

Urban Design Policies Implementation in Kuala Lumpur City Hall Malaysia: A Review

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Abstract: Urban Design Policies (UDPs) play a vital role in shaping the spatial form, functionality, and identity of contemporary cities. In Kuala Lumpur, these policies are embedded in key planning documents such as the Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 (PSKL2020), Urban Design Guidelines for Kuala Lumpur City Centre (UDGKLCC) 2014, Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2040 (KLSP2040) and Kuala Lumpur Local Plan 2040 (KLLP2040). These policies aim to enhance livability, promote walk ability and strengthen the city's visual and spatial character. However, despite their comprehensive objectives, the outcomes of implementation have been inconsistent, raising questions about policy effectiveness and the factors that influence successful execution. Despite their comprehensive objectives, implementation outcomes have been inconsistent, raising questions about policy effectiveness and the successful execution. This paper critically reviews the literature on the effectiveness of UDP implementation with a particular focus on Kuala Lumpur. The review encompasses discussions on urban design concepts, urban design policies, the notion of effective implementation and the current status of UDP implementation in Kuala Lumpur. In this regard, this paper discusses the effective implementation of urban design policies in Kuala Lumpur with a particular focus on their execution by Kuala Lumpur City Hall (KLCH) as the local authority.

Keywords: Urban design, urban design policy, policy implementation, Kuala Lumpur, implementation effectiveness, Kuala Lumpur City Hall

1.0 Introduction

Policy implementation is a central concern in public administration and urban governance, particularly in developing countries where institutional capacity and coordination remain major challenges (Anderson, 2023; Shahi, 2023; Trinh et al., 2021). Implementation represents the crucial stage where government intentions are translated into concrete actions that shape social, economic and spatial outcomes

(Tezera, 2019; Gaus et al., 2019; Selepe, 2023; Chukwuka & Dibie, 2024). However, even well-formulated policies often fail to deliver meaningful results when implementation mechanisms are weak or inconsistent (Khan & Khandaker, 2016). This issue is especially evident in the field of urban design, where the translation of policy objectives into tangible spatial outcomes remains complex and inconsistent (Shamsuddin, 2024). Urban design has evolved from an aesthetic pursuit into a multidisciplinary practice that integrates spatial quality, social wellbeing and environmental sustainability (Powell, 2023; Urban Design Lab, 2024; Tarigan et al., 2024). As a key component of urban planning, it shapes the physical character, functionality and identity of cities (Shamsuddin, 2024; Anderson, 2023). Globally, governments have recognized Urban Design Policy (UDP) as a strategic instrument for guiding development, enhancing public spaces and fostering distinctive city identities. Yet, as Rittel and Webber (1974) note, urban problems are “wicked” and they involve competing interests, multiple stakeholders and shifting priorities. Carmona and Tiesdell (2007) further argue that successful urban design depends not only on good policy formulation but also on clear guidance, coordination and effective implementation. Paterson (2012) observed that in the United Kingdom, despite the existence of national and local urban design policies, unclear hierarchies and differing interpretations often result in fragmented outcomes.

A similar situation exists in Malaysia. Although urban design is increasingly recognized in national and local planning frameworks, implementation remains inconsistent across jurisdictions. Shamsuddin (2024) highlights that while UDPs are frequently emphasized, their execution has yet to produce significant improvements in the quality or identity of urban spaces. This reveals a persistent gap between policy intent and outcomes, driven by limited institutional mechanisms, inadequate resources and insufficient technical expertise. Kuala Lumpur exemplifies this challenge. As Malaysia’s capital and a rapidly developing global city, it faces the dual task of promoting growth while maintaining sustainability and liveability. The Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 (PSKL2020) and the Urban Design Guidelines for Kuala Lumpur City Centre (UDGKLCC) (2014) were introduced to enhance walkability, improve the public realm and reinforce city identity. However, while areas such as KLCC and Bukit Bintang display notable improvements, other districts remain fragmented and lack design coherence.

Kuala Lumpur City Hall (KLCH), as the primary local authority, plays a crucial role in both formulating and implementing UDPs. Its responsibility includes ensuring that development aligns with policy objectives through technical assessment, enforcement and stakeholder coordination. Nonetheless, KLCH faces several institutional constraints, including fragmented departmental structures, limited inter-agency collaboration, inconsistent technical expertise and weak enforcement mechanisms. Implementation theories emphasize that the success of any policy

depends on how effectively implementers understand, interpret and execute it (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980; Chandarasorn, 1983). Thus, even well-designed policies may fail without effective implementation (Khan & Khandaker, 2016). These issues raise key questions about the effectiveness of UDP implementation in Kuala Lumpur.

2.0 Introduction To Urban Design

Urban design is an age-old discipline that has gained renewed attention for its role in shaping sustainable and liveable cities (Abd Elrahman & Asaad, 2021). Historically concerned with beautification (Matan, 2011), it has evolved into the art of shaping cities through design, form and culture (Greed & Roberts, 1998; Abd Elrahman & Asaad, 2021). Urban design encompasses the planning and design of towns, streets and public spaces (UDGKL, 2014; Rahman, 2023) and is widely recognized as a multidimensional, participatory process influencing how people experience urban environments often described as the “art of place-making” (Urban Design Group). The term urban design originates from the Latin *urbs*, meaning “city” (Elshater, 2014; Abd Elrahman & Asaad, 2021), but gained contemporary relevance after Wirth’s seminal work *Urbanism as a Way of Life* (1938) (Abd Elrahman & Asaad, 2021). Lynch defined design as “the playful creation and strict evaluation of possible forms of something, including how it is to be made” (Madanipour, 2006; Nag & Ghosh, 2019), while Matan (2011) emphasized the creation of robust, accessible and stimulating urban environments. Carmona and Tiesdell (2007) described urban design as the making of places for people and Moughtin (1999) outlined three key objectives; (1) creating environments that are structurally sound, (2) aesthetically pleasing and (3) enjoyable to use (Matan, 2011). Similarly, Nag and Ghosh (2019) and Rahman (2023) highlighted that the core goals of urban design are to foster a sense of place and identity, enhance legibility, promote diversity and create meaningful and symbolic environments. Urban design contributes to sustainability, environmental quality and the overall wellbeing of urban residents (Harahap et al., 2023; Rahman, 2023; Shamsuddin, 2024). Over the years, its objectives have evolved, positioning it as a key driver of modern urban development (Matan, 2011; Abd Elrahman & Asaad, 2021; Rahman, 2023). Effective urban design requires a clear vision of spatial structure, functional form and human experience (Madanipour, 2006). As an integral part of urban planning, it shapes the quality of urban places while addressing social, economic and environmental dimensions (Abd Elrahman & Asaad, 2021; Rahman, 2023; Shamsuddin, 2024). Beyond aesthetics, it enhances social interaction, promotes inclusivity and offers practical solutions to urban challenges such as mobility, housing and public space management and ultimately creating cities that are both functional and liveable (Rahman, 2023; Shamsuddin, 2024).

3.0 Evolution Of Urban Design Policy

Urban design policies (UDP) have evolved as an essential part of planning practice, shaping the physical, social and environmental quality of cities. Though they have

origins in the early attempts to beautify cities particularly the City Beautiful movement from the 19th century and post-war reconstruction in Europe it is only from the late 20th century on that they are becoming acknowledged as a separate policy field (Punter, 2007). Initially, design concerns were secondary to land use planning. However, growing urban challenges such as sprawl, declining quality of urban life and rising environmental issues pushed design to the forefront of planning agendas. Policy implementation for public policy has long been a fundamental element of governance (Cavada, 2021). The roots of design policy implementation can be traced to the establishment of the Aesthetic Advisory Committee in the Netherlands (1922) and later to design commissions and review panels in many American cities by the mid-1970s (Punter, 2007). Jonathan Barnett (1974) was among the first to introduce the idea of urban design as public policy and his thinking was in part shaped by experiences with redevelopment in New York in the late 1960s. By the 1980s, a formal review process was standard practice in cities across the United State in recognition that development quality demanded a more structured assessment and professional expertise (Punter, 2007).

According to Punter (2011), the impact of the Urban Task Force (UTF) led by Richard Rogers (1999) which significantly influenced urban design in planning (Paterson, 2012). He also highlights the Planning Policy Statement (PPS1) (DCLG, 2005) and its companion guide, *By Design* (DETR/CABE, 2000) which provides a structured approach to urban design (Paterson, 2012). These documents, particularly *By Design* serve as an unofficial framework (Paterson, 2012). Additionally, urban design principles from Bentley et al. (1985) have been widely adopted in PPS1 and *By Design* (Paterson, 2012). Both PPS1 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) emphasize that good planning and good design are inseparable reinforcing design as a fundamental aspect of urban planning (Paterson, 2012). Between 2000 and 2010, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) significantly influenced UDP through its publications including contributions to PPS1 (Paterson, 2012). CABE helped elevate urban design within planning by addressing key themes such as the link between good design and property value, design coding and design review. It also introduced important tools like the Building for Life criteria and design and access statements now widely used by Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in assessing planning applications (Paterson, 2012). These tools provide a structured approach to evaluating design quality with further details available in Paterson (2011). The advent of urban design as public policy is also linked to the imperatives of globalization and neoliberalism (Cuthbert, 2006; Punter, 2007).

In increasingly competitive urban economies, design became a strategic tool for attracting investment, enhancing city image and supporting growth in sectors such as real estate, tourism and international events (Gospodini, 2002; Madanipour, 2006). Cities have accordingly started to regard design quality not merely as a matter of aesthetics but as a catalyst for economic and social growth. Over the past fifty years,

UDP has expanded in scope. It now encompasses not only architectural form and spatial layout but also broader goals of sustainability, identity and liveability (Nag & Ghosh, 2016; Ujang, 2023; Shamsuddin, 2024). Overall, the development of UDP and controls in Europe has faced ups and downs due to various factors including the need to preserve historic cities, pressure for redevelopment and political and economic influences. Although there have been efforts to introduce stricter design guidelines and controls, several factors have made consistent implementation difficult. This shows that balancing good urban planning with economic development remains a major challenge for UDP worldwide.

4.0 Concept Of Effective Implementation

The primary goal of policy design is to clearly define objectives and integrate them into a coherent vision that guides practical action (Selepe, 2023; Sa'at et al., 2023; Shahi, 2023; Chukwuka & Dibie, 2024). According to Cavada (2021), Howlett (2014) emphasized that effective policy design seeks to enhance public service delivery through innovative and efficient governance mechanisms. Chompucot (2011) defined implementation effectiveness as the ability to deliver public projects and services successfully through sound public management, inter-agency collaboration and improved competitiveness. Similarly, Hussin (2014) and Chompucot (2011) asserted that a policy is deemed successfully implemented when it achieves its intended goals despite external challenges. Hussin (2014) also noted that full execution and consistency with the policy's original intentions, even under pressure are key indicators of success. Brinkerhoff et al. (2002), as cited by Islam (2020), highlighted that successful implementation depends not only on good policy design but also on effective management during execution. Howlett et al. (2009) emphasized that a policy holds no real value until it is implemented and produces measurable outcomes, a process Shahi (2023) describes as "turning a policy decision into action." The success of implementation, therefore, depends on the extent to which the resulting outcomes align with stakeholder expectations and achieve the intended objectives (Hussin, 2014). Without strong implementation mechanisms, even well designed policies risk becoming ineffective and may hinder broader development goals (Alias et al., 2021; Shahi, 2023). This concept is illustrated in Giacchino's (2003) "Arch of Successful Policy Implementation" (Figure 1), where commitment serves as the keystone, supported by two pillars: the People-Oriented Factor (implementers) and the Process-Oriented Factor (systems, structures, and procedures) (Hussin, 2014). Without shared commitment between the organization and its implementers, policies such as the UDPs within KLCH are likely to fail (Selepe, 2023; Sa'at et al., 2023; Shahi, 2023; Chukwuka & Dibie, 2024). This commitment often described as the "will to act" and is closely tied to organizational behaviour, leadership and implementers' motivation.

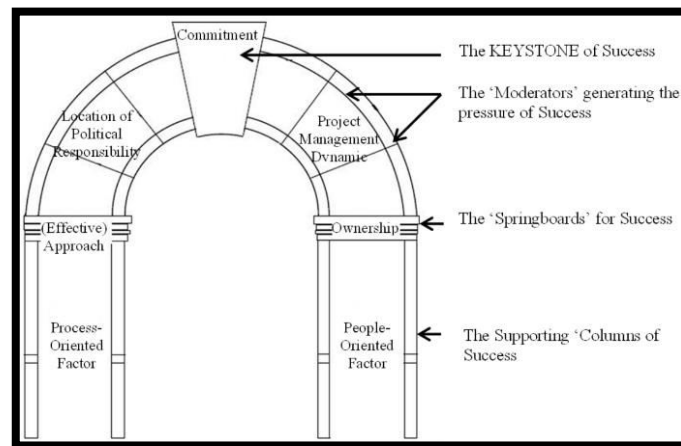


Figure 1. The Arch of Successful Policy Implementation
(Source: Giacchino, 2003 in Hussin 2014)

In practice, policy implementation often adheres to traditional bureaucratic norms, where administrative entities perform designated roles and functions (Howlett & Howlett, 2019; Cavada, 2021). However, as Ali (2020) observed, actual implementation frequently diverges from initial plans, reflecting the unpredictable nature of policy execution. Wildavsky argued that policy failures typically arise from either non-implementation or poor implementation, especially when a disconnect exists between design and practice (Islam, 2020). Shahi (2023) further emphasized that implementation success should not be assessed solely based on procedural compliance but on the extent to which it produces meaningful, intended, or even unforeseen positive outcomes. Hidayati et al. (2021) and Sager and Gofen (2022) similarly contended that policy success depends equally on sound design and effective execution. This highlights that implementation structures, processes and resources are as critical as the formulation of the policy itself. Without clear procedures, sufficient resources and competent implementers even the most well designed policies are unlikely to succeed (Shahi, 2023; Shamsuddin, 2024; Chukwuka & Dibia, 2024. Ottoson and Green (1987) also reinforced that sound policy design alone is inadequate without effective implementation (Ali, 2020).

5.0 Review Of Kuala Lumpur

5.1 History of Kuala Lumpur Development

Kuala Lumpur's development began in the 1850s, with early growth concentrated in the downtown area between the Klang and Gombak Rivers, now known as Medan Pasar (KLSP2040, 2023). The city's growth was driven by trade and political influence (Isti et al., 2021). Initially a tin-mining settlement at the confluence of the two rivers, Kuala Lumpur evolved into a trading post and was later designated as the state capital and administrative headquarters of British Malaya in 1880 (Gullick, 2000). By 1895, the city had a population of about 25,000 and covered 0.65 km². Cartographic records show that Kuala Lumpur expanded from 20 km² in 1903 to 52 km² in 1924 (Isti et al., 2021) as

illustrated in Figure 2. According to UN-Habitat in 1999, when it became the capital of the newly independent Federation of Malaya in 1957, its urban area had grown to 93 km² with a population of around 320,000 (Isti et al., 2021). From then on, urbanization became increasingly concentrated around Kuala Lumpur, while older cities such as Penang and Melaka experienced slower growth (Isti et al., 2021). Kuala Lumpur was officially declared a city in 1972 and later designated a Federal Territory in 1974, covering an area of 243 km² (Yin et al., 2019). After the Second World War, the city expanded rapidly from the central core to surrounding areas such as Sentul, Setapak and Ampang. Development was primarily concentrated in the Central Planning Area, particularly the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC). Since the 1980s, four major new growth areas, namely Damansara, Wangsa Maju, Bukit Jalil and Bandar Tun Razak, have emerged with continued expansion through the 1990s in districts such as Bukit Bintang, KLCC and Kampong Bharu (Figure 3).

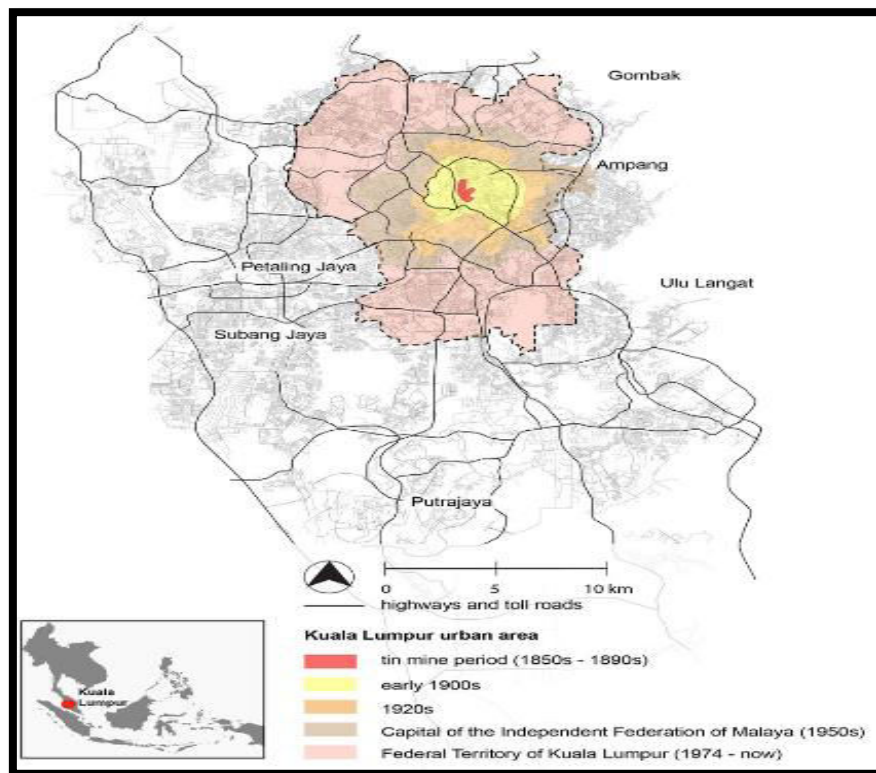


Figure 2. Kuala Lumpur's urban development (adapted from Aiken, 1981).
(Source: Isti et al., 2021)

Kuala Lumpur is Malaysia's largest and most significant urban area, serving as the nation's centre for economic activity, education, and social infrastructure. The city is expected to maintain its prominence for decades to come (Yasin et al., 2022). As the country's capital and premier metropolitan centre, Kuala Lumpur covers an area of 24,289.45 hectares and functions as Malaysia's key economic and financial hub. In its early stages of development, the city's growth was primarily focused on addressing issues related to settlement planning, urban management, and environmental concerns (KLLP2040, 2025).

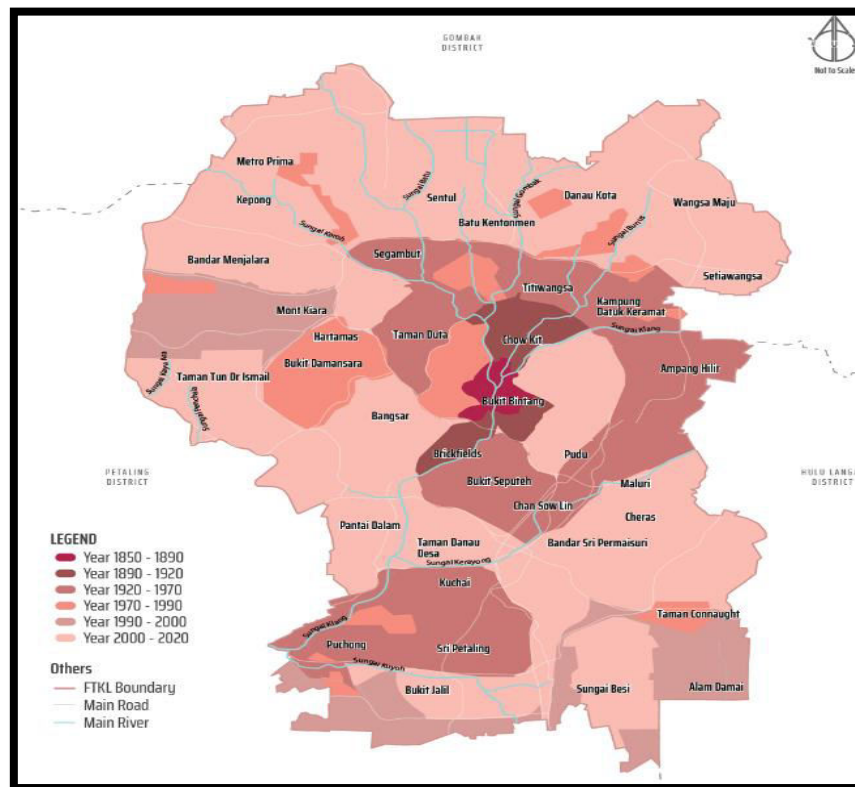


Figure 3. Physical and Spatial Development of Kuala Lumpur 1850-2020
(Source: Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2040, 2023)

Kuala Lumpur now functions as a global city, serving as a gateway between Asia and the rest of the world and acting as Malaysia's main growth conurbation. Its convergence of social, economic, industrial, and technological sectors has driven unprecedented levels of urbanization and transformation (Yasin et al., 2022). Kuala Lumpur is consistently ranked among the top ten cities in Asia (Figure 4).

Mori Global Power City Index 2019	A.T. Global Report 2019	Kearney Cities	IESE Cities in Motion Index 2019	DHL Connectedness 2018
Tokyo	Tokyo	Tokyo	Singapore	Singapore
Singapore	Hong Kong	Singapore	Hong Kong	Kuala Lumpur*
Seoul	Singapore	Hong Kong	Seoul	Abu Dhabi
Hong Kong	Beijing	Seoul	Shanghai	Bangkok
Dubai	Seoul	Shanghai	Tel Aviv	Hong Kong
Beijing	Shanghai	Nagoya	Beijing	Ho Chi Minh
Osaka	Istanbul	Dubai	Dubai	Taiwan
Shanghai	Bangkok	Kuala Lumpur*	Kuala Lumpur*	Seoul
Kuala Lumpur*	Kuala Lumpur*			Kuwait City
Istanbul				Doha

Figure 4. Kuala Lumpur regularly features as one of the Top 10 cities in Asia
(Source: Muhammad et al., 2022)

However, rapid urbanization has introduced new challenges, including traffic congestion, inadequate public facilities, disaster risks such as flash floods and a gradual loss of the city's unique identity and character (Shamsuddin, 2024). To sustain its global city status, Kuala Lumpur must adopt effective strategies to manage its urban challenges. According to the Global Cities Index 2018, Kuala Lumpur ranked 49th

worldwide, based on criteria such as business activity, human capital, information exchange, cultural experience, and political engagement (KLLP2040, 2025).

In essence, Kuala Lumpur's urban development is guided by six strategic planning zones: (1) City Centre, (2) Wangsa Maju – Maluri, (3) Sentul – Manjalara, (4) Damansara – Penchala, (5) Bukit Jalil – Seputeh and (6) Bandar Tun Razak – Sungai Besi (Figure 5). Each zone is planned according to specific development functions to ensure balanced and purposeful growth. This zoning approach helps optimize land use, improve connectivity and promote equitable distribution of services and infrastructure across the metropolitan area. It also supports effective governance and resource allocation, addressing the diverse needs of each zone while contributing to Kuala Lumpur's overall liveability and longterm sustainability.

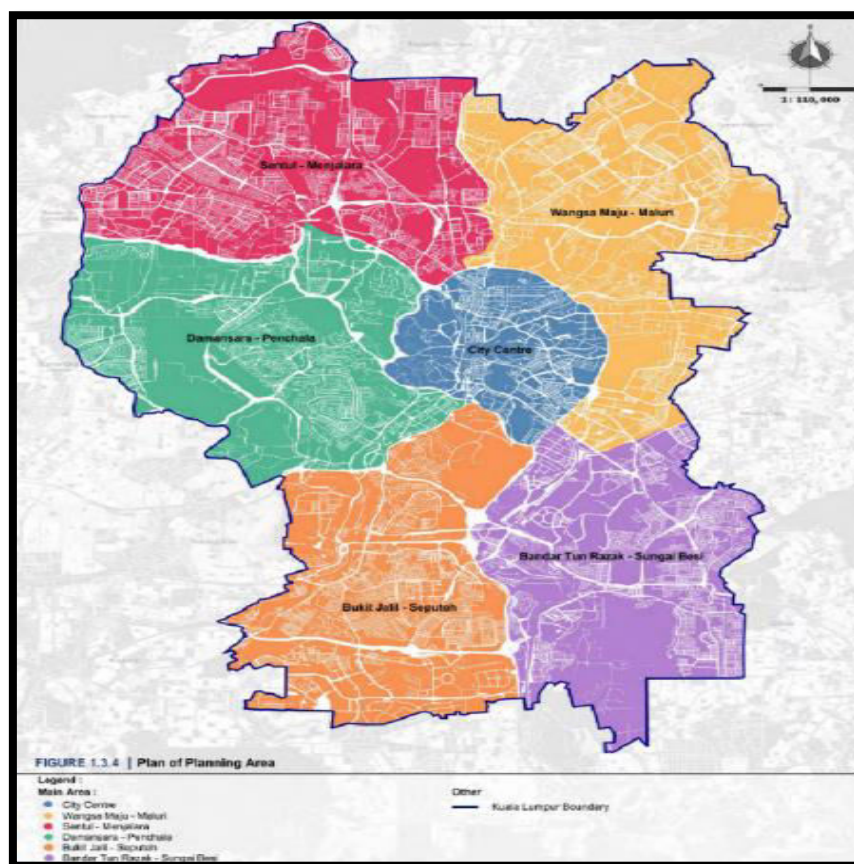


Figure 5. Kuala Lumpur Plan of Planning Area
(Source: Kuala Lumpur Local Plan 2040, 2025)

5.2 Population of Kuala Lumpur

Kuala Lumpur's strategic location has positioned it as a major hub for global production and marketing activities. The city has successfully pursued its vision of becoming a landmark symbolizing Malaysia's economic progress (KLLP2040, 2025). The transformation of Kuala Lumpur into a prominent business district is expected to continue driving population growth and expanding employment opportunities. As of 2020, the city's population stood at 1.98 million and is projected to increase to 2.35

million by 2040 (KLLP2040, 2025). Meanwhile, the employment projection target is 1 million people by the year 2040, as shown in Figure 6 (KLLP2040, 2025). With significant population and employment growth, alongside rapid urban development, unplanned urbanization may become a major issue if urban design aspects are not considered in the development agenda. The increasing population and workforce in Kuala Lumpur necessitate a well-planned urban design to accommodate growth while maintaining the city's liveability and efficiency. The link between a city's growth rank and urban land use expansion influenced by the urban hierarchy of the cities would result in a rapid urban growth in the country (Yasin et al., 2022).

Years	Population ('000)	Percent	Working Population ('000)
2020	1,982.1	44.1	874.7
2025	2,040.0	45.1	920.0
2030	2,130.0	45.3	964.9
2035	2,240.0	45.6	1,021.4
2040	2,350.0	45.9	1,080.0

Figure 6. Population and Working Population of Kuala Lumpur by Year 2040
(Source: Draft Kuala Lumpur Local Plan 2040, 2023)

The evolution of development patterns significantly impacts the interplay between market forces and the physical environment (Yin et al., 2019). As urban populations increase, the pressure on land resources intensifies, directly influencing the trajectory of urban expansion (Yin et al., 2019). This population growth also heightens the strain on urban infrastructure, including transportation networks, utilities and public services. As urban populations continue to grow, effective traffic management becomes even more critical as increased vehicular congestion can degrade the quality of life. Matan (2011) discusses how democratic, "modern" and "Western" cities, especially their central areas, have increasingly become dominated by automobiles, leading to a loss of vitality in public spaces and streets.

The vision for Kuala Lumpur to become a developed city, aligned with the "City for All" goals outlined in the Kuala Lumpur Local Plan 2040 (KLLP2040), places urban design as a key priority for implementation by Kuala Lumpur City Hall (KLCH). Effective urban design practices are essential for realizing the six main goals of the KLLP2040, all of which aim to enhance liveability, inclusivity and sustainability for urban residents. Urban design also serves as an important contributor to national progress as it directly influences the quality of life, environmental resilience and overall city competitiveness.

However, despite Kuala Lumpur's rapid population growth, expanding workforce and ongoing urban development, the city continues to face challenges in delivering an efficient and well designed urban environment. The physical outcomes of urban design initiatives remain limited even though policy implementation efforts began as early as 2004.

6.0 Urban Design In Policy In Kuala Lumpur

Over the past two decades, the rapid pace of urban and economic growth in Kuala Lumpur has necessitated strategic planning interventions to manage development and sustain liveability. The Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 (KLSP2020), launched on 12 August 2004 to replace the earlier Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 1984 (KLSP1984), was developed as a comprehensive framework to guide the city's growth and transformation into a modern metropolis. It outlined 190 development goals to be achieved over 20 years, addressing key issues such as urban expansion, infrastructure provision and population growth. The plan adopted two primary approaches: first, by establishing clear objectives, strategies and policies to achieve its long-term vision; and second by identifying practical solutions to major urban challenges, including congestion, housing shortages, environmental sustainability and social wellbeing. As a strategic roadmap, the KLSP2020 has guided the actions of urban planners, developers, policymakers and particularly KLCH in ensuring that urban development aligns with the city's broader goals of sustainability, liveability and economic vitality. Its overarching vision of transforming Kuala Lumpur into a World Class City is built upon four key principles: (1) a world-class working environment, (2) a world-class living environment, (3) a world-class business environment and (4) world-class governance. To realize this vision, five core goals were identified. The first aims to strengthen Kuala Lumpur's position as an international commercial and financial centre to enhance global competitiveness. The second seeks to create an efficient and equitable urban structure that ensures fair access to resources and opportunities. The third emphasizes improving the city's living environment through better housing, infrastructure and environmental management. The fourth focuses on building a distinctive city identity that reflects cultural heritage and design excellence. The fifth goal stresses the need for transparent and effective governance to ensure accountability and high-quality urban management. KLSP2020 was among Malaysia's first policy documents to embed urban design as a central strategy in shaping city identity and quality of life. The plan tasked KLCH with balancing physical, economic, social and environmental objectives in line with Local Agenda 21 (LA21) principles, reinforcing citizen participation and international commitments such as the Habitat Agenda and the Rio Declaration. Despite this progressive foundation, KLSP2020 provides limited guidance on what defines good design or how it can be achieved in practice, lacking reference to established design principles discussed in the literature (Paterson et al., 2012).

To bridge this gap, the Urban Design Guidelines Kuala Lumpur City Centre (UDGKLCC) were introduced in 2014 as a detailed, micro-level framework to guide the implementation of UDPs outlined in KLSP2020. The UDGKLCC serves as both a development control tool and a reference for implementers which are the KLCH and developers ensuring that new developments align with the objectives of KLSP2020 and the Kuala Lumpur City Plan 2020 (KLCP2020). Completed on 14 August 2014, the guidelines aim to support “the creation of a coherent, design oriented Kuala Lumpur City Centre that is dynamic, liveable, efficient and sustainable with a unique and appealing image and identity.” In essence, the UDGKLCC consolidates relevant development policies to advance the city’s long-term vision of becoming a “City for All,” strengthening identity and sense of place (KLSP2040, 2023). The effective implementation of these guidelines is critical to transforming Kuala Lumpur into a productive, liveable, green, healthy and vibrant city (Abd Elrahman & Asaad, 2021; Rahman, 2023; Shamsuddin, 2024). It also contributes to the national transition toward a climate-smart, low-carbon city that prioritizes sustainability and environmentally responsible mobility.

The Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2040 (KLSP2040), officially gazetted on 19 October 2023, builds upon and advances the city’s earlier development vision. Formulated through extensive collaboration with professionals, government agencies, industry stakeholders and the community, KLSP2040 outlines a long-term aspiration to establish Kuala Lumpur as a “City for All,” founded on the principles of sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience. The plan provides a strategic framework that defines the city’s development direction, policy actions, and governance mechanisms. It also serves as a key reference for planning approvals, infrastructure investments, and urban design decision-making, ensuring Kuala Lumpur’s continued progress toward a more liveable and sustainable urban future. Figure 7 illustrates the series of development and urban design documents prepared by Kuala Lumpur City Hall (KLCH) in guiding the city’s planning and growth.



Figure 7. Kuala Lumpur’s Development Plan Documents (1984–2025)
(Source: Author, 2025)

Implementation remains a critical stage in public policy and urban governance because it determines how policy intentions are translated into practice (Tarigan et al., 2024). The success of policy implementation depends not only on the quality of policy design but also on the degree of alignment between government objectives and actual

implementation outcomes (Shahi, 2023). The effectiveness of implementation largely relies on the capacity and behaviour of government implementers, who play a pivotal role in operationalizing policy goals and ensuring performance (Orlandi & Rabie, 2021; Tarigan et al., 2024). Sa'at et al. (2023) further emphasize that organizational behaviour significantly influences implementation success, while Shahi (2023) observes that in many developing countries, bureaucratic rigidity and unethical practices continue to weaken policy effectiveness.

7.0 Status on Urban Design Policy Implementation In Kuala Lumpur

After two decades of implementing the KLSP2020 and the UDGKLCC, progress in the effective implementation of urban design policies remains limited. According to the Policy Implementation Performance findings reported in the KLSP2040 and the KLLP2040, many of the intended outcomes have yet to be fully realised. This situation highlights the need to examine the key challenges that have hindered the successful implementation of UDPs in Kuala Lumpur. One of the key implementation efforts was the introduction of the UDGKL, which serves as a detailed design control guideline focusing on specific city areas (KLSP2020, 2004). However, despite the availability of such comprehensive documents, the core issue lies not in the absence of policies or plans but in their poor implementation. This raises an important question about the institutional and operational factors that continue to impede the successful realisation of urban design policies in Kuala Lumpur.

Table 1-23 Implementation and Continuity of the 23 Urban Design Policies in Kuala Lumpur

(Source: Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 2025)

23 UDPs in Kuala Lumpur		KLSP2020			KLSP2040		
		Implemented	Currently Implemented	Not Implemented	Still Relevant	Currently Relevant and Needs Improvement	Should Be Dropped
UD1:	CHKL shall ensure the protection and enhancement of the City's gateways and major vistas.	/				/	
UD2:	CHKL shall maintain and enhance the character and sequence of visual experiences along the major road corridors in particular those that focus on the City Centre.		/			/	

23 UDPs in Kuala Lumpur		KLSP2020			KLSP2040		
		Implemented	Currently Implemented	Not Implemented	Still Relevant	Currently Relevant and Needs Improvement	Should Be Dropped
UD3:	CHKL shall enhance the definition of existing view corridors and where practicable establish new corridors within the City Centre.		/			/	
UD4:	CHKL shall maintain and enhance the sequence of orientating views from rail-based transport routes.			/		/	
UD5:	CHKL shall ensure that urban design considerations are taken into account in the planning, design and implementation of transportation and utility service systems and structures.		/			/	
UD6:	CHKL shall implement measures to improve the visual definition, continuity and streetscape character of the major road network, to provide greater coherence and legibility within the urban areas.		/			/	
UD7:	CHKL shall ensure the retention and enhancement of important views of the City's skyline and landmarks visible from urban centres and public open spaces outside the City Centre.		/			/	
UD8:	CHKL shall encourage the development of additional major landmark buildings or complexes at key locations.		/				/
UD9:	CHKL shall control building heights to ensure the visual primacy of certain designated areas in the City Centre, the protection of special character areas and the accenting of entry gateways and activity nodes.	/			/	/	
UD10:	CHKL shall ensure the retention and enhancement of major treed areas and hill ridges as visual backdrops, orientating elements and landscape amenity.		/			/	

23 UDPs in Kuala Lumpur		KLSP2020			KLSP2040		
		Implemented	Currently Implemented	Not Implemented	Still Relevant	Currently Relevant and Needs Improvement	Should Be Dropped
UD11:	CHKL shall provide a continuous green network of open spaces.		/			/	
UD12:	CHKL shall develop pocket parks and plazas in the City Centre and urban centres.	/				/	
UD13:	CHKL shall provide and designate places for informal civic and cultural use in the City Centre.		/			/	
UD14:	CHKL shall retain and maintain mature trees found in all areas and ensure that the character of designated areas which have a preponderance of mature trees is preserved.		/			/	
UD15:	CHKL shall designate river corridors, implement measures to improve the amenity value of the rivers and implement guidelines for developments within or abutting the river corridors.		/			/	
UD16:	CHKL shall designate and implement pedestrian friendly street networks and green pedestrian networks within the City Centre, urban centres, major activity nodes and areas surrounding transit nodes which also cater for the needs of the aged and the handicapped.	/				/	
UD17:	CHKL shall construct a system of continuous covered walkways linking major activity centres in the City and in areas of high pedestrian activity.	/				/	
UD18:	CHKL shall ensure the adequate provision of pedestrian connections where major road or rail infrastructure has disconnected linkages between adjacent areas.	/				/	
UD19:	CHKL shall define, conserve and enhance distinctive identity areas in the City Centre, district and local precincts.		/			/	

23 UDPs in Kuala Lumpur		KLSP2020			KLSP2040		
		Implemented	Currently Implemented	Not Implemented	Still Relevant	Currently Relevant and Needs Improvement	Should Be Dropped
UD ₂₀ :	CHKL shall designate the conservation of areas, places, landscapes and structures of historical and architectural value and significance, and ensure that all developments in their vicinity are sympathetic in form, scale and character.		/			/	
UD ₂₁ :	CHKL shall ensure a high standard of architectural design appropriate to the City's regional tropical setting and sympathetic to the built and natural context.		/			/	
UD ₂₂ :	CHKL shall ensure that the redevelopment of Malay Reservation Areas, traditional kampungs and New Villages incorporate design elements that are reflective of their historical and traditional character.			/		/	
UD ₂₃ :	CHKL shall draw up an Urban Design Framework together with a comprehensive set of Urban Design Guidelines to ensure public safety and health and designate a body responsible for implementation and coordination with other relevant authorities.			/		/	
Status on Udp Implementation		6	14	3	1	22	1

The KLSP2020 introduced 23 UDPs to guide the city's physical and spatial development. These policies were designed to improve the urban environment by focusing on key elements such as city gateways, visual corridors, landmarks, skylines, street character, open spaces and pedestrian networks. Collectively, these policies were intended to help KLCH manage development and promote urban design improvements that contribute to a liveable, safe and sustainable city. The importance of these policies was reinforced through an official statement by the then Minister of Federal Territories in 2004, who underscored their role in shaping Kuala Lumpur's future. Despite this strong policy foundation, the KLSP2020 did not clearly define what constitutes good design or provide guidance on how to achieve it in practice. This gap aligns with the observation by Paterson et al. (2012), who noted the absence of explicit design

principles within the plan. To address this limitation, the UDGKLCC was developed to provide detailed and area specific design guidance, aiming to enhance the practical application of the UDPs.

The status of the 23 UDPs was reassessed under the KLSP2040 to evaluate their relevance and level of implementation. Of the 23 policies, 6 have been fully implemented, 14 are currently in progress, 3 remain relevant but require improvement and 1 is recommended for removal (Table 1). This distribution shows that while most policies continue to hold relevance, their implementation has been uneven, reflecting variations in coordination, technical capacity and enforcement. Implemented policies primarily focus on enhancing visual corridors, expanding green spaces and improving pedestrian connectivity including initiatives such as pocket parks (UD12), pedestrian networks (UD16) and streetscape upgrades. Policies still being implemented address broader objectives, such as improving city gateways (UD1), major corridors (UD2–UD4) and architectural quality (UD20–UD21). These efforts indicate KLCH continued commitment to integrating urban design in city development, although progress varies across planning zones. Meanwhile, policies identified as still relevant but needing improvement, UD6 (streetscape coherence), UD7 (skyline and landmark enhancement) and UD15 (river corridor improvement) require better coordination, design integration and maintenance to ensure long-term effectiveness. The policy recommended for removal reflects redundancy within the updated KLSP2040, signaling refinement and streamlining of design policies. As outlined in KLSP 2040, the plan provides strategic direction, actions and governance frameworks to guide future urban development. It serves as a key reference for planning approvals, infrastructure investment and urban design decisions. However, as Nikolić et al. (2021) emphasize, the persistent challenge lies not in policy formulation but in its implementation. A significant concern is the absence of the Urban Design Framework (UDF) mandated under Policy UD23, which was intended to complement the UDGKLCC. The UDF was envisioned to safeguard public health and safety, strengthen inter-agency coordination and ensure design consistency. Its absence risks fragmented and uncoordinated implementation efforts as noted by Paterson et al. (2012) and reaffirmed in KLSP2040 (2025).

As illustrated in Figure 7, the gap between policy formulation and implementation outcomes remains significant. Between 2004 and 2018, only 26% of the 23 UDPs were fully implemented, while 60% are still in progress and 14% have yet to begin (KLSP2040, 2025). Despite the clear vision of KLSP2020, limited tangible progress underscores a persistent disconnect between planning intentions and practical outcomes. Policy implementation represents a critical stage in translating plans into action and determining whether intended goals are achieved. The modest implementation rate suggests that institutional and human factors, rather than policy design alone, are key determinants of success. This raises important questions about

internal capacities, coordination mechanisms, leadership effectiveness, and the commitment of implementers all of which are essential components of successful policy execution (Selepe, 2023; Sa'at et al., 2023; Shahi, 2023; Chukwuka & Dibie, 2024).

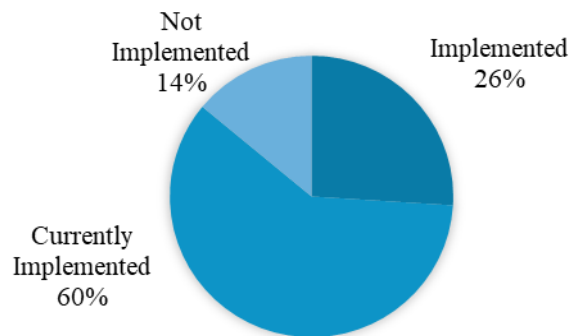


Figure 7. Urban Design Policies for KLSP 2020 (2004) Implementation Status in 2025
(Source: Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 2024)

Kuala Lumpur has experienced slow and inconsistent implementation of UDPs since the introduction of the KLSP2020 in 2004 and the UDGKLCC in 2014. This raises concerns about the city's ability to translate well formulated policies into tangible urban outcomes. As highlighted in KLSP2040 (2025), the limited progress reflects broader challenges in governance, policy enforcement and technical capacity to sustain urban design quality. Research on policy implementation has gained increasing attention globally (Trinh et al., 2020; Shahi, 2023; Chukwuka & Dibie, 2024), particularly in developing contexts such as Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Shahi, 2023), underscoring the need to examine the factors influencing urban design policy implementation. As Punter (2007) highlights, one of the greatest challenges for local authorities is attracting and retaining skilled urban design professionals a key factor in ensuring urban design is effectively implemented as public policy (White, 2015).

8.0 Conclusion

UDPs in Kuala Lumpur were introduced to enhance the city's quality of life, attractiveness and competitiveness. Anchored in the KLSP2020 and UDGKLCC, these policies aim to create a liveable, sustainable and people oriented city. They focus on strengthening the city's identity, improving public spaces, promoting walk ability and fostering better coordination among stakeholders to achieve a more cohesive urban environment. However, despite these objectives, progress in implementation has been modest as reflected in the available UDP performance data. This reveals a significant gap between policy formulation and on the ground outcomes. The review of the 23 UDPs reaffirms that urban design remains a central component of Kuala Lumpur's planning framework, yet its implementation outcomes are uneven. Understanding the underlying challenges and factors contributing to this limited effectiveness is essential

to strengthen future UDP execution and ensure their intended impact on the city's urban quality.

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Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Declaration statement

The authors affirm that this manuscript is an original work that has not been published previously and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. All sources of information have been appropriately acknowledged, and all data presented are accurate to the best of the authors' knowledge.

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