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Making KL `our' city

A WORLD-CLASS city, proclaimed the draft Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 (KL20). There is nothing wrong with the planners' vision or with the desire that the "nation's capital should be made ready for a competitive international role in the world of the 21st century", or with the assertion that the plan is wedded to the principles of Agenda 21.

However, a structure plan that will guide the development of KL for the next 20 years should, at the very least, articulate what a world-class city means. Doubtless, town planners will say there are thousands of criteria to measure its capacity in becoming a global node and its efficiency in servicing the international economy. We agree. But what is the KL20's localised conception of a world-class city, or should we be mindlessly following - while packaging our history, heritage and culture into tourism-driven capsules - the physical, socio-cultural and ecological footprints of London, New York and Paris in the name of international growth?

A nagging question: should the city's development blueprint revolve around its economic responses to the dictates of globalisation or around the needs, engagement and participation of the denizens and the "humanisation" of the city? This is not a negation of the city's economic role or a rejection of globalisation. We are merely questioning the main thrust of KL20 in light of what was said by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the World Economic Forum in New York on Feb 3, 2002: "The challenge for Asia is not how to manage the present concept of globalisation but to make it work and benefit from it. The challenge is to influence the thinking on globalisation, to reshape it, to reduce the chances of it going awry."

KL20's overall policy thrust falls short of "reshaping" and localising globalisation. Some of the goals, strategies and policies identified in KL20 should be revised. The Mayor of Kuala Lumpur, Datuk Mohamad Shaid Mohd Taufek, is right in saying that "a good plan is less meaningful unless it is successfully implemented and the implementation of the plan will not be successful without the support of the citizens". At this juncture, let us get the structure plan right.