



Delft University of Technology

## The Death and Life of a Tropical Landscape Envisaging a New Melaka, Malaysia

Cipriani, L.

### DOI

[10.1007/978-981-33-4631-4\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-4631-4_11)

### Publication date

2021

### Document Version

Final published version

### Published in

Tropical Constrained Environments and Sustainable Adaptations

### Citation (APA)

Cipriani, L. (2021). The Death and Life of a Tropical Landscape: Envisaging a New Melaka, Malaysia. In S. Azzali, & K. Thirumaran (Eds.), *Tropical Constrained Environments and Sustainable Adaptations: Businesses and Communities* (pp. 187-207). (Managing the Asian Century). Springer.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-4631-4\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-4631-4_11)

### Important note

To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable).  
Please check the document version above.

### Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download, forward or distribute the text or part of it, without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license such as Creative Commons.

### Takedown policy

Please contact us and provide details if you believe this document breaches copyrights.  
We will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

***Green Open Access added to TU Delft Institutional Repository***

***'You share, we take care!' - Taverne project***

**<https://www.openaccess.nl/en/you-share-we-take-care>**

Otherwise as indicated in the copyright section: the publisher is the copyright holder of this work and the author uses the Dutch legislation to make this work public.

# Chapter 11

## The Death and Life of a Tropical Landscape: Envisaging a New Melaka, Malaysia



Laura Cipriani

**Abstract** The UNESCO heritage city of Melaka, Malaysia, is a historically rich centre, but one in which environmental, urban, and above all social crises are currently taking a heavy toll: building speculation, strong touristic spatial imbalances, reclamation work along the coast with immense dredging operations, deforestation of coastal mangroves, soil erosion, sea-water incursion, water pollution, and hydraulic risk are the heavy price paid for the city's rapid and destructive development. In addition, it is also evident that behind the changes in the built landscape lies racial and religious discrimination against certain ethnic minorities. In this context a small fishing community, descendants of the early Portuguese colonizers, merits special mention as pharaonic reclamation projects, and dredging work are destroying the marine ecosystem upon which the already severely compromised livelihood of these fishermen depends. This article aims to present a series of design scenarios to tackle complex issues at city scale. Design works start from the belief that the landscape is not only an environmental resource, but also a factor that can become an economic resource, a major driving force for alternative development of the territory and its cities and people.

**Keywords** Tropical landscape · Reclamation projects · Melaka city · Landscape economies · Design scenarios

### 11.1 The 'Death' of Tropical Landscape

It is not easy to define a tropical landscape or the conditions that determine its demise. Firstly, the term 'landscape' has been amply and variously debated and defined in accordance with the discipline adopting the term. However, we can, at least, affirm that a landscape is the end result of a long temporal process represented by the actions of human beings and natural forces.

---

L. Cipriani (✉)  
TU Delft, Delft, The Netherlands  
e-mail: [L.Cipriani@tudelft.nl](mailto:L.Cipriani@tudelft.nl)

Secondly, the adjective ‘tropical’ also lends itself to different interpretations as it refers to a large geographical area. Literally, ‘tropical’ means belonging to or typical of the tropics. The term originally derived from the nineteenth-century definition of the tropics, in which Central and South America barely deserved mention, but now it has come to signify a much broader geographical area, namely a swath of the Earth between the Tropic of Cancer, 23 ½ degrees north of the Equator and the Tropic of Capricorn, 23 ½ degrees south of the Equator. Although the adjective includes a variety of different landscapes, it usually connotes the warm and humid climate engendering the lush vegetation associated with ‘tropicality’, and conjuring up an image of a wild nature, or the land of rich biodiversity depicted in the Garden of Eden.

The tropical landscape discussed in this paper is geographically limited to South-east Asia, specifically the city of Melaka in the Malay Peninsula. We will approach the term ‘landscape’ by adopting a holistic approach that encompasses historical processes, ecological and physical transformations, and social and economic systems.

We shall relate the landscape’s past and the present demise—not only a biophysical but also the economic and spiritual ‘demise’ of the local populations—and we will also try to formulate a possible new ‘life’ and hope for Melaka and its people.

### ***11.1.1 The ‘Death’ of the Natural Heritage***

When Alfred Russel Wallace, a famous naturalist and explorer, arrived in the Archipelago of Melaka in 1809, he described a city lush with palms and fruit trees whose inhabitants were Portuguese descendants, Chinese and officers of the English administration.

‘The old and picturesque town of Malacca is crowded along the banks of the small river, and consists of narrow streets of shops and dwelling-houses, occupied by the descendants of the Portuguese, and by Chinamen. In the suburbs are the houses of the English officials and of a few Portuguese merchants, embedded in groves of palms and fruit trees, whose varied and beautiful foliage furnishes a pleasing relief to the eye, as well as most grateful shade’ (Wallace 1890, pp. 19–20).

Melaka grew up as a port and multi-ethnic city where two civilizations, the Indian and the Chinese, met (Widodo 2004, 2011). Its geographically strategic position, between China, India, and Indonesia, and favourable monsoon winds enabled the settlement to develop into a cosmopolitan city based on maritime trade, and which since the beginning of the fifteenth century had become predominantly Muslim. Colonization began first with the Portuguese (sixteenth century), then the Dutch (mid-seventeenth century–mid-nineteenth), and later the British (mid-nineteenth–mid-twentieth)—British domination ending with the city’s declaration of independence in 1946 and subsequently with that of Malaysia in 1957.



**Fig. 11.1** Cantino planisphere, 1502 (Source Biblioteca Estense, Modena, Italy)

The sea and coastal mangrove forests constituted the natural elements that characterized early maps and the historical imaginary of cities. At the time of the Portuguese conquests when the galleons were setting forth to discover Asia, Melaka was nothing more than an unknown destination recorded on the map of Cantino (Fig. 11.1), one of the world's first maps, dated 1502, that depicted lands for future conquest. Southeast Asia was represented as a green triangle, dominated by rain forests with mangrove coastlines.

In Pedro Reinel's Atlas Miller of 1519, Melaka is portrayed with palm trees inland and a coast rich with rivers, mangroves, and islets, including a few golden ones (Fig. 11.2). In 1507, Martin Waldseemüller's cartography illustrated Melaka as a lush land with abundant animal life testifying to its rich coastal biodiversity ('ibi sunt multa animalia').

Today, the image of Melaka city, with its strong links to the sea, a luxuriant nature and a multi-ethnicity has undergone profound change.

Melaka's designation as a UNESCO heritage site in 2008 has transformed the city and its inhabitants: in 2017 there were more than 16 million tourists—four times more than its visitors in 2005. This accolade has certainly produced prosperity but also brought about strong spatial imbalances—the gentrification of the historic centre, with the progressive exodus of its residents and activities—and temporal imbalances—the city comes alive principally at weekends.

With the rapid arrival of tourism the city began to experience environmental, urban, and above all social crises that are exacting a heavy toll: building speculation, reclamation work along the coast with immense dredging operations, the deforestation of coastal mangroves, soil erosion, sea-water incursion, water pollution, and hydraulic risk are a heavy price to pay for rapid and destructive development.



**Fig. 11.2** Pedro e Jorge Reinel, António de Holanda, Atlas Miller, paper n. 3, 1519 (Source Bibliothèque National, Paris, France)

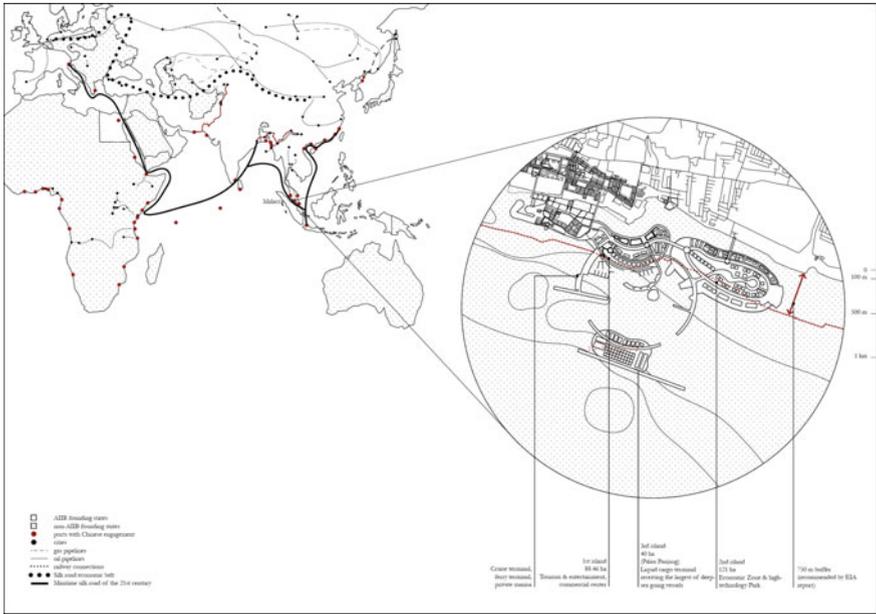
### 11.1.2 *The ‘Death’ of the Coast*

Whole portions of the coast are subject to development by real estate companies speculating on the city’s attractions. Melaka Gateway, the new seaport with over 240 hectares of reclaimed land, three artificial islands, and countless luxury homes, is part of the ‘One Belt One Road’ project that aims to re-establish Melaka as a port city along the erstwhile maritime silk road (Fig. 11.3).

‘Most harbor projects will be combined with the creation of massive satellite towns’ (Embong et al. 2017, p. 9) mainly earmarked for tourists. ‘Construction of ports and railroads is largely financed by loans from Chinese banks. These loans will eventually have to be repaid by the Malaysian government. Majority ownership of the new ports and railway lines will stay with Chinese (mainly state owned) companies’ (Embong et al. 2017, p. 11).

The Chinese plan sets out a precise geopolitical strategy aimed at transferring the port’s traffic—currently converging on Singapore—to a series of ports on the eastern and western coasts of Malaysia together with the East Coast Rail Link, planned to connect them together.

In the coastal areas affected by the projects—Pantai Klebang, Pekan Klebang, Taman Kota Laksamana, Pulau Melaka, Permatang Pasir Permai, and Telok Mas—it is clear that the development started without proper planning (Yusup et al. 2016).



**Fig. 11.3** ‘One belt one road’ project and ‘Melaka gateway’ proposal. Image: student R Yan, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca. NUS, Singapore

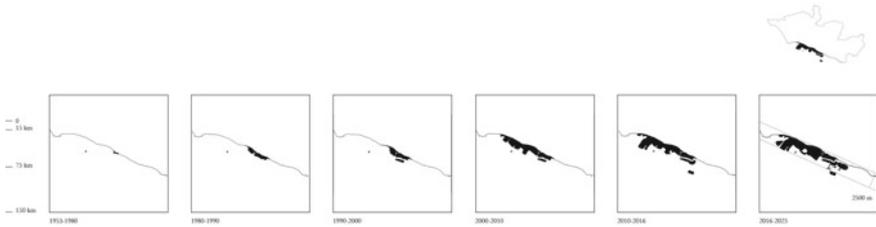
Dimensionally inappropriate, out of scale and out of context with respect to traditional buildings, the concrete skeletons of the skyscrapers under construction loom along the coast and over the city. And not to mention the major differences between reclaimed and original land, in particular in terms of stabilization and durability. Artificial terrain can, for example, only support buildings of a certain height.

Basing ourselves upon Melaka’s historical maps to retrace the reclamation projects, we will find that developments along the coastal area began in the 1920s, continued into the mid-70s in Bandar Hilir and Tranquerah and underwent significant acceleration in recent years thanks to massive Chinese investments (Fig. 11.4).

Beyond the ethereal charm engendered in the minds of the oblivious tourist, the mounds of sand in the Klebang peninsula are only a tangible testimony to an ongoing ecological war unfolding on various fronts (Fig. 11.5).

Satellite images recount the phases of the excavations. Sand is dredged from the sea, transported in large barges, and finally deposited along the coast in accordance with ill-conceived bio-engineering operations (Fig. 11.6). However, as erosion is currently already visible and underway, what is removed from the sea, the sea will sooner or later reclaim.

The coastal area viewed from below offers other clues. The water is ‘mal-acqua,’ literally ‘bad water,’ to use an oxymoron, on account of its poor quality. The recent dredging and reclamation work, as well as the absence of the mangrove forest that



**Fig. 11.4** Development of coastal areas from 1916 to 2025. Image: student R Yan, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) *Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca*. NUS, Singapore



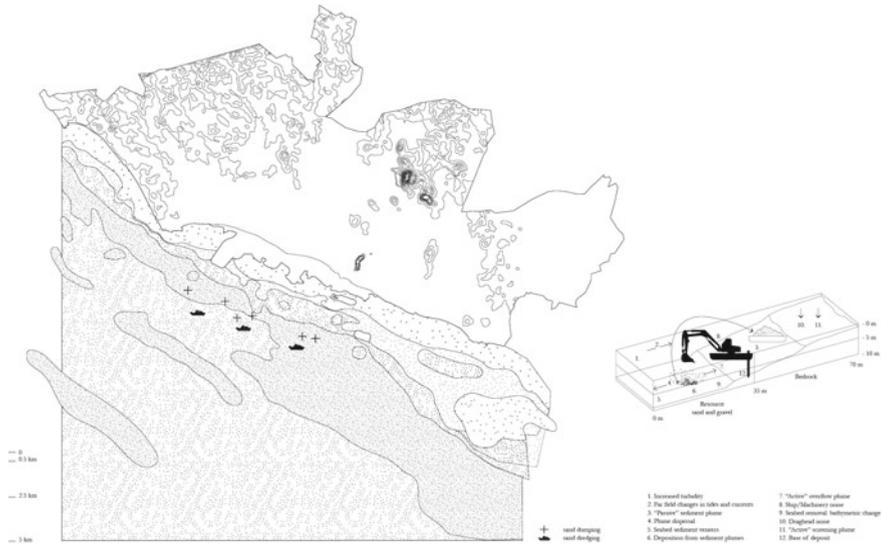
**Fig. 11.5** Coastal reclamation in Melaka (Photo Satellite image, 2017)

originally ran parallel to the coastline, has accelerated phenomena of turbidity, erosion, and siltation. Moreover, the progressive disappearance of the mangroves has led to an increased influx of seawater into the water table.

But surface water quality is affected. Our investigations show that the main sources of contamination occur in the northern part of the city, as a result of industrial activities, agricultural pollutants, and slaughterhouses. In addition, wastewaters, including those from the historic centre are discharged directly into the river without treatment. To make matters worse, the tidal river running through the city is today regulated by a series of dams and locks that while ensuring navigability impede the daily exchange of its waters.

The city, crisscrossed by tourist boats instead of fishing boats, has lost its relationship with the river, the backbone of the development of the territory when people mainly moved by water, long before the advent of motorization.

Furthermore, the river has been a source of danger throughout the city's history. The great deluge of 1971, as well as previous flood events in 1930 and in 1954, means



**Fig. 11.6** Location and impact of sand dredging in Central Melaka District. Image: student R Yan, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca. NUS, Singapore

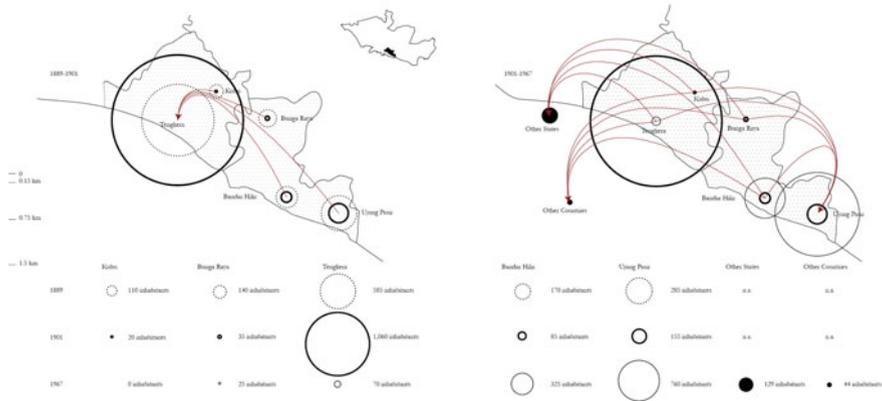
that sooner or later the city will have to face another major flood, perhaps worse than in the past, should extreme climatic events become more acute.

### 11.1.3 The ‘Death’ of the People

Even more worrying than these environmental aspects, is the perception that behind the changes in the built landscape racial and religious discrimination is practised against certain ethnic minorities. A war being silently fought in Melaka and Malaysia because reclamation projects undermine not only the natural landscapes but also the identities and economies of people and places.

In particular, the small community of fishermen who arrived over five centuries ago from Portugal, at the time of Portuguese colonization, today live in very straitened circumstances as the pharaonic reclamation projects have had a dramatic on their catches.

In July 2018, around 200 inhabitants in the Portuguese village in Bandar Hilir attended a mock funeral, a peaceful demonstration to protest reclamation work for the Melaka gateway project. Fishermen’s bodies were symbolically laid in coffins to denote the economic collapse of the fishing industry. Participants complained about the dramatic environmental conditions of the area and the inability to fish on account



**Fig. 11.7** Relocation of Eurasians of Melaka Town from 1889 to 1967. Data: KS Sandhu, P Wheatley (1983) *Melaka: the transformation of a Malay capital c.1400–1980*. Image: student R Yan, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) *Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca*. NUS, Singapore

of the poor quality of the water and the presence of sediments along the coast that are destroying the marine ecosystem.

The Portuguese community, located to the south of the reclamation project, is what remains of the first Portuguese conquerors who arrived in Melaka in 1511. Along with the colonization of the lands, Admiral Alfonso de Albuquerque initiated a campaign of forced conversion to Catholicism, which resulted in the creation of mixed Malaysian and Portuguese communities called *Kristang* (Bernstein 2009).

Melaka attracted traders, missionaries, and adventurers from many parts of Asia, and the city’s early multi-ethnic character was maintained, despite the vicissitudes of political change, throughout its subsequent history up until 1970, although the ethnic proportions of the indigenous communities have altered tremendously (Fig. 11.7).

‘The various groups – Europeans, Chinese, Indians, and Natives – mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways (...). There is a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit’ (Furnivall 1948, p. 304).

The Portuguese Settlement was established in 1933 when, with a concession of 28 acres of land, the colonial government allowed the descendants of the Portuguese colonizers to gather together in a single urban core. This operation should have enabled the Portuguese descendants, mainly fishermen who resided in slums in the city of Melaka and in the localities of Tengker, Peraya lane, Bandar Hilir, and Kampung Hilir, to overcome their condition of extreme poverty.

The government of the time accepted the creation of the Portuguese Settlement, whose plots of land were subject to annually renewable Temporary Occupation Licenses, for humanitarian reasons and after significant pressure. Although the establishment of the Portuguese village made it possible to maintain their identity

and cultural traditions, over time the community has become increasingly isolated from the rest of the territory of Melaka and continues to experience problems of overcrowding determined by a prohibition on the settlement's territorial expansion.

'Fishing is a long-established economic activity of the Eurasians in Melaka. It allows poor members of the community a limited source of livelihood' (Eng 1983, p. 279) but recent reclamation activities are preventing the community from making even a subsistence livelihood.

Martin Theseira, a Portuguese fisherman, a courageous hero of the local resistance, recounts his battle to save what remains of these places or at least to transmit a sense of responsibility to future generations for the land, sea and for what remains of the Kristang identity, as the mixed Portuguese and Asian ancestry is known: 'My family was forced to move three times. Now we have lost the sea which we depend on. We can see with our own eyes how the ecology has changed: silting, worse seabed quality, sand dumping, macro-organisms in the mud. When the mud has a grey colour it is alive, when it is chocolate black it is dead instead. It is dirt from the sea.'

In interviews with the local communities, a nostalgia emerges for the lost relationship with the sea, natural elements, and a fish-based economy, which albeit subsistence, is the basis of their livelihood.

'It's a stupid idea that such tall buildings on the seashore are blocking the sunset. The reclamation has totally destroyed the whole fishing industry. We don't need all these developments, Melaka doesn't need to be another Singapore, we are already happy with what Melaka was.'

## 11.2 Envisaging a New 'Life' for Melaka

This article sets out to present a series of design scenarios able to manage city-scale environmental, urban, and human complexities.

It is part and parcel of a studio aimed at studying the area in its entirety and thereby takes full account of water systems, open spaces, productive sites, and mobility networks in Melaka city and its region.

The designs' starting point is the tenet that the landscape is not only an environmental resource, but also a factor that can become an economic resource; a major driving force for an alternative development of the territory, its cities, and for its peoples.

Thanks to practical research work in the form of design projects, the course broached the question of revitalizing local economies by proposing innovative and simple ideas whereby the actual environmental and economic cycles could be replaced by a circular economy. It was with such projects in mind that we intended to seed and nurture some propitious proposals, both small and large, as a way of triggering change.

The course envisaged a design approach based on research and the knowledge of the local area ('research by design'/'design by research'), accompanied by a series of workshops aimed at drawing up alternative short- and medium-term scenarios.

Planning by means of scenarios means answering the question ‘what if...?’ The scenario is a tool for exploring the future in conditions of uncertainty and complexity constructed based on hypothetical reasoning.

For example, what could ensue after the completion of the Melaka project? What measures can/must be taken to mitigate water quality or protect the natural environment? What would, on the contrary, happen if land reclamation ceased and, what fate would befall such reclaimed but subsequently abandoned areas? How can we help local communities, particularly the Portuguese community, map out a different future for themselves?

By deploying scenarios for planning purposes, we propose to support decision-making processes that must tackle highly uncertain issues. The value of such scenario-assisted planning lies not so much in the answer, as in the discipline of ‘creative thinking.’ The objective is not to select the most probable scenario, or the one that can best meet expectations, but rather to pave the way for a flexible response to major events if or when they occur, whatever their nature.

During this phase, consideration was given to a series of possible alternatives which—we hope—public institutions and citizens will define for subsequent physical, economic, and environmental development. Landscape transformation scenarios and proposed strategies must be approached holistically.

Five main scenario themes were developed as feasible city developments: art and heritage, agriculture, energy, mobility, and water. Furthermore, all these themes can be combined with one another to give life to new economic activities and social inclusion projects, in which landscape becomes the epicentre of transformation. This article will present three scenarios which deal with the reclamation projects currently being undertaken.

### *11.2.1 Art and Heritage Landscapes*

What do we foresee happening if the reclamation project is completed? What measures can/must be taken to preserve artistic heritage, encourage new economies, and protect the natural environment? Can we carry out intervention work on the coastline that could salvage the past and improve the future?

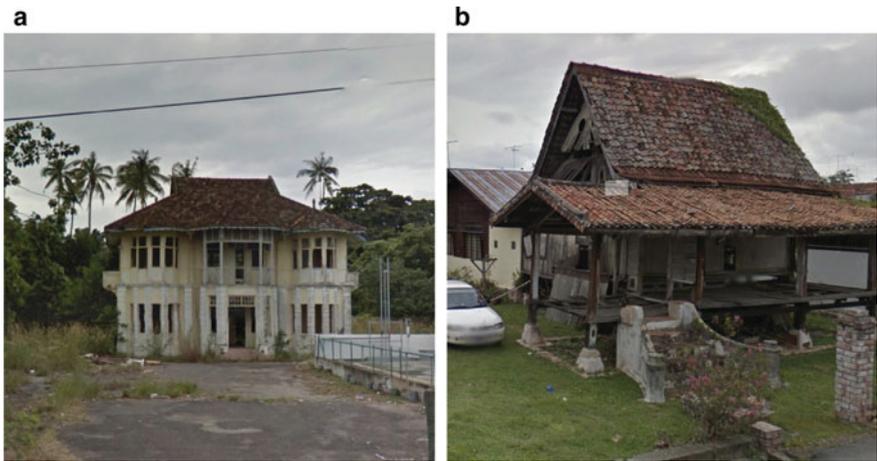
This scenario sets out to reconstruct the identities and economies of places commencing from past and present coastlines.

Three strategies will be adopted: first, the decentralization of tourism, which is currently concentrated in the historic centre of Melaka; second, the restoration of the historical coastline through an art-themed pedestrian and bicycle path; finally, the performance of work on the new coastline to improve the Melaka gateway’s environmental conditions.

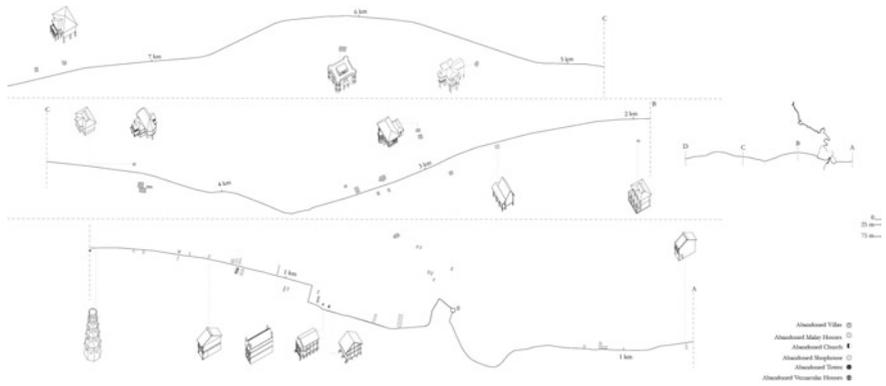
The results of the mapping process, conducted during the studio, show that the historic city originally grew up along the coastline. Thus, many old and abandoned buildings can be found marking the contours of the coastline that existed prior to being merged with the hinterland (Figs. 11.8, 11.9 and 11.10).



**Fig. 11.8** Distribution of abandoned historical buildings in Melaka. Data: Google maps, 2017. Image: student Y Wu, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca. NUS, Singapore



**Fig. 11.9** (a) Abandoned villa near Petron Jalan Tengker. Photo: Google maps, 2017 (b) Abandoned traditional Malay house along Jalan Tengker. Photo: Google maps, 2017



**Fig. 11.10** Typologies of abandoned historical buildings in Melaka. Data: Google maps, 2017. Image: student Y Wu, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca. NUS, Singapore

Furthermore, cartographic surveys show a series of monumental trees situated along the old coastline (Fig. 11.11). Some old postcards also depict (Fig. 11.12) these coastal trees; whose importance also stems from the fact that fishermen used them to pinpoint piers when fishing out at sea. Therefore, it is quite natural that the



**Fig. 11.11** Distribution of heritage trees in Melaka. Data: Google maps, 2017. Image: student Y Wu, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca. NUS, Singapore

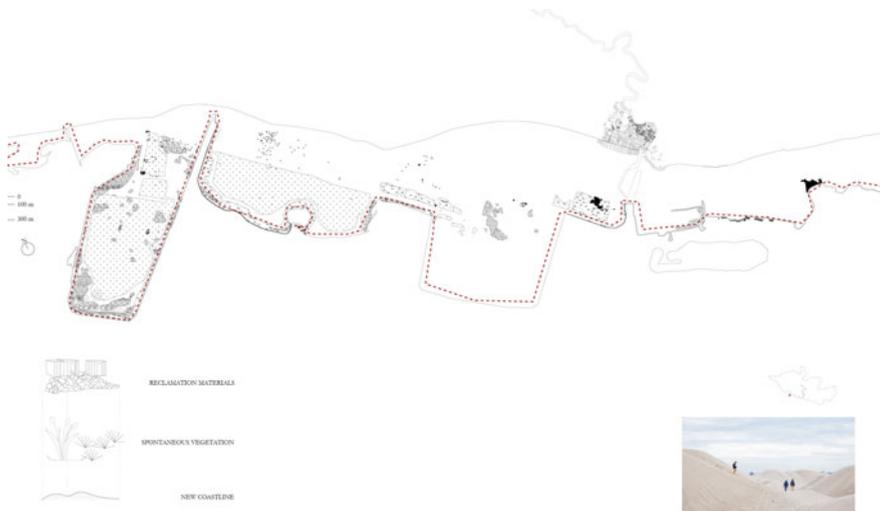


**Fig. 11.12** Heritage trees and piers along old coastline. Data: Historic Malacca Post Cards, 2011; Google maps, 2017

trees are now part of the region’s cultural heritage, symbolizing a past with which fishermen and inhabitants can easily identify.

The new coastline (Figs. 11.13 and 11.14) the result of years of accretions, will be further and substantially altered by the ‘Melaka gateway’ project, as it will definitively exclude all views of the sea and remove the social and urban identities of locations.

The historic landscape was lost during the reclamation process. In order to allow past history to re-emerge and enhance future economic activities, the project set out to reclaim Melaka by positing small-scale art design works along the old and new



**Fig. 11.13** The new coastline. Image: student Y Wu, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca. NUS, Singapore



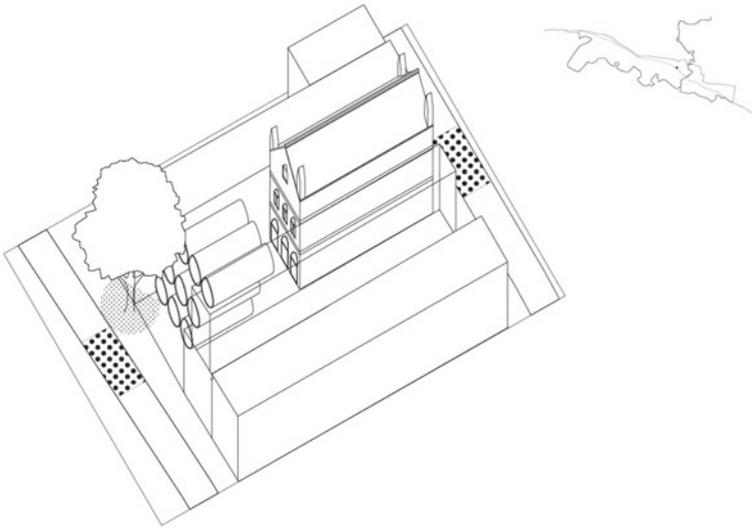
**Fig. 11.14** Sand dunes in the new coastline (Photo Y Wu 2017)

coastlines. More public space for art will be created thus benefitting the local craft industries and art business (Figs. 11.15 and 11.16).

Art has always been a leitmotif of Melaka. It figures in the city’s murals, in its shops, in the work of street artists as well as in public planning initiatives such as the art and crafts festivals that take place every year.



**Fig. 11.15** Masterplan 2025. Interventions along the old coastline. Image: student Y Wu, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca. NUS, Singapore



**Fig. 11.16** Art intervention along the Historical Path. Image: student Y Wu, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) *Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca*. NUS, Singapore

A pedestrian-cycle path based on an artistic theme is planned along the old coastline connecting the historic buildings, the monumental trees, and the Portuguese Settlement.

As the Melaka gateway project, once completed, will only exacerbate environmental issues such as the water's turbidity and erosive processes undermining soil stability, a series of ecological measures will be undertaken:- a partial restoration of the coastal mangrove forest in order to consolidate the land and improve the water quality; a series of naturalistic engineering techniques to mitigate the erosive phenomenon such as dune grass planting, dune thatching, and dune fencing.

### ***11.2.2 Research Landscapes***

What can be expected from making partial changes to the reclamation project?

As matters currently stand, the rapid reclamation process and a newly found prosperity stemming from a decade of tourism, are compromising the unique historical and cultural characteristics of the old Melaka Town. For example, the monocentric development model is concentrating the tourism industry in the town centre, while coastal reclamation causes severe phenomena of siltation and the destruction of the natural habitat.



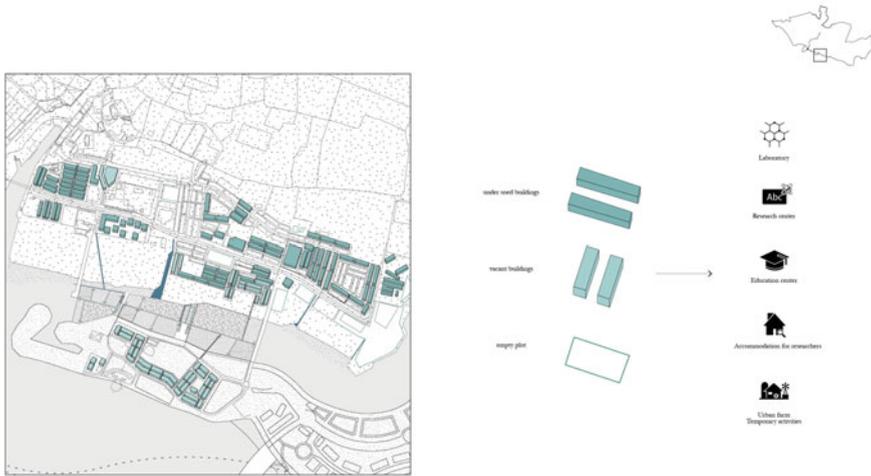
**Fig. 11.17** The process of ‘Melaka Gateway’ redesign along the coast. Image: student R Yan, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) *Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca*. NUS, Singapore

Three strategies will be adopted: first, a modification to the still incomplete Melaka gateway project; second, the diversification of the city’s economy by promoting research and university education; finally, the development of fish farming in a controlled environment.

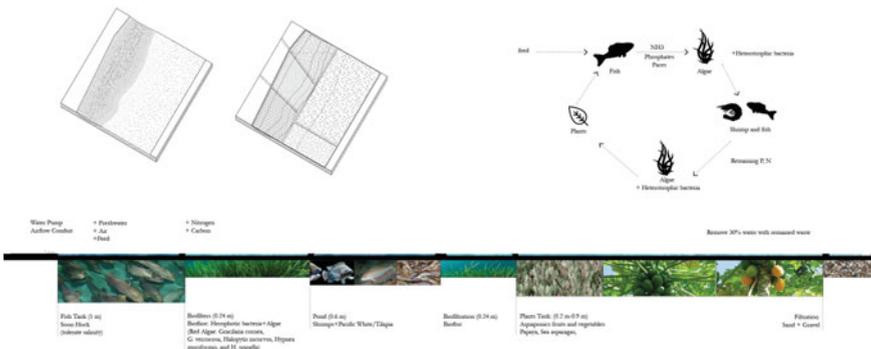
A new reclamation plan will address the conservation of a wildlife sanctuary, respect environmental constraints, and, as regards new economic activities, propose multi-trophic aquaculture in existing areas subject to siltation (Fig. 11.17).

The Melaka project’s islands will be constructed 200 metres from the coast while a bird sanctuary will be preserved thanks to a 500-metre buffer zone. Abandoned buildings extant in the reclamation areas will be repurposed as university and research centres. Intensive aquaculture production will be sited in adjoining silted up areas (Fig. 11.18). The Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture System (IMTRAS) technique will be the premise for the gradual establishment of a new fishing industry (Fig. 11.19).

This technique allows waste accruing from one organism to be recycled as food for another, creating an ecosystem of various species. Farmers combine aquaculture (e.g., fish, shrimp) with inorganic extractive (e.g., seaweed) and organic extractive (e.g., shellfish) aquaculture to create balanced systems for environment remediation (bio-mitigation), economic stability (improved output, lower costs, product diversification, and risk reduction), and social acceptability (better management practices).



**Fig. 11.18** The re-use of under used and vacant buildings university and research centres and intensive aquaculture production in the nearby existing siltation areas. Image: student R Yan, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca. NUS, Singapore

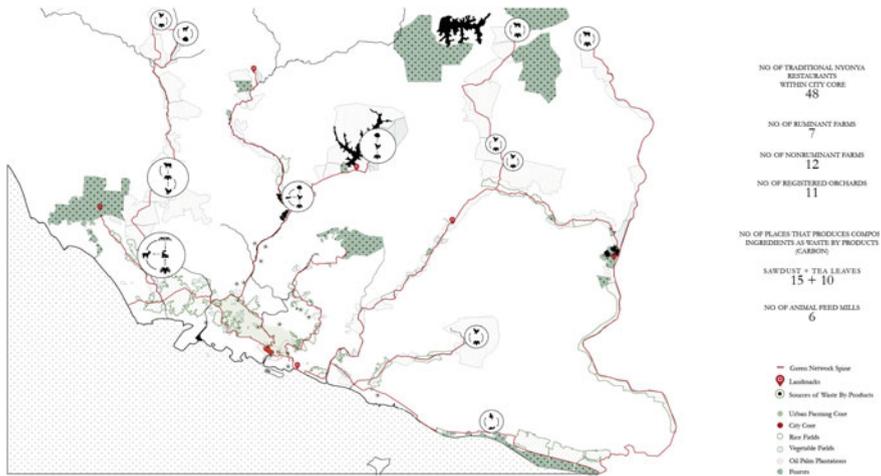


**Fig. 11.19** The Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture System (IMTRAS) technique will allow the progressive establishment of an advanced fishing industry. Image: student R Yan, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca. NUS, Singapore

### 11.2.3 Food Landscapes

What would happen if the reclamation project, as it now stands, is completed? What economic alternatives could be proposed for the city and the Portuguese Settlement?

This scenario intends to focus on food and agriculture as the city’s development pillars (Fig. 11.20).



**Fig. 11.20** Potential of closing biodynamic cycles in Melaka. Image: student A Sun, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) *Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca*. NUS, Singapore

Thanks to the appeal of Malaya's culinary heritage, the city of Melaka has become a major culinary mecca. There is a sizable number of traditional Nyonya restaurants in the city centre (n. 48), with formal and informal markets occupying urban spaces. Every weekend Jonker Street is crowded with tourists and vendors peddling goods. Carparks are regularly transformed into night markets, with tents erected at weekends. Food tourism could play a revitalizing role in expanding and promoting the region into a variegated, food-based, culinary territory.

Strategies range from establishing a green network radiating out from the city centre to all the surrounding territory, to making improvements in the productivity of plantations in the agrarian landscape, waste recycling, and new forms of food production.

The scenario envisages a series of green pathways, or specially designed routes for urban dwellers and tourists seeking respite from the city in the countryside and interested in learning about how to prepare food and where it originates. A few simple scenic devices could be placed along these pathways to stimulate visitors' interest and guide them as they travel in the countryside.

Furthermore, some measures could further enhance these pathways: available vacant urban land could be used to cultivate crops; on-site food processing could reduce energy and costs; organic waste products from neighbouring mills and restaurants could be collected and delivered to urban farms for composting.

An analysis of existing orthophotos reveals that nearly 50% of the Melaka landscape is earmarked for oil palm plantations, 15% for rubber plantations, 16% for rice

paddy fields, 1% for coconut plantations, 5% for fruit and vegetable farming, and only 2% of the residual area has been left as natural forest.

The agrarian landscape, thus dominated by oil palm monoculture, could be improved by agroforestry techniques to increase biodiversity. Palm oil planted with the use of agroforestry systems might yield a significant increase in soil carbon stock and nutrient cycling through management practices, such as intensive pruning and mulching, while also contributing to climate change mitigation. Thus, the planting of different species is a socially, economically, and environmentally feasible alternative.

The project culminates in a design for a self-sustaining system for the Portuguese Settlement. This would valorize its culinary tradition, which, as a characterizing feature of the settlement, could enable it to become a centre for culinary tourism, and hence play a key role in improving the community’s economic sustainability (Fig. 11.21).

The current development of the Melaka gateway threatens the livelihood of the Portuguese Settlement. However, the community could learn to become self-reliant and create economic opportunities for itself if several measures were taken: the promotion of intensive aquaponics and agriculture production (Fig. 11.22), subsistence backyard farming and community gardening with a close loop compost system, and water treatment for agriculture.

The food industry and tourism could become an important economic activity for the city and the Portuguese Settlement.



**Fig. 11.21** The self-reliant food production system in the Portuguese Settlement. Image: student A Sun, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca. NUS, Singapore



**Fig. 11.22** Intensive aquaponics production in the Portuguese Settlement. Image: student A Sun, professor L Cipriani, National University Singapore NUS, 2017. From: Cipriani L (2018) Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca. NUS, Singapore

### 11.3 Melaka's New 'Life'

This study aimed at proposing an integrated work method able to study various landscape and environmental themes. The result was a kaleidoscope of interrelated projects that produced a series of scenarios. Starting from these scenarios we intended to seed and cultivate ideas, both large and small, to trigger change. Art and heritage, agriculture, and water are all themes that can be combined with one another to create new economic activities and social inclusion projects where the landscape belongs to everyone.

This process simply marks a starting point for defining a possible new 'life' for Melaka, its landscape and its inhabitants which must, necessarily, entail participatory planning that will involve not only the public administrations but also all the stakeholders, at all phases of the plan.

We would therefore like to reimagine a different development for the city, in which the landscape becomes the epicentre of transformation.

We would like to recover different types of economies. An economy based on a circular rather than a linear cycle, in which waste becomes a resource.

We would like to reclaim different types of tourism. A tourism based on art and heritage, on agriculture, and on multiplicity.

We would like to recover the river as a vital element for the city, improving water quality and preparing the city for possible extreme events.

Above all, we would like to reclaim a city for everyone. A city that does not discriminate but welcomes all.

In short, we would like to reclaim what Melaka was and what it might become.

## References

- Bernstein R (2009) *The Malacca blues. The east, the west, and sex: a history of erotic encounters.* Alfred A. Knopf, New York, pp 153–159
- Cipriani L (ed) (2018) *Landscapes of hope. Reclaiming Malacca.* NUS, Singapore
- Embong AR, Evers HD, Ramli R (2017) *One Belt One Road (OBOR) and Malaysia: a longterm geopolitical perspective.* Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Institute of Malaysian and International Studies
- Eng CK (1983) *The Eurasian of Melaka.* In: Sandhu KS, Wheatley P, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (eds) *Melaka: the transformation of a Malay capital c.1400–1980—Vol II.* Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, pp 264–281
- Furnivall JS (1948) *Colonial policy and practice: A comparative study of Burma and Netherlands India.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Sandhu KS, Wheatley P (1983) In: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (eds) *Melaka: the transformation of a Malay capital c.1400–1980.* Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur
- Sidhu M (1983) *An introduction to ethnic segregation in Melaka town.* In: Sandhu KS, Wheatley P, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (eds) *Melaka: the transformation of a Malay capital c.1400–1980—Vol II.* Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, pp 30–46
- Wallace AR (1890) *The Malay Arcipelago. The land of the orang-utan and the bird of paradise.* MacMillan and Co, London
- Widodo J (2011) *Melaka. a cosmopolitan city in Southeast Asia.* Rev Cult 40:33–49
- Widodo J, Chinese Heritage Centre (2004) *The boat and the city: Chinese diaspora and the architecture of Southeast Asian coastal cities.* Marshall Cavendish Academic, Singapore
- Wong YC (2011) *Historic Malacca postcards.* CASA, NUS, Singapore
- Yusup M, Arshad AF, Abdullah YA, Ishak NS (2016) *Coastal land reclamation: implication towards development control system in West Malaysia.* Environ Behav Proc J 1(1):354–361