

# VALUE OF RURAL LANDSCAPE FROM PUBLIC PERSPECTIVES

Siti Mariamah Mazehan, Kamarul Bahrain Shuib & Habsah Hashim

Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying  
Universiti Teknologi MARA  
[maria\\_mazehan@yahoo.com](mailto:maria_mazehan@yahoo.com)

## ABSTRACT

*Rural landscape conservation is still not the crucial element to be considered under the development planning of Malaysia. It is because people believe that physical development is the way forward to become a developed country. This approach will result in the disappearance of its own culture or identity in Malaysia. Thus, addressing the conservation of rural landscapes is significant to ensure that it will not be taken up by rapid development, climate change and other threats. This research conducted to advance fundamental knowledge about rural landscape conservation. The purpose of this research was to explore the value of rural landscapes from public perspectives. The area under study was a rural landscape in Lenggong, Perak by using a set of criteria from the IUCN. Methods used to gather data were perceptual observation, which included an inventory of landscape features and photographs of the landscape as a surrogate of the rural landscape. A total of 123 photographs used in preference rating survey to a group of UiTM student and subsequently in the study area. The expected outcomes were landscape values that will highlight in this research and help in strengthening the proposed landscape conservation strategies in Malaysia.*

**Field of Research:** *Landscape conservation, cultural heritage, rural identity.*

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## 1. Introduction

Rural landscape conservation is still not the core element in the development of Malaysia. It is because people have always viewed economic development as the indicator of a developed country. Development was resulting in the disappearance of the cultural heritage or identity of a place. Abdullah (2011) states that over the centuries, the rural landscape in Malaysia, are not unusual to have encroached upon by various anthropogenic activities which driven by socioeconomic development and because of this, in some cases, rural landscape in Malaysia totally changed into other landscape types such as urban landscape. The effect from that, the rural landscape, threatened by the development and also changes of the surrounding environment such as an influence from other cultures.

Rural landscape defines as an area where there exist an interaction between humans and nature through time that developed a landscape that has its own characteristics (Phillips, 2002; Akagawa & Sirisrisak, 2008; Mitchell, 2009; Abdullah, 2011). Rural landscape can also be referred as a middle landscape where it is neither urban nor wilderness. The rural landscape is an area where people have developed an area from a wilderness to a small settlement area. For example, a settlement built from natural resources such as timber and the community does the farming, fishing and raising livestock for sources of food and income. It also shows the interaction between humans and nature that has created an identity to that place. The rural landscape is rich with natural resources including flora and fauna, custom and beliefs that represent the culture of the community in that area and also dramatic scenery that cannot be found in other landscape. From previous research, rural landscape or middle landscape

can be defined as an area or space where the setting is between wildernesses and urban which consist of human activities such as living and work with nature like agriculture and also pastoral activities (Stephen, 1997; Timothy, 2000; Krall, 2007).

There are a lot of research areas that needed investigations in order to improve and produce excellent results in conserving rural landscapes in Malaysia. One of the areas is in community understanding. Values from different communities, which differ from conservation professionals, needed in order to conserve and manage heritage buildings, sites or landscapes successfully (Taylor, 2011). This is because community plays a vital role in shaping their environment. There are many positive or negative impacts from the human-environment relationship. Human is an agent of change and always shape their environment that related to their surrounding, place and time. Akagawa & Sirisrisak (2008) had also stated that the documentation prepared for conservation plans requires not only statistical inventory but also the description of intangible associations such as local knowledge, traditions and beliefs which is beneficial for further study, especially when the site is in danger of disappearing or irreversible change.

This research conducted to get the public view and preference on the rural landscape character, which guided by a set of criteria listed by the IUCN. It involved an inventory of the rural site to get the characteristic existed there such as a photo of its scenery, natural features, human activities, architectural remains and other features of the landscape. These photographs are being use in further survey to get community preference about that landscape. This survey aimed at knowing the character of the rural landscape in this study that will represent each of the characteristics listed by IUCN.

## **2. Landscape and perception**

Taylor (2011) described landscape has various meanings from different sources and perspectives. It is not simply about what we see but a way of seeing. That means it is not simply said something that we can just see but more than that. It has different meanings depends on the situation. Akagawa & Sirisrisak (2008) in their research mentioned that the term 'landscape' first recorded in 1598, borrowed as a painters' term from the Dutch during the 16<sup>th</sup> century which is '*landschap*' which meant region or tract of land. However, over time it brought to English which meant the picture depicting scenery on land. The perception of the landscape, deeply established in Europe and became well known as 'English Garden', which refers to the informal landscape style and popular in the UK from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century. A landscape does not just a natural feature or a man-made feature that usually seen, but it has various definitions that describe what a landscape is. Wylie (2007) in his book called "Landscape" described the landscape in several meanings, which is real and solid. It is also synonymous with nature or wilderness, geography, and he mentioned that the cultural landscape also referred as a landscape. The landscape is also a vital part of the environment, and we as a human have a much closer relationship with the environment. That is why public understanding is extremely influential in order to take any action on the environment.

Phillips (2002) in the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Management Guidelines listed characteristics of a rural landscape which are there must be an area where there existed a unique or dramatic scenery that will portray the interaction between human and nature. Besides that, there also existed an area where can attract people or tourist to do some leisure activities or recreation especially for outdoor activities. Human activities of that place must also preserve rural landscape area such doing the activity that does not damage the quality of water and land. Biodiversity conservation such as protection of flora and fauna is also an essential element in a rural area. Rural landscapes also where is people do some traditional activities, for their sources of

income, or basic needed such as, farmed varieties of vegetation and also breeding or raising livestock. Cultural heritage such as the remains of the old building or historical evidence are also representing a rural landscape. Lastly, Cultural association such as local culture, customs and belief was also one of the characteristics of rural landscape.

Preferences of the local communities and outsiders towards a landscape created values to that place. Shuib & Hashim (2011) mentioned that the value of a place can be defined through the perception of people. Besides that, the perception of people will also determine the underlying factors of a landscape as a heritage (Shuib et al., 2010). Hunziker et al. (2008) also stated that the community must be involved in guiding landscape development through contributing their view and perception because that landscape is a symbol or the identity of that community. There are also needs to involve the community in every aspect of the landscape conservation field included in the aspect of identification, planning and management of the area because they are the most effective guardians of the landscape heritage (Rossler, 2006; Taylor, 2011). Both studies show that person's perception towards a landscape is necessary because, the value of the landscape depending on how people perceived it. However, there are few studies undertaken on the perception of the public or the community itself towards any of landscape preservation or conservation research because usually there are only views of expert undertaken while doing this area of study (Hunziker et al., 2008; Walker & Ryan, 2008; Shuib et al., 2010).

There are several landscape studies that considered publics' view and preference. Most of this study was using photo as stimuli in portraying the real landscape features. Research done by Jones (2004) was use set of scenic indicators and rating criteria in order to get the perception from experts and publics regarding the view or vista in Adelaide Oval. O' Brien & Wilson (2011) also doing several case studies in their research on community perception by using photo because they found that a human can easily give accurate judgments toward something even there is little information about it. There are two basic things to be considered in doing landscape perception and assessment. First is by getting the actual setting of the landscape and the second is the value of landscape from the view of people. Methods of the survey included a questionnaire and interviews, which involves rating procedure or sorting procedures such as Q-sort techniques (Jacobsen, 2007). Yang & Kaplan (1990) and Yang & Brown (1992) had provided an example of landscape preference study by making cross-cultural comparisons for the landscape taken in Korea, Japan and Western countries.

Literatures show that public preference is a serious thing to be considered while doing any of landscape preservation and conservation study. The photograph could be categorized, as the best method to be used in landscape preference study because, it can accurately portray the real landscape, other than using the set of indicators that constructed by the researcher. It is because photo plays as stimuli that attract people to get involved in that research. In the other word, it can make that research more attractive. Besides that, the visual on the photo can make people more understand other than just words.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Participants**

This research had employed 66 undergraduate students of Park and Amenity Management from Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Surveying Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam. They asked to give their opinion and preference on the suitability of each photo regarding the categories given. The participant selection is based on convenience sampling. However, they also selected because they have some basic knowledge of landscape and research method. Their perception or perspectives may contribute to this research.

#### **3.2 Landscape**

The landscape photos are taking on 22 June 2012 until 23 June 2012 within the district of Lenggong, Perak. Some of the area or villages included Gua Gunung Runtuh, Kampung Gelok, Lata Kekabu, Tasik Raban, Kampung Kuak, Kampung Kelantan, Pekan Lenggong, Kampung Bangol Batu, Kampung Bangol Belimbing, Kota Tampan and Bukit Sapi. It consist landscape photographs to represent the category listed in IUCN guideline of protected area. They are scenic quality, recreational importance, traditions of stewardship, biodiversity conservation, agri-biodiversity, cultural heritage and cultural associations. There were over 500 photos taken, and only 123 photographs selected to be shown to the participants. The selection of images based on the quality of the photos, the suitability and potential that may be listed under those categories. Those entire photos randomly pasted on the six different cardboard and given a number. Each cardboard contains 20 or 21 photos.

#### **3.3 Procedure**

Firstly, 66 participants divided into six different groups for administration purposes. Each group consists of 11 students. Then, each group received one cardboard, and they asked to select the photographs on the cardboard according to the suitable categories under IUCN guidelines. Respondents also received an evaluation form to state their own preferences or perspective on the landscape of Lenggong and the guideline on the rural characteristic as listed by IUCN as information.

### **4. Finding and discussion**

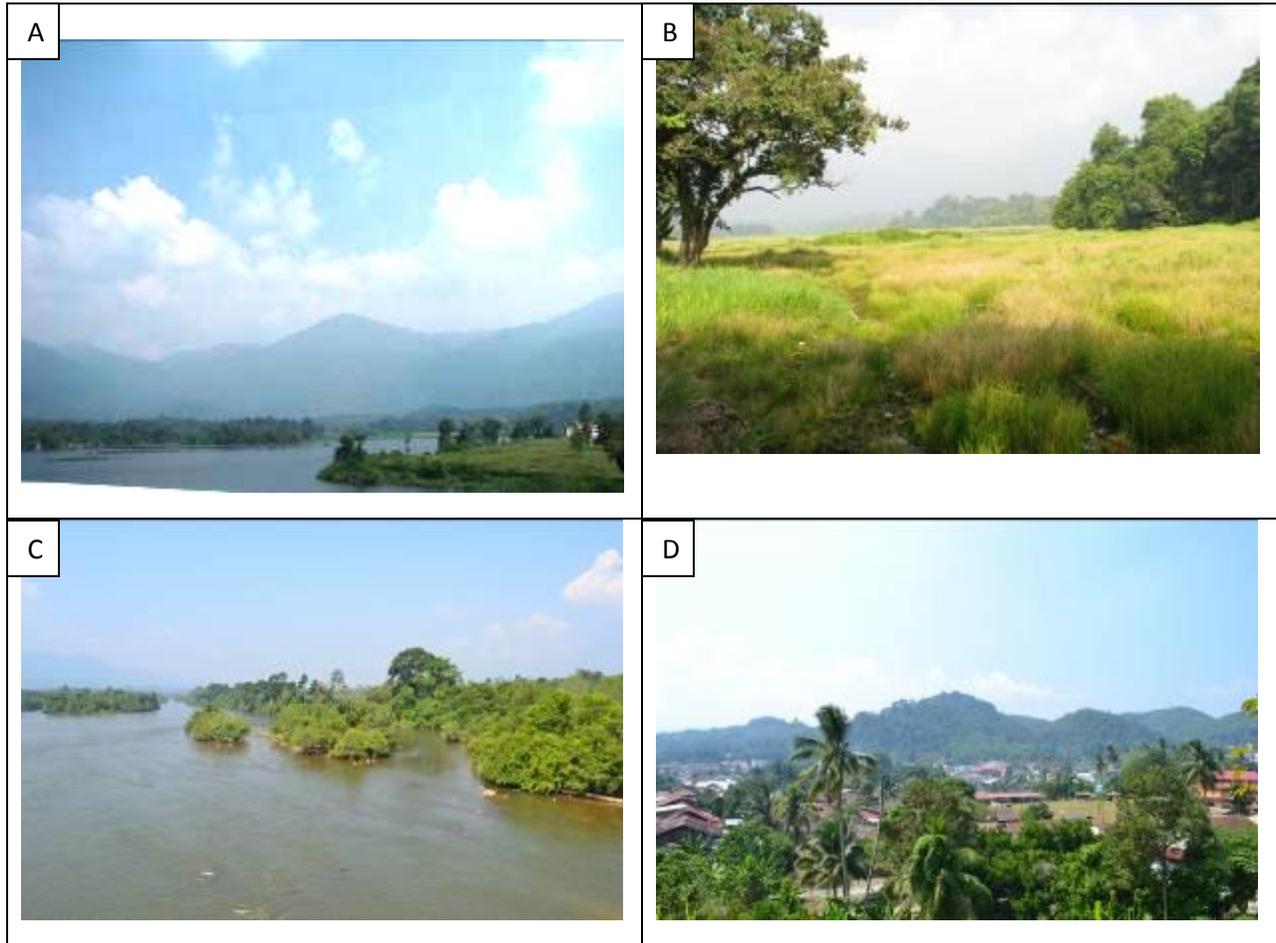
The data analyzed and studied when all of the photographs survey completed. The findings were landscape values as perceived by the respondent as selected under the seven categories. The images showed the top 4 photographs that valued by the respondents. They classified into themes or concepts which are sense of identity, recreational resources, sustenance for living, landscape conservation, agro-tourism potential, built heritage and cultural heritage.

#### **4.1 Sense of identity**

There are many views of photographs that portraying the beautiful scenery of Lenggong. For example, a view of the mountain which included Titiwangsa Range and Bintang Range, Perak River, Lake of Tasik Raban, the greenery of forest area, caves and also the surrounding area of Lenggong. These images classified under the sense of identity.

From the data collections, top 4 photos, that received the highest score in representing the scenic quality character shown in figure 1. For the image A, are views of the mountains behinds the Perak River which also including the greenery of the surrounding area. Besides that, image B shows the photo that portraying the swamp area near Tasik Raban was also among the highest score. This view also

shows the greenery of the area which may difficult to be found in another place. The other photo, which image C portrays the image of surrounding Perak River from an aerial view. The last photo, which image D is a little bit different where the photo shown views of Pekan Lenggong from the aerial view. The differences here are the three other photos shown the natural characters' views but, for this photo show also the human contribution to that landscape which is the images of housings and buildings in that area. Those images are portraying a sense of identity in Lenggong.



**Figure 1:** Sense of Lenggong

#### 4.2 Recreational sources

There is also much recreation potential in Lenggong. All those places may attract visitors and also local community to do their leisure activities or outdoor recreation. The example of those places is rivers in Lenggong, Tasik Raban Lake, Caves and also a natural area in Lenggong.

Result of data collection, there were top 4 photos which received the highest score to be representing recreational importance character. Refer to figure 2, images A is the views of Tasik Raban where many recreation activities can be done here such as canoeing, cruise and other water recreation activities. Image B are views of the river in Lata Kekabu where visitors can do some recreation activities with family and friends. Image C shows the surroundings of the cave area, which are the platform provided along the way to the cave. Visitors can see and learn a lot of species of flora and fauna surrounding this area. The last images, which is image C, shows ways to get into the cave. These activities are suitable for

those who love to take the challenges and adventure activities. These show that there are a lot of recreational sources found in Lenggong.



**Figure 2:** Recreational sources in Lenggong

### 4.3 Sustenance for living

Communities in Lenggong still practiced their traditional way of living. For example, their sources of income mainly come from agriculture activities such as rubber and freshwater fish farming.

Figure 3 shows the top 4 photographs that received the highest score to represent the traditions of stewardship in Lenggong. Image A, in figure 3 shows the product from freshwater fish farming which is Pekasam. This shows that they can also generate income by doing some traditional activities like freshwater fish farming. Second photo, which is image B, shows a rubber tree where the main sources of income for the local community in Lenggong. Image C shows platform build along the way to the cave which is to protect the land or forest area from the visitors' impact. This is crucial to ensure that the forest area does not damage by the visitors. Image D shows the main transportation used by the local community in several villages especially near the river such as Kampung Beng and Kampung Batu Ring. This traditional method of transportation can reduce the air pollution effect in Lenggong. Those activities show their sustenance for living.

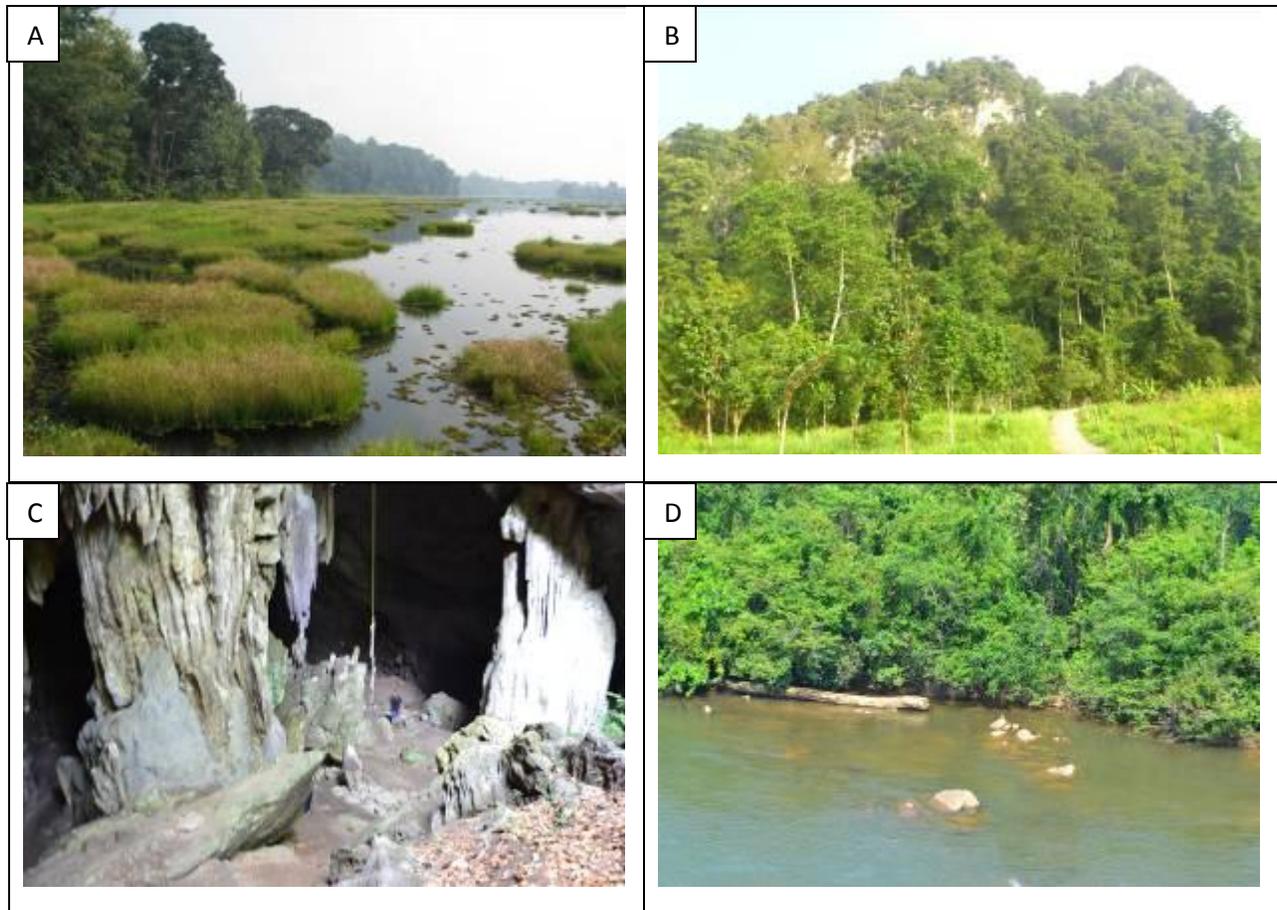


**Figure 3:** Traditional activities in managing natural resources in Lenggong

#### 4.4 Landscape preservation

Flora and fauna in Lenggong still preserved where many of natural area are still maintained its nature. For example, the river or lake, swamp area, forest area and also caves area.

From the survey, there are top 4 photographs that represent landscape preservation in Lenggong. As shown in figure 4, first photo, which is an image A, was portraying the swamp area in Lenggong. This area is a habitat for many species of flora and fauna such as fishes and aquatic vegetation. In the image B, photo shows a forest area near Gua Gunung Runtu. This area also maintains its nature where there are still many wildlife animals such as monkeys, apes and wild boar found here. Image C show caves area, which is Gua Puteri. Besides containing remains of historical evidences such as unique rock formation, this cave also notable as habitat for wildlife such as bats, frogs, snakes and others. Lastly, image D shows the river area in Sungai Perak. Those entire places are habitats to many species of flora and fauna in Lenggong such as birds, fishes, boar, monkeys and also other living things. This shows landscape preservation in Lenggong.

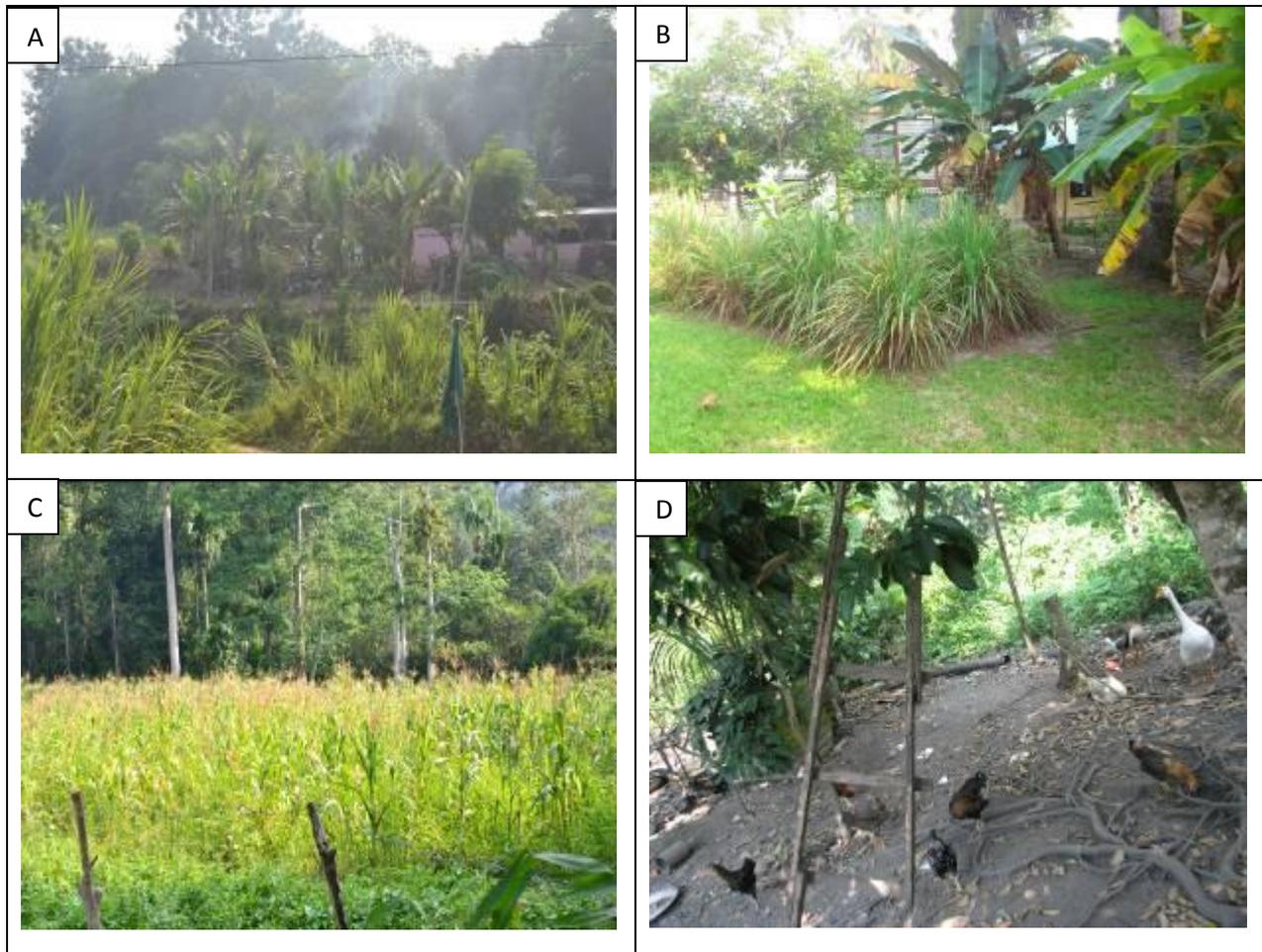


**Figure 4:** Landscape preservation in Lenggong

#### 4.5 Agro-tourism potential

Communities in Lenggong still practicing farming in their daily activities as sources of food and income. For example, they are cultivating fruit orchards and also breeding livestock such as deer, goat, cow, chicken, duck and swan.

Figure 5 shown activities practiced by local communities in Lenggong. Image A show banana farm along the way at Kampung Bangol Batu and Kampung Bangol Belimbing. They usually plant banana trees behind their houses. Besides that, crops such as lemongrass also planted behind their house or in an orchard. As shown in image B, lemongrass planted behind their house. Those crops usually planted as family needs or sources of side income for certain communities in Lenggong. They are also planting corn as sources of income. Usually corns planted in a wide area such a farm or field as shown in image C. Besides that, they were also raising livestock as sources of income or for family use such as in image D. Those images had shown agriculture activities, which contributed to biodiversity conservation and preservation in Lenggong. Besides that, they also contributed to agro-tourism which can attract outsiders such as the foreigner.



**Figure 5:** Some traditional farming in Lenggong

#### 4.6 Built heritage

Built heritage included old building, which had its own uniqueness or history behind it. There were still many traditional houses in Lenggong, Perak. Besides that, there were also many old mosques in Lenggong.

As shown in figure 6, image A show an old mosque in Kampung Bangol Belimbing. This mosque built about 100 years ago and had its own history. Image B, C and D shows traditional houses in most of the villages in Lenggong. Most of them still retain some of its original structure even after renovation or upgrading. These houses are an element of heritage remains which becomes an identity of Malay houses in Perak.



**Figure 6:** Traditional houses and old mosque in Lenggong

#### **4.7 Cultural heritage**

Besides built heritage, which usually referred as physical remains, there were also non-physical remains, which is the cultural heritage. Examples of cultural heritage included custom, tradition, practices, spirituals, language and others.

Figure 7 shows some traditions and practices in Lenggong. As shown in the image A, they still practiced a traditional culture such as farming in front of their house and also close with the neighborhoods. There usually had a place for chatting with their neighbor in front of their house or below their house as in image B. Besides that, there are also using a manual method when drying the food besides using the oven which is by putting their food under the sun as shown in image C. The last photo shows their traditional culture, where they are still using boats or sampan and doing traditional activities like fishing in their daily life. Those images show cultural heritage remains in Lenggong.



**Figure 7:** Some of traditions and practices in Lenggong

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The rural landscape is an area where there are interactions between human and nature that was created identity to that place. According to Phillips (2002), there were several characteristics that define a rural area which must consider their scenic value, recreational importance, traditions of stewardship, biodiversity conservation, agri-biodiversity, cultural heritage and also cultural association. Themes constructed reflected characteristics guided by IUCN which are sense of identity, recreational resources, sustenance for living, landscape conservation, agro-tourism potential, built heritage and cultural heritage. Those landscape characters are indispensable to be preserved or conserved because it creates identity to the place.

As in Lenggong, there are still rural areas where existed dramatic or beautiful scenery of its surrounding and offered varieties of recreational area that can attract visitors to come. Besides that, local communities in Lenggong still practiced traditional way of living such as farming and fishing which also contributed to the preserving of its flora and fauna. Lenggong also rich with cultural heritage and associations, where abundance of historical remains were creating an identity of Lenggong such as the old building and also in their customs and culture value. Those entire elements indispensable to be preserved because it is an identity of Lenggong and it can also attract outsiders to come.

The landscape study does not only require the view from an expert but also the view from the public can also be used as sources of information or contribute to the research. Public also have their personal views or interest towards their surroundings. This research was taking public views and preference toward rural landscape. From the survey taken, all the preferences of the participants are valuable in

strengthening the landscape conservation strategies in Malaysia. Besides that, there were also beneficial inputs to be put into national policy for landscape in Malaysia.

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