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10. May 2012

Online at <http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/39210/>

MPRA Paper No. 39210, posted 4. June 2012 13:40 UTC



Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung  
Center for Development Research  
University of Bonn

ZEF

# Working Paper Series 95

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Cyberjaya, Malaysia



universität**bonn**

ISSN 1864-6638

Bonn, May 2012

ZEF Working Paper Series, ISSN 1864-6638  
Department of Political and Cultural Change  
Center for Development Research, University of Bonn  
Editors: Joachim von Braun, Manfred Denich, Solvay Gerke, Anna-Katharina Hornidge and  
Conrad Schetter

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# **The Symbolic Universe of Cyberjaya, Malaysia**

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## **Abstract**

This paper analyses how various actors have used potent urban symbols to assert their vision of a modern, globalized Malay identity in the construction of the recently founded knowledge city of Cyberjaya, part of the flagship Multimedia Super Corridor project. As the state controls both the land and the urban planning process it has attempted to impose its own particularistic vision of Malaysian society on urban space and urban structures. This is demonstrated through an analysis of the discursive vision behind Cyberjaya, the logos of government corporations, the use of architectural forms and motifs, and the treatment of urban space itself. The discussion suggests the spatial and symbolic universe of Cyberjaya draws on both patterns of 'traditional' Malay life as well a projected vision of a modernized Malay identity that resonates with a globalized Islam. This generates contestations in which other possible imaginings of Cyberjaya's symbolic space become possible.

Keywords: urban development, urban symbols, identity, knowledge, Malaysia.

# 1 Introduction: Symbolic Space

"Urban symbolism expresses itself through different phenomena, such as the layout of a city, architecture, street and place names, poems, as well as rituals, festivals and processions" (Nas 2011:9). In Malaysia's multi-ethnic society symbolic space is highly contested. Competition between political elites, strategic groups and social classes is not only directed at the control and appropriation of resources like capital, land and bureaucratic office but also at influencing signs and symbols. The print media, television and cyberspace are assets that elites strive to dominate and manage. More specifically, new symbols are invented and propagated whose power is absorbed by those who create them. Old symbols are often imbued with new meaning and used by political authority to connect to a glorious past – whether imagined or real – and thus to reinvent history. 'Urban symbolism and rituals are more than a simple reflection of society. They lay bare the bones of society and the relations between its constituent groups of all sorts: class, ethnicity, gender and age' (Nas and De Giosa, 2011: 283).

Whereas Chinese symbols, like signboards with Chinese characters and Chinese temples, previously dominated urban space, Malay symbolism was largely relegated to national mosques, the sultans' palaces and rural areas. With the New Economic Policy (NEP), launched by the government in 1971, Malays made claims to a larger share of economic opportunities under the stated objectives of reducing socio-economic disparities and eradicating poverty. One way this could only be achieved was by occupying more urban space where higher value economic activities are concentrated. Initially this proved to be difficult. But eventually the foundation of new urban centres opened avenues to material and symbolic claims for Malay hegemony in both government and the economy. The creation of a new national capital, Putrajaya, and of a new urban centre of the high-tech economy (mainly in the information and technology sector) named Cyberjaya, was the outcome of the battle for symbolic domination.

Cyberjaya is a 'powerful national symbol' created by the political elite 'romanticizing the future' (Evers, 1997: 1; Evers and Gerke, 1997: 4). It reflects the Malay elite's intention to ride the wave of modern technology and globalization in order to attract capital and investment. Given the intimate relationship between economic and political power, the governing class in return benefits from contracts for massive infrastructural development to construct the city which is part of the hugely ambitious Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project (Wain, 2009: 189). The political elite uses urban development to define modernity, with information and communications technology (ICT) as its backbone. Cyberjaya was planned and developed with the idea of advancing a 'new economy, embracing capitalism and modernity' (Norhafezah Yusof, 2010: 29). This modernity was projected to have a Malay-Muslim face to reflect a relatively new Malay assertiveness at the centre of the 'national development' project in a global 'informational age'. The very name 'Cyberjaya' itself is a combination of the English term 'cyber', relating to the culture of computers, information technology and virtual reality, and the Malay term '*jaya*', meaning victory.

The idea behind the creation of Cyberjaya, apart from establishing a new and vibrant urban centre, was in part to reduce and divert the development pressures on Kuala Lumpur. Historically, Chinese merchants and tin mining interests, with the help of Malay rulers, were largely responsible for developing Kuala Lumpur. Its status was further enhanced when the British chose it as the administrative capital of the newly formed Federated Malay States in 1896. By creating a new city from a greenfield site on former rubber and oil palm plantations

exactly a century later, the political elite consciously aimed to relocate core elements of the 'new economy' away from the Chinese dominated economy of Kuala Lumpur, challenging and countering that supremacy through the spatial development of the new urbanscapes (King, 2008).

The analysis presented here examines the relationship between culture and power as expressed in architecture, urban planning and attendant forms of symbolism over the course of the past two decades. It asks how political authority takes shape in stone, glass, marble, steel and signs, and how, in turn, these architectural, urban and symbolic spaces help shape the discourse on the allocation of power and the politics of identity in contemporary Malaysia. These processes can be demonstrated by examining the different actors and decision-making dynamics involved in the planning and construction of Cyberjaya.

## 2 The Imagined City: Global, National and Ethnic Dynamics

Large-scale urbanization started in Malaya in the late nineteenth century when the British introduced modern urban planning and municipal reform in the peninsula (Goh, 1991; Lees, 2011). Major cities and smaller towns were settled, organized and managed along racial and ethnic lines (Evers, 1975; Cangi, 1993; Yuen, 2011). This contributed towards an imbalanced spatial distribution of ethnic groups, reinforced by a sharply differentiated division of labour. Historically, ethnic Chinese dominated most urban settlements in the western states of the peninsula and this is where major economic and infrastructural development took place (Sidhu, 1976). As a result, the combination of spatial segregation, economic imbalances and political competition contributed to increasing strains on the post-independence political settlement leading to bloody inter-ethnic conflict in 1969. This crisis created an opportunity for the ruling elite to push for a new politics of ethnic preferment at the heart of urban planning and development, embedded within the provisions of the NEP.

Rapid urbanization was seen as an important process to enable the Malays to overcome perceived socio-economic problems. In his well-known book, *The Malay Dilemma* (1970), that set out the terms for a new Malay ascendancy, the former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad – the man behind the creation of Putrajaya and Cyberjaya – noted:

Properly regulated and planned, urbanization appears to afford the only method of keeping the Malays abreast of developments around them and in the rest of the world.... It is the old values and ways of life which have held the Malays back, cutting them off from the changes continually taking place in the rest of the country and the world (Mahathir, 1970: 112–13).

Though he was absolutely clear about the economic prerequisites to achieve his developmental goals, and the broader project of social engineering this would entail, Mahathir was equally conscious of the importance of ideational constructs to change the ‘values and way of life’ he attributed to the majority of Malays.

By 1990 the NEP – at least in its original guise – had run its course. In the decade that followed Mahathir’s government oversaw the creation of two major new cities with Malays at the socio-economic heart of both, part of what Daniel Brooker (2012: 3) calls Mahathir’s *fin-de-siècle* ‘grandiose utopian vision’. Designed as an ‘intelligent city’ Putrajaya was earmarked to be the new Federal Government Administrative Centre to replace Kuala Lumpur as the administrative capital. Though construction was delayed by the impact of the 1997–98 Asian financial crises, Putrajaya was formally declared a Federal Territory in February 2001 and the majority of government offices had relocated there within another four years.

For its part, Cyberjaya was envisioned as an ICT-themed city at the heart of the showcase MSC, a business cluster self-consciously modelled on Silicon Valley, part of a regionwide ‘Siliconization’ of Asia (Jessop and Sum, 2000). The immediate aim was to attract international multimedia and ICT companies, drawn by a state-of-the-art integrated infrastructure, but also to promote research and development leading to the creation of *new* technology. But the emergence of Cyberjaya, and the MSC more broadly, should also be



understood as a core element of Mahathir's longer-term developmental strategy, first outlined in the Sixth Malaysia Plan of 1991, to attain self-sufficient industrialized nation status by 2020. The MSC would become a geographic focal point serving as the regional base for high-tech corporations and an enabling environment to foster the emerging innovations of the technology sector (Bunnell, 2004). For its leading supporters the MSC was presented as a unique opportunity to 'leapfrog' Malaysia toward its Vision 2020 goals and allow it to be connected to the globalized informational economy (Mahathir, 1998; see Banerjee and Mustafa, 1999).

Beyond these pragmatic political and economic considerations, the MSC, Putrajaya and Cyberjaya are expressive of broader currents and tensions that confront the Malaysian polity. First, as we have seen, the new departures of the 1990s were conceived as a maturing of the long-term *national* development project, allowing the government to retain national political legitimacy. In this regard, Mahathir was able to present the MSC as bound up with a *multicultural* imagining of Malaysian national identity (Bunnell, 2002). Though long known as a champion of Malay interests, Mahathir was not insensitive to the needs of nation building. In promoting the attractiveness of the MSC to potential international investors Mahathir understood perfectly well the value of 'multicultural marketing':

The Malaysians are made up of people of Malay, Indonesian, Indian and Chinese origin. We are only a few hours flight from the major Asian capitals. We have language skills and cultural knowledge that can be very helpful. Most people speak English as well as one or more languages such as different Chinese or Indian dialects, or Malay.... Malaysia will be a highly efficient and effective hub for the region (Mahathir, 1997 cited in Bunnell, 2002: 114).

In this version of development, then, the regional high-tech hub of the MSC and its leading cities were to be expressions of national power projected through a multicultural version of the nation.

Second, both the MSC and Cyberjaya are explicitly situated as part of the re-scaling of global capital not only beyond the national level but also at the sub-national level of cities and urban regions (Swyngedouw, 2004; Brenner, 2004). From the outset, a range of incentives and benefits were designed to attract high-tech transnational investors to Cyberjaya, including largely unrestricted employment of local and foreign 'knowledge workers', exemption from local ownership requirements and the freedom to source investment capital globally (MDeC, 1996). Mahathir, once again, was able to imagine Cyberjaya as one of the world's great hubs for an information age in which 'borders are disappearing due to the ease of global communications, capital flows, the movements of goods and people and location of operational headquarters' (Mahathir, 1996 cited in Bunnell, 2002: 112). This is emphatically *not* an example of the power of global capital displacing or even hollowing out the nation-state. Rather what Cyberjaya – and the MSC more broadly – sought to do was to harness these new global imperatives to Malaysia's national developmental project by embedding them in a new region-city scale of accumulation. Tensions invariably arise from this symbiosis of the national/sub-national and the global. A great deal of the political elite's efforts has been precisely targeted at mediating and containing fears of 'negative consequences' of 'opening up'.

Third, the interaction between global, national and sub-national scales of economic development is, in the Malaysian context, inevitably conjoined by the politics of ethnicity and specifically Malay rights. As we have seen, the NEP actively promoted the interests of the Malay community – even though the results have been ambiguous at best. During the 1970s and 1980s the policy was largely pursued through state-directed developmentalism via the creation of government-owned entities that became directly involved in the economic activities of the nation. Many analysts argue that the main beneficiaries of the NEP have not been Malay community *tout court* but rather a small class of politically-connected, rent-seeking businessmen and a larger middle class group that has gained from educational opportunities and salaried employment in state agencies (Searle, 1999: 58–78; Gomez and Jomo, 1999,; Gomez, 2009, 2012). The Mahathir administration consciously attempted to break the dependency syndrome associated with the NEP by reconfiguring the role of Malay interests during the 1990s. This was done through a greater emphasis on privatization of state-owned assets and the promotion of Malay entrepreneurialism. As much as anything else, then, the MSC and Cyberjaya were presented as an opportunity for a new generation of Malay entrepreneurs to compete in the high-tech economy and for the urban Malay middle class to personify the future (Brooker, 2012: 14).

In this respect, both Cyberjaya and Putrajaya were consciously conceived and created as symbols of Malay modernity, a ‘unique Malay urban sphere’ (King, 2008). They represent a particular kind of emergent identity politics, a confident vision of political and economic power that imagined and then asserted a specifically Malay-Islamic character. Both cities consciously tried to break away from colonial or Chinese forms and symbols which had been the dominant features of the built environment since the introduction of modern city planning. Most of the buildings in Putrajaya, for example, demonstrate (or rather claim to demonstrate) either Malay or Muslim architectural and design motifs although the exact provenance of these stylistic and structural forms is the subject of considerable debate (see Bunnell, 2004; Mohamad Tajuddin, 2005; King, 2008; Moser, 2010). The attempt to shape a ‘modern’ Malay sense of identity and its political-economic mission from earlier ‘traditions’ actually had precursors. The new national university, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, was founded in 1970 and is situated close to Cyberjaya. As we have shown in an earlier study, the physical plan, rather than the architectural form, of its buildings reflected the basic symbolic structure and spatial pattern of the traditional Malay state. In this regard, ‘UKM has been constructed in the image of the Malay civilization’ (Evers, 1997: 54). In Cyberjaya the symbolism of a constructed Malay modernity has been further enhanced in novel ways.

### 3 'Key to the City'

Who holds the key to Cyberjaya? Over the past fifteen years five main actors have driven Cyberjaya's development (see Table 1). Apart from the local authority, Sepang Municipal Council, the remainder were established together with MSC Malaysia in 1996: the Multimedia Development Corporation (MDeC) directs and oversees the National ICT Initiative; Cyberview is a government-owned corporation and principal land owner; Setia Haruman is the so-called 'master developer' entrusted with the planning, design and preparation of the primary infrastructure for Cyberjaya; and, the Multimedia University is the country's first private university seen as central to the creation of a 'knowledge society'.

Sepang Municipal Council, previously known as Sepang District Council, is the local planning authority for Cyberjaya. In March 2005, Cyberjaya Development Committee approved to upgrading the status of Sepang Municipal Council with a total of about 60,000 sq km developable land. Its responsibilities as the local authority for Sepang are set out under the Local Government Act 1976, which includes 'planning, development and community services' (MDeC, 2006). The function of the local planning authority is vital in dealing with planning applications and to grant planning permission in Cyberjaya. The ceremony to commemorate the upgrading of the council's status offers an interesting insight into the discursive and symbolic languages that help to project a very particular vision of Cyberjaya. The ceremony was described on the council's website in the following terms:

Upacara pengisytiharan gilang gemilang dengan mengekalkan adat istiadat Melayu dilangsungkan penuh kemeriahan di Stadium Perbandaran Sepang yang telah dirasmikan oleh Duli Yang Maha Mulia Sultan Selangor pada 13hb Disember 2005 (SMC, 2012).

**Table 1** Actors in Cyberjaya's development

<i>Actor</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Interest</i>	<i>Instrument</i>
<b>Sepang Municipal Council</b>	Local authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating jobs</li> <li>• Expanding authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning guidelines and approval</li> <li>• By-laws</li> <li>• Quit rent</li> <li>• Business licence</li> <li>• Building approval</li> </ul>
Multimedia Development Corporation (MdeC)	MSC Malaysia governing body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating business opportunities</li> <li>• Expanding authority</li> <li>• Gatekeeper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MSC status approval</li> </ul>
<b>Cyberview Sdn Bhd</b>	Land owner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanding authority</li> <li>• Control development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capital shares</li> <li>• Building/land sale</li> </ul>
<b>Setia Haruman Sdn Bhd</b>	Master developer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business empire</li> <li>• Profit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infrastructure</li> </ul>
<b>Multimedia University</b>	Higher learning institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Funding</li> <li>• R&amp;D</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuition fees</li> <li>• Research and development projects</li> </ul>

This highlights an explicitly Malay set of ceremonial motifs, not least the Sultan of Selangor's attendance. In Malaysia, the sultan functions as the titular head of Islam at the state level. Further, of the 24 consultative committees established in the Sepang municipality as platforms for residents to communicate with the local authority only the Cyberjaya Community Consultative Committee is headed by a member of the state royal family. While Cyberjaya is portrayed as a modern, globally connected city, the local authority still maintains a strong connection with the sultan, Islam and the wider Malay society.

The MDeC is the government-owned corporation that acts as a 'one-stop agency' appointed to govern, promote, develop and manage the operation of the MSC with Cyberjaya at its core. It envisions a 20-year timeframe for the full implementation and execution of all the aims of the corridor. This schedule is divided into three inter-connected phases: the creation of the MSC itself (1996–2004); the growth of a global ICT hub with links to other cyber cities in Malaysia and round the world (2004–2010); and, the transformation of Malaysia into a 'knowledge society' thus fulfilling one of the stated aims of Vision 2020 (2010–2020). Given a mission to realise Malaysia as a global hub and preferred location for ICT and multimedia innovations, services and operations it is hardly surprising that the MDeC portrays itself in quite different ways to Sepang Municipal Council: 'we combine the entrepreneurial efficiency and effectiveness of a private company with the decision-making authority of a high-powered government agency' (MDeC, 2012). The members of the board of directors comprise high-ranking civil servants from ministries, a special officer to the prime minister as well as corporate leaders. The MDeC presents itself as a new form of governance, harnessing a public–private partnership which privileges current organizational management orthodoxies in the field of urban development. Its purpose, in the Malaysian context is nothing short of revolutionary. In the words of the MDeC's former chief executive officer, 'we are aiming to create a "multimedia utopia" for knowledge workers by developing the ideal environment to generate creativity' (cited in Brooker, 2012: 9; see also Wee, 2008).

Cyberview is also a government-owned company, with direct links to the Ministry of Finance, and owns the land of Cyberjaya. It has been mandated by the government to spearhead the development of Cyberjaya. Its core mission is to realise Cyberjaya as a nucleus of the MSC and as global hub and preferred location for ICT, multimedia and services for innovation and operations, and to fulfil specific government initiatives in support of Vision 2020. In addition, Cyberview is also responsible for the physical development tasks of Cyberjaya including attending to all land administration matters, building enterprise buildings, building supporting amenities as well as undertaking necessary maintenance work (Cyberview, 2012). In ways that are analogous to the MDeC, Cyberview offers a means for politically connected strategic groups to directly control over all aspects of the physical development of Cyberjaya in accordance with the government's stated aspirations (Evers, 1980; Evers and Schiel, 1988).

As we have seen, Sepang Municipal Council, the MDeC and Cyberview are each directly controlled by the political elite through specific bureaucratic and legally-binding arrangements. By contrast, Setia Haruman, the 'master developer' of Cyberjaya, uses different instruments to benefit from the city's development. The company is chaired by Mustapha Kamal bin Abu Bakar, one of the best-known Malay property developers who has strong links with the ruling elite. Formerly a civil servant he became head of a state property company and concurrently served as a special officer to the chief minister of Selangor. In 1983 he formed the EMKAY group of companies, which proved to be his point of entry into the lucrative property and land development sector that became the most common means of advancement for a rising class of Malay capitalists under Mahathir's administration. Due to his strong political connections:

The Selangor State Government awarded EMKAY its first major breakthrough project in 1985, the development of a new township consisting of residential and commercial units in Sungai Buloh. Bandar Baru Sungai Buloh, a RM200 million project, was hailed as 'the first ever large-scale privatised property development scheme' in the state of Selangor Darul Ehsan (Emkay Group, 2012).

Setia Haruman was entrusted with the role of planning, designing and preparing the primary infrastructure for the Cyberjaya Flagship Zone. The area covers 7,000 acres of freehold land consisting of enterprise, commercial, institutional and residential zones. The company also provides basic infrastructure and marketing, and sells parcels of land and other property developments to investors and sub-developers to design their own premises. In addition, Setia Haruman has also been approved to oversee Cyberjaya's residential development (Setia Haruman, 2012).

The final core actor in Cyberjaya's development is the Multimedia University (MMU). As the country's first private university it became the flagship for the government's goal to liberalize higher education and aimed to 'enhance creative dynamics between research and industry'. The aspirational character of the university is set out in the clearest possible terms:

As the university at the heart of the MSC, MMU also serves as a catalyst for the development of the high tech ICT industry of the nation, parallel to the Silicon Valley-Stanford model in the United States (MMU, 2012).

As a private institution MMU caters for a different set of students compared to state universities. Tuition fees are a significant source of income. A typical 4-year undergraduate degree costs RM60,000, considerably higher than fees charged by state universities located in the Klang Valley. Even though most universities round the world have faced straitened financial circumstances over the past decade MMU boasts of having achieved 'financial independence' within the first three years of its founding, because of what it calls 'prudent spending and careful budgeting' though the very considerable forms of support it receives are not mentioned (MMU, 2012).

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the institutionalization of the entire Cyberjaya project is the extent to which it collapses the claims to being multicultural and transnational to a much more familiar pattern of control. Almost all the key decision-makers in the five key agencies – chairmen of boards, chief executives, chief operating officers – are drawn from a very specific social group: a Malay elite that has close ties to the state through bureaucratic arrangements, business contracts and social networks. They represent that generation of Malays who emerged during the NEP era and greatly benefited from Mahathir's later support for the emergence of 'modern', entrepreneurial class. Representative of a highly technocratic managerial style they are, at the same time, rooted in deeply-embedded traditional ties of ethnicity, religion, party politics and personal ties. They are emblematic of what John Hutnyk (1999) calls, in a memorable phrase, 'semi-feudal cyber-colonialism'.

## 4 Symbols and Signs

While material interests and the institutionalization of the Cyberjaya project are obviously central to any understanding of its place in the overall national developmental project this is not its only significant aspect. The ideational significance of Cyberjaya also matters. For as Evers (2011: 194) has recently suggested, 'the strong interrelation between political and economic developments with urban symbolism should not be overlooked as an important dimension in the study of urban governance in Southeast Asia'. In this regard, Peter Nas has pioneered the study of the importance of symbolic signifiers in understanding urban landscapes. He argues that a city's identity and image depend on its 'symbolic ecology'. Of course, symbols and signs do not exist in a vacuum. Symbolic ecology has to be regarded as 'poly-form and often nested' either historically or politically (Nas, 1993; Nas, *et al.*, 2011). In a similar way, Evers (1997: 47) notes that symbols 'often are made up of a chain of related signs and refer to complex sets of meaning and provoke feelings raise consciousness or influence behaviour if not immediately, possibly in the future'. They are, in the final analysis, a key component of the cultural capital that helps to mediate the forces of globalization to create outcomes that are congruent with more local and national aspirations.

A study of the different symbols in Cyberjaya offers an interesting insight into how the ruling elite creates and defines space and projects high-tech utopian dreams in Malaysia (Wong, 2003). First, we look at the logos used by different actors to represent their organizations. Second, we discuss the different symbols created in the main buildings of organizational offices. Third, we analyse the physical location of the main buildings. Finally, we interpret the relationship between different actors based on their social ecology in terms of locational arrangements.

### 4.1 Logos and crest

The logos chosen to represent different actors carry deeper meanings. For example, the MDeC, established to manage MSC Malaysia, tries to create an inclusive image resonant of the discourse of multiculturalism and globalization. Different ethnic groups are represented on an equal basis to create a projected 'future' Malaysia, one that is democratic, modern and developed. The implied claim is that ICT would finally allow different ethnic groups to compete and contribute equally. In other words, it symbolizes the vision to establish a united *bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian nation) bonded by full and fair partnership (Mahathir, 1991). This is deliberately different from the NEP discourse which granted special privileges to the *bumiputera* or so-called indigenous communities (in the peninsular Malaysia context effectively the Malays). In an interesting development – given how much the national language policy has been heavily politicized over the last forty years – English is seen as providing the best platform for pushing forward the 1Malaysia vision of the current administration.

Likewise, the MMU crest symbolizes the same globalized and high-tech image. The university was formerly known as Universiti Telekom and changed its name in 1997. The use of an English name indicates clearly the university's intention not to make reference to any ethnic group and to create a global brand that can compete on the global stage (MMU, 2012). The logo of Cyberview is also commonly used to symbolize MSC Malaysia and a smaller version of it is also used on the MDeC logo. Although, the design appears to have a rather mechanical look redolent of much contemporary image-making, upon closer inspection it actually symbolizes the dome of a mosque. As Figure 1 shows, the resemblance is not with any

ordinary mosque but with the dome of Masjid Putra (Putra Mosque). The mosque is located next to the prime minister's office in Putrajaya and was built in the same year as Cyberjaya. The colour green and the star are common Islamic motifs. The logo symbolically indicates Malaysia's position as a leading Islamic nation. Malaysia was a founding member of the International Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1969 and chair of the OIC from 17 October 2003 to 13 March 2008. The symbolic representation of Cyberview's logo is thus constructed in the image of Islam, but a self-consciously 'modern' and 'progressive' Islam.

**Figure 1** Dome of Masjid Putra and Cyberview Logo



Source: Masjid Putra, 2006 and Cyberview, 2012

Turning to the logo of Sepang Municipal Council the most significant colour is yellow which is the official colour of the sultan and of Malay royalty more generally. It symbolizes the fact that the sultan is considered the protector of the *rakyat* (people). Loyalty to the sultan is an important element in Malay *adat* (custom). The three circles symbolize the three main ethnic groups – Malays, Chinese and Indians – and the connection shows the symbiotic relationship and bonds between them. Hence, the logo of Sepang Municipal Council clearly denotes the two core elements of traditional governance, i.e. the sultan and *rakyat*, with technology providing the necessary linkages between different social groups. In contrast with the other key players in Cyberjaya, the council upholds the Malay language as well, further evidence of how it is situated within a traditionally defined notion of place.

The logo of Setia Haruman also shows a clear link to the royal court and Malay ethnicity (Figure 2). A closer look at the upper part of Setia Haruman logo exhibits a resemblance with the Selangor coat of arms. The latter depicts both the *keris* (small dagger) and *tombak* (spear), two elements of the state regalia (Selangor, 2012). The company's name *setia* literally translates as loyal while *haruman* means fragrance. This suggests that loyalty is the most important trait of a businessperson or business organization. There is also hidden significance here since the founder Setia Haruman, Mustapha Kamal, was a former senior Selangor civil servant. His own personal connections with the state are thus symbolically translated through design allusions to the state's crest. In doing so, Setia Haruman asserts its loyalty to the state and the royal court, which concurs with traditional notions Malay *adat* (Evers, 1977).

**Figure 2** State of Selangor Coat of Arms and Setia Haruman Logo



Source: State of Selangor and Setia Haruman (2012)

In sum, the logos used by different institutional actors in Cyberjaya symbolize different meanings that, in combination, attempt to capture the totality of the MSC as a whole; these include technology, knowledge, modernity and globalization, on the one hand, and more traditional signifiers such as ethnicity and royalty, on the other. Despite this very broad range of meanings it is also clear that two main meanings are present in all the logos. One perceives the overall development of Cyberjaya from a modern Islamic and global perspective; the other retains an older sense of tradition associated, above all, with the position of the sultan and the *rakyat* as his subjects. The analysis of the logos thus seems to suggest that 'borderless', informational capitalism is still necessarily bound up with traditional affiliations that are pre-modern or feudal in their origins. In this sense, globalization is understood not as weightless but as landing and reproducing itself in a particular place. A reading of the contrasting symbolic meanings attributed to Cyberjaya's leading actors is presented in Table 2.



**Table 2** Symbols connecting different actors in Cyberjaya

Symbol	Signs	Meaning	Domain
<p>MdeC</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black for letter 'M'</li> <li>• Red for letters 'DEC'</li> <li>• English motto: 'Driving Transformation'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'M' stands for Malaysia</li> <li>• Black means <i>rakyat</i></li> <li>• Red symbolizes bravery and the drive for success</li> <li>• The three letters represent the main ethnic groups</li> <li>• English represent the 'global' language and <i>lingua franca</i> in ICT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State</li> <li>• Ethnicity</li> <li>• Globalization</li> <li>• Modernity</li> </ul>
<p>Cyberview Sdn Bhd</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dome</li> <li>• Green font and 'circle'</li> <li>• Mechanical design</li> <li>• One full triangle and two half triangles pointing north, east and west</li> <li>• English name: 'Cyberview'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Official religion of Malaysia</li> <li>• Modernity</li> <li>• Nature and sustainability</li> <li>• Malaysia's position in Southeast Asia</li> <li>• Green technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religion: Islam</li> <li>• State</li> <li>• Globalization</li> <li>• Modernity</li> <li>• Sustainable future</li> </ul>
<p>Sepang Municipal Council</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yellow</li> <li>• Blue</li> <li>• Red</li> <li>• Highway connection</li> <li>• Malay name: 'Majlis Perbandaran Sepang'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yellow represents the official colour of Malay royalty</li> <li>• Blue symbolizes unity</li> <li>• Red means bravery and the drive for success</li> <li>• Highway represents advanced technology and connectivity</li> <li>• Malay identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religion: Islam</li> <li>• Ethnicity</li> <li>• State</li> <li>• Modernity</li> </ul>
<p>Setia Haruman Sdn Bhd</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three triangles</li> <li>• Green</li> <li>• Blue</li> <li>• Malay name: 'Setia Haruman'</li> <li>• English motto 'The Master Developer of Cyberjaya'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Represents the state of Selangor coat of arms: royalty</li> <li>• Land: rubber and oil palm estates</li> <li>• Lake</li> <li>• Land subdivision</li> <li>• Loyalty and fragrance</li> <li>• Global</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tradition</li> <li>• State</li> <li>• Nature</li> <li>• Social network</li> <li>• Capital</li> <li>• Modernity</li> </ul>
<p>Multimedia University</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Red circle</li> <li>• Blue pins</li> <li>• Blue band</li> <li>• English name: 'Multimedia University'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nucleus of dynamic growth with technology</li> <li>• Creative ways to acquire knowledge</li> <li>• Environment for R&amp;D</li> <li>• Located at the centre of ICT capital</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge and learning</li> <li>• Academic</li> <li>• Modernity</li> <li>• Global</li> </ul>

Sources: Individual websites (2012), field data (2009–2011), Evers (1997)

## 5 Buildings and architecture

Turning now to the buildings and architecture of Cyberjaya, we first examine the MDeC building, one of the two earliest buildings in the city. Those who are familiar with the Malay *kampung* (village) would notice the significant resemblance of the building with the traditional Malay house at least in formal and functional terms. In their study of traditional Malay architecture, Mohd Sabrizaa and Sufian (2008) point out that the *tunjuk langit* (finial or device employed decoratively to emphasize the apex of a gable) signifies its owner's wealth and aristocratic status. The *tunjuk langit* is a very familiar architectural motif in Cyberjaya (see Figure 3). Based on its size, the MDeC building would fit perfectly as a *penghulu's* (village chief) house in a *kampung*. There are steps to enter the building which are also a common feature in traditional Malay houses. Entering a house, even a level one, is still called '*naik rumah*' (literally 'moving up into a house'). In addition, the MDeC is surrounded with a few species of palm trees including the areca nut palm which is common in the *kampung*.

Figure 3 Echoes of a Malay *kampung*

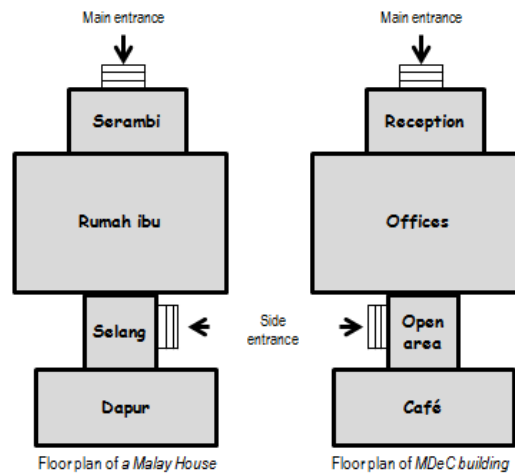


Source: Field data (2009)

A Malay *kampung* is frequently located by a river or coastline (Zulkifli, 1994; Evers, 1997). Although no natural water elements exist near the building, technology has helped to recreate the *kampung* environment. There is a man-made miniature waterfall and fish pond attached to the building. Apart from creating a cooling atmosphere they also recapture the *kampung* environment. In addition, the MDeC building is located within a cluster of buildings with similar architectural features. The most striking is the Padi Restaurant, an obvious reference to irrigated rice cultivation which exists at the very centre of Malay *adat* (Evers, 1977, 1997). It helps demonstrate that at the 'heart of Cyberjaya' there is Malay *adat* in action.

Another important feature of the MDeC building that exhibits formal similarities with the Malay house is the floor plan. The moment one enters the building one cannot but recognize the floor plan as that of a typical Malay house (Zulkifli, 1994; Chen et al., 2008). Figure 4 illustrates the comparable features of a Malay house with the MDeC building. The *serambi* (verandah entrance or portico) in a Malay house is replaced with a modern reception area. Nevertheless, both the areas function in a similar way. Guests at a Malay house are not allowed to enter the *rumah ibu* (core area) automatically. Similarly, visitors are not allowed to enter the offices in the MDeC unless they are accepted by the person in charge. It requires getting security clearance and other protocols.

Figure 4 Floor plans of Malay house and MDeC building



Source: Zulkifli (1994), Field data (2009)

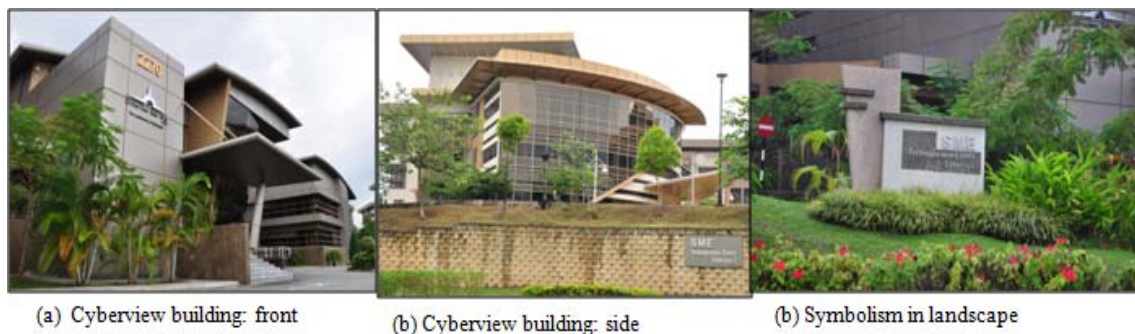
In a Malay house, the dapur (kitchen) is always located at the back. Interestingly, in the MDeC building this function is fulfilled by the café. Food served in the café – such as nasi lemak (rice cooked with coconut milk), rendang (slow-cooked meat in a coconut sauce) and nasi dagang (rice steamed in coconut milk and fish curry) – not surprisingly shows a strong connection with traditional Malay cuisine. Nevertheless the English language dominates nearly all written and spoken communications in the building from the receptionist's greeting to all the signage.

It appears then that the earliest building in Cyberjaya was not built in a contemporary international modernist style. Rather it tried to emulate some formal features of the *kampung*. In this sense the MDeC building can actually be understood as an example of Malay postmodernism. The functional and formal shapes and spaces of the modernist style are replaced by a much more diverse palette of aesthetics. Most obviously, the architects of the MDeC building have rediscovered the expressive and symbolic value of older, indigenous architectural elements and forms that had been abandoned by the modern style, including symbolism and ornament. The message of the building seems clear: it represents the 'modern Malay' at home in a transnational environment.

By contrast, the Cyberview building does not exhibit any particular reference to ethnicity, place or particularity (see Figure 5). The building seems to embody what Mohamad Tajuddin (2005: 76) terms, in the Malaysian context, 'democratic architecture' defined as a style in which 'one either uses all the ethnic references or one does not refer to any at all'. The Cyberview building is clearly an example of the latter, with no particular ethnic or cultural references, relying instead on the juxtaposition of various geometrical shapes redolent of international modernism. The building is located within the SME Technopreneur Centre. It was purposely built to cater for small- and medium-sized ICT-related companies. Tenants are required to pay relatively low rents compared to other buildings in Cyberjaya while they are provided with all the necessary facilities. It is supposed to be a test ground for companies before they move to a more spacious office spaces. The road that services the building

complex is known as Jalan Usahawan (Entrepreneur Road). In a direct signal to the dominant managerial style practised in Cyberjaya the road outside the building complex, where other multinational companies are located, is known as Jalan Teknokrat (Technocrat Road). While the aesthetic and the symbolism are resolutely modern and 'global' there are still small hints of the local. The structure functions as a signifier for a Malay proverb: *sedikit-sedikit, lama-lama jadi bukit* (bit by bit, in the end it becomes a hill). This means that in order to achieve something big one needs to start with something small. The proverb perfectly suits the building's function. It appears to suggest the main factors needed to be a successful entrepreneur are to start small and be patient until bigger opportunities arise.

**Figure 5** Cyberview building and SME Technopreneur building signage



Source: Field data (2009)

At first sight the building that houses the offices of Sepang Municipal Council (Majlis Perbandaran Sepang) has strong echoes of Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). As noted, Sepang Municipal Council is also the local authority for the airport. With an open space in front of the building it looks 'dominant' (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6** Sepang Municipal Council building

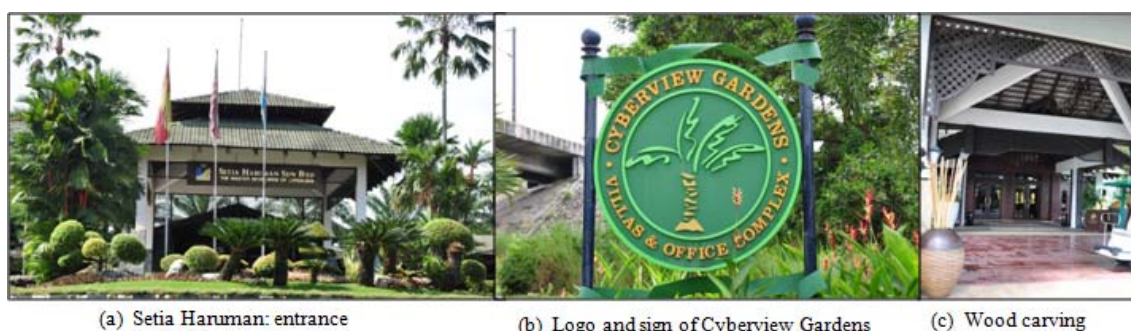


MPSP building: flying to the future?

The whole building is located on a spacious site, built in a fairly nondescript modernist style with little or no ornamentation. It exudes a sense of civic authority but in a rather faceless, bland way. This is ironic given the effort made to design the logo to reflect a range of embedded local motifs. And yet the building contains some very obvious functional confusion. To begin with, the main parking space is located at the back of the building. This requires almost all visitors to use a small door at the back to enter the building. Only the VIPs are allowed to use the main entrance. Our guess is the architect who designed the building got carried away with the arrival/departure hall concept of an airport! The problem is nobody is flying anywhere from here. Next, after entering the building from the back door there is further confusion. It is extremely difficult to get an immediate sense of direction and orientation which makes the building very user-unfriendly to first-time visitors. There is also a continuous sound coming from electronic doors from some of the offices. We were told users have to force the door open because it is inconvenient for them to key-in the access code every time they pass through the door. Although the system was created for safety reasons it seems that the local government officers prefer convenience to security. In ways typical of public buildings in Malaysia, the Sepang Municipal Council building pays extravagant attention to the needs of VIPs but is actually fairly forbidding to visitors. This is ironic given that the council is meant to represent the interests of the local population. The building offers a particularly overbearing sense of its own self-importance.

The Setia Haruman building is located in a large area which is divided into two distinct sections – upper and lower ones – based on the gradient level. The upper level is where the Setia Haruman office is located together with Cyberview Resort and Spa (not to be confused with the landowner, Cyberview) while the lower part is mostly occupied with resort-style villas and offices (see Figure 7). Although, the building looks like any other tropical resort or what Mohamad Tajuddin (2005: 9) terms ‘primitive regionalism’, upon closer inspection it does have some significant features. We notice the usage of *kekisi* (lattice) and wood carving which are common features of old Malay houses (Mohd Sabri and Sufian, 2008; Zumahiran and Ismail, 2008).

**Figure 7** Symbols and signs at the Setia Haruman cluster of buildings



Source: Field data (2009)

While offices in the cluster are named after birds commonly found in the *kampung*, guests of the resort are treated as Malay royals in the *istana* (palace) with a *dayang* (lady-in-waiting) and *hulubalang* (centurion). Likewise, the other two main ethnic groups in Malaysia are represented in a restaurant and a music lounge, Xing Zhu (lucky bamboo) and Karma (an Indian religious concept of cause and effect). In addition, there are symbols of globalization

as well with the English/German pub and an Italian restaurant. The resort's publicity material presents this mixture in the following terms:

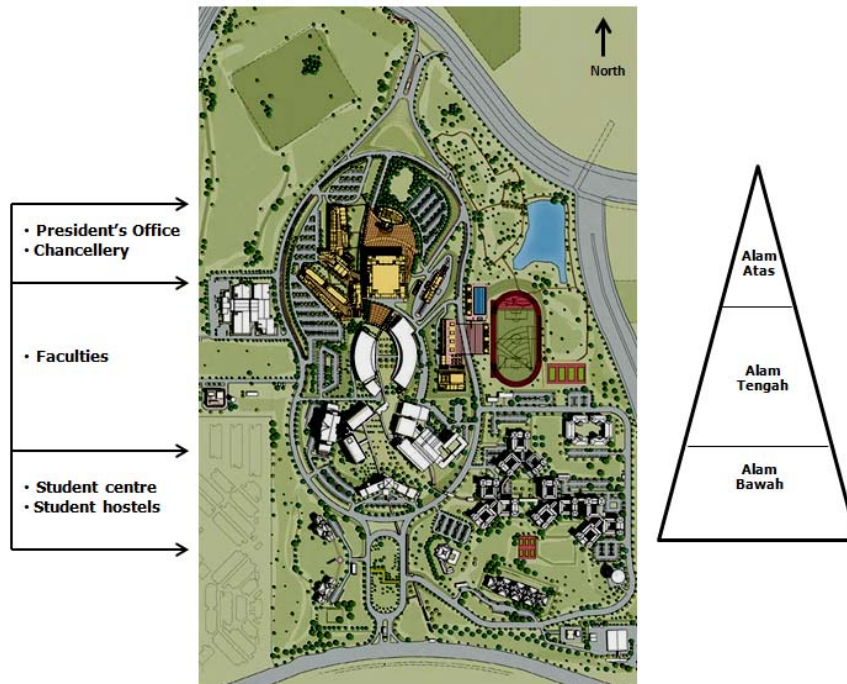
*Selamat datang* or welcome to the tropical paradise of this part of the world. Cyberview Resort & Spa is a 5-star boutique resort, a veritable paradise set on 28.8 acre of award-winning landscaped gardens, featuring world-class quality of service and unparalleled Malaysian hospitality (Cyberview-Lodge, 2012).

Thus the Setia Haruman cluster of buildings suggests that man-made 'nature' is an integral part of the city's future. It also symbolizes a particular kind of exclusivity, accessible to those who can afford it.

The most significant feature of the MMU campus is the triangular-shaped building of the student centre, located at the main entrance of the university. As Mohd Sabrizaa and Sufian (2008) note, in the Malay world the triangle is believed to symbolize the sacred mountain Gunung Mahameru (Evers, 2011: 293). This is just part of a wider Malay cosmological world that is divided into three levels: *alam atas* (top) occupied by the *dewa* (divine being); *alam tengah* (middle) occupied by humans; and *alam bawah* (bottom) representing the soil. We suggest that the soil is present in the area where plants are grown and students are symbolically situated like plants in the soil of the lower world. The references to traditional cosmology can also be applied to campus buildings as well. The MMU campus presents the three levels of the Malay world: *alam atas* is the administrative offices which also house the university president's office; *alam tengah* is where most of the faculties are located; while *alam bawah* contains the student centre and hostels. Beyond the clear statement of global modernity, the architectural and design forms and features of the MMU campus are also mediated by sophisticated use of explicitly Malay motifs.



**Figure 8** The Symbolic Universe of the Multimedia University



Source: GDPArchitects (2012), Mohd Sabrizaa and Sufian Che Amat (2008), Evers (1997)

In ways that are familiar from other buildings in Cyberjaya, the MMU projects the modern, 'globalized' Malay. A small example illustrates this new kind of hybridity: during Friday prayers in the MMU *surau* (place of prayers), the *khutbah* (sermon) is presented in English. This might be because of the large international student population, 20 per cent of the total, but also seems to carry the intention to enable Malay student to be familiar with English as the global language, ironically even for Islamic rituals. This contradicts the frequently used slogan '*utamakan bahasa Malaysia*' (put the Malay language first), as English is used for daily lectures as well as sermons in the house of God! Thus the MMU does reflect the same symbolism as other buildings in Cyberjaya described earlier. At the same time, the MMU layout plan perfectly denotes the Malay cosmological world.

Earlier studies of UKM (Evers 1997, 1996) concluded that the emphasis on 'Malay cultural identity is replaced by modernity as the major semiotic theme in Malaysia's domain of meaning'. In relation to Cyberjaya this conclusion needs to be modified by our current analysis. Malay cultural identity is not *replaced* by modernity. Rather it sits alongside, embellishes and *mediates* modernity. The result is a kind of eclectic postmodern global domain of meaning. Cyberjaya looks in two directions at the same time: inwards it borrows from the *kampung*, traditional architectural features, the rituals of royalty and the Malay cosmological world; outwards it reaches to a globalized order whose economic promises are still largely controlled by the (sometimes reviled) West or at least faceless, placeless transnational forces. Both dynamics are inscribed onto buildings and spaces in both literal and symbolic ways. The message from Cyberjaya seems to be clear: it is possible to be Malay yet global.

**Table 3** Symbols and signs of main buildings in Cyberjaya

Symbol	Signs	Location	Meaning	Domain
MDeC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Malay roof</li> <li>• Steps to enter the building</li> <li>• Floor plan cf. typical Malay house</li> <li>• Palm trees</li> <li>• Fish pond</li> <li>• Flag of Malaysia and State of Selangor</li> <li>• Three-tiered concrete slab</li> <li>• Padi restaurant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main junction</li> <li>• 'Heart of Cyberjaya'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Malay cultural identity</li> <li>• Pseudo-traditional Malay architecture</li> <li>• Kampung</li> <li>• Government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tradition</li> <li>• Ethnicity</li> <li>• State</li> </ul>
Cyberview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modern international architecture</li> <li>• Glass and latest building materials</li> <li>• Compact design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cluster of small- and medium-sized companies</li> <li>• Off the main boulevard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modern technology</li> <li>• Modernity</li> <li>• Cultural free architecture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modernity</li> <li>• Development</li> <li>• Capital</li> </ul>
Sepang Municipal Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modern international architecture</li> <li>• Glass and latest building materials</li> <li>• Two entrance</li> <li>• Federal and State flags</li> <li>• Lush open space in front of the building</li> <li>• Spacious building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persiaran Sepang (Sepang Boulevard)</li> <li>• In-front of MMU, sharing the same boulevard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modernity</li> <li>• State</li> <li>• 'Protector'</li> <li>• 'Bureaucratic'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State</li> <li>• Administrative modernity</li> </ul>
Setia Haruman Sdn Bhd and Cyberview Lodge and Spa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Palm trees</li> <li>• Tropical architecture</li> <li>• Golf course</li> <li>• Five-star hotel</li> <li>• Building name after birds in Malay</li> <li>• English/German, Italian, Indian, Chinese food outlets</li> <li>• Sembunyi spa (Malay)</li> <li>• Traditional Malay costume (songket, songkok etc)</li> <li>• Malay wood carving</li> <li>• Swimming pool with artificial waterfalls with palm trees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main entrance from Putrajaya</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Man-made nature</li> <li>• Leisure</li> <li>• Global</li> <li>• Multiculturalism</li> <li>• Tropical : Southeast Asia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature</li> <li>• Global</li> <li>• Ethnicity</li> <li>• Capital</li> </ul>
Multimedia University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Centre: significant triangular design</li> <li>• Looped road with two entry-exit roads</li> <li>• Flags of all states</li> <li>• Significance of blue</li> <li>• Persiaran Newron (Neuron boulevard)</li> <li>• Siti Hasmah Digital Library</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main entrance is located at the main boulevard of Cyberjaya together with MDeC building</li> <li>• Second entrance is located in front of MPSP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Triangle of man-nature-technology</li> <li>• Corporate colour of Telekom Malaysia</li> <li>• Nerve system to transmit information</li> <li>• Focus on students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic modernity</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• State</li> <li>• Capital</li> <li>• Knowledge sharing</li> <li>• Political networks</li> </ul>

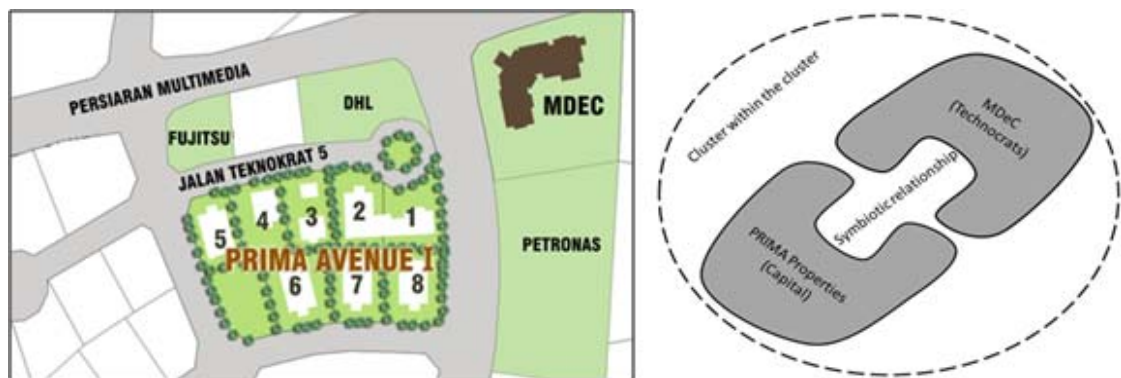
Source: Individual websites (2012), field data (2009)



## 6 Symbiotic relationships

The discussion on symbols and signs now focuses on the symbiotic relationships that exist denoting development. A striking symbiotic symbolism exists in many parts of the city and this can be best illustrated in the relationships created between the MDeC and Prima Avenue, where two major integrated office developments are owned by Prima Properties, a property management company. Prima Properties has had considerable importance to Cyberjaya's development from the beginning. It was the first contractor chosen to build both the Cyberview Resort and Spa and the MDeC building. These are the two earliest structures that mark the very foundations of the city. The company also managed to complete the 20,000 sq ft resort within 100 days so it could be used to host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders retreat in November 1998 (Prima Avenue, 2012).

Figure 9 Symbiotic relationship between main actors in Cyberjaya cluster



Source: Prima Avenue (2012), Authors' illustration (2012)

The company's office is located adjacent to the MDeC building which makes it an ideal case study for direct comparison (see Figure 9). In essence the MDeC symbolizes the cadre of technocratic managers who create and implement the governance mechanisms for Cyberjaya whereas Prima Properties represents a leading capitalist corporation in the fields of master planning, commercial and residential development. Both actors provide the necessary conditions for their survival in the city. The MDeC requires the capitalist to ensure the delivery of infrastructural needs of the city are fulfilled. On the other hand, Prima Properties needs the MDeC to attract more ICT companies to Cyberjaya to ensure their construction business continues to be profitable.

The symbiotic between Prima Properties and the MdeC refers not only to geographical proximity or shared material interests but also emotional attachment. CM Chong, Prima Properties' executive director, made a telling statement when asked about his company's involvement in Cyberjaya. In a media interview he articulated the nature of his company's commitment to the Cyberjaya vision: 'We had sentimental feelings about Cyberjaya ... and its growth prospects, that's why we formed our own team to do the development here. We purchased land from the master developer and developed it on our own' (Lee and Siti Radziah, 2010). Chong understands perfectly well the virtuous circle of relationships that

Prima Properties needs to sustain in order for his business to grow. The shift from an initial focus on office developments to commercial developments and medium-cost residential groups reflects the transition to the third phase of Cyberjaya's development which focuses on the creation of a 'knowledge society'. He is clear that graduates from the MMU are likely to form the core of his future clientele when they then settle into long-term careers in Cyberjaya. And in this regard, Prima Properties has cultivated very close relations with the technocrats of the MDeC and, by extension, with other key actors such as the MMU. In terms of the ethnic politics that penetrate every aspect of Malaysian development it is interesting to note that Prima Properties is a Chinese-owned company that managed to secure its first construction contract from the Malay-owned master developer, Setia Haruman. Moreover, state organizations such as the National Water Services Commission and international organizations such as the regional office of World Health Organization are the main tenants for buildings owned by Prima Properties. In this regard Prima Properties may actually represent the reality of a genuinely multicultural imagining of Cyberjaya. The irony is obvious: one of the reasons for the original idea behind the MSC in general and Cyberjaya in particular was to create an alternative site of accumulation away from Chinese-dominated Kuala Lumpur. Today the most high-profile property management group in Cyberjaya is Chinese owned.

## 7 Conclusion

The new urban space of Cyberjaya – like all urban spaces – is subjected to a constant process of contestation and negotiation. Imagined, planned and built as the heart of the ambitious MSC project, Cyberjaya is seen as the major driver that will enable Malaysia to accelerate towards its long-held goal of attaining ‘developed country’ status by 2020. The transformation has been spectacular by any measure. As Ross King (2008: xxii) describes the rise of nearby Putrajaya – a description that applies equally well to Cyberjaya – we have seen ‘the landscape of oil palm plantations succumb to bulldozers and excavators to yield the red-earth scars of construction sites, then roads, formal avenues, monuments and domes, engineering extravaganzas, high-rise offices and housing estates’. As such Cyberjaya is deeply implicated – iconic even – in the *national* development project that has been shaped by the state over more than four decades. But in the Malaysian context, the material realities and symbolic significance of Cyberjaya raise important questions about whose development is being advanced and for what immediate and long-term purpose. Malaysia is a multi-community society of long standing and yet Cyberjaya was presented by its planners – not least Mahathir himself – as *simultaneously* a manifestation of that multiculturalism and also as a monument to particularistic Malay-Muslim achievement. In this divide Cyberjaya reflects the wider ambivalence of identity politics as it permeates every aspect of life: political control, patterns of ownership, spatial segregation, the emblems of affiliation, the meanings of culture, and much more besides. And then there is the impact of global dynamics – part of the promise to liberalize and open up the economy in order better to compete as a technopole in the informational network society.

Can Cyberjaya hold all three identities at the same time? Can it be Malaysian and multicultural, Malay-Muslim and communal, global and borderless? Most of the evidence appears to suggest that the *primary* identity of Cyberjaya is as part of the Malay-Muslim world. This is certainly the view of Ross (2008: xxiv) who, in discussing the origins of the MSC project as a whole, says ‘the underlying agenda is the advancement of Malaysia as a Malay-Muslim polity, a new kind of high-modernist Muslim nation, one pole in an emerging pan-Islamic world and noble counter to more venal globalist ideas’. Much of the evidence we have gathered here would seem to bear out this assertion, both materially and symbolically. In the case of the latter, our discussion of the significance of the logos and crest used to define and project the key actors in the evolution of Cyberjaya clearly draw of specifically Malay-Muslim referents, both ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’. In examining the architectural motifs and use of space it is equally clear that Malay identifiers predominate but not exclusively so. There is a mixture of styles at play here: Sepang Municipal Council, Cyberview and the MMU each uses a fairly conventional international modernist style of architecture. And in keeping with the modernist tradition, Cyberjaya follows ‘a zonal pattern corresponding to each function of the city’ with distinctive flagship, residential, commercial and recreation zones. As Brooker goes to suggest ‘Zoning was designed to produce specific psychological effects on the citizens who inhabit the “intelligent city”’ (Brooker, 2012: 9). These include such modernist tropes as order, rationality, discipline and hard work through which ‘creativity and innovation’ are meant to thrive.

There is much greater symbolic and aesthetic ambivalence and inconsistency in Cyberjaya than initially appears the case. In light of this, it is not possible to suggest that Malay-Muslim cultural identity is the only domain of meaning in Cyberjaya even though it may be the predominant one for the time being. Between now and 2020 the Malaysian political elite will have to steer a careful path between the competing claims over the vision of what Cyberjaya

is and should be: between a genuinely Malaysian project that is inclusive of the whole population or an exclusivist Malay-Muslim urbanscape that, ironically, looks more and more away from the traditional *kampung* world and to the wider Islamic world for its inspiration. Added to the mix is the way that global forces themselves – in the making of a knowledge society – will also impact the dynamics of social change. For the time being, Cyberjaya seems to reflect nothing that is ‘real’ in the Malaysia that exists outside the MSC. It is a postmodern fantasy that mixes symbolic cultural referents in all kinds of promiscuous ways perhaps not knowing what it really stands for. Where it goes from here in large part will depend on the balance of political forces that might emerge in the coming years. But equally, it will depend on global structural and ideational influences whose effects are much less straightforward to predict.

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