embodiment still remain until now, through all its colonization by the Portuguese, Dutch, Japanese and British. Even with the multiracial presence of the Chinese, Indian and other races, the Malay history still prevail in their own continuity. Therefore the Malay history and architecture should remain in continuity but with a careful reanalysis and reinterpretation of its deep meaning. Hence, we still need to own our historical cultural beliefs and preserved lifestyle and identity to achieve a national architecture identity. Efforts to promote awareness and understanding of the traditional Malay Architecture should continue to direct us towards this mission.

BIBLIOGRAFI
[22] Ngiom, Lilian Tay, 80 years of architecture in Malaysia, PAM Publication, 2000