Chapter 17
Orchestrating Knowledge-Based Urban Development: Lessons from Multimedia Super Corridor, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

In the era of knowledge economy, cities and regions have started increasingly investing on their physical, social and knowledge infrastructures so as to foster, attract and retain global talent and investment. Knowledge-based urban development as a new paradigm in urban planning and development is being implemented across the globe in order to increase the competitiveness of cities and regions. This chapter provides an overview of the lessons from Multimedia Super Corridor, Malaysia as one of the first large scale manifestations of knowledge-based urban development in South East Asia. The chapter investigates the application of the knowledge-based urban development concept within the Malaysian context, and, particularly, scrutinises the development and evolution of Multimedia Super Corridor by focusing on strategies, implementation policies, infrastructural implications, and agencies involved in the development and management of the corridor. In the light of the literature and case findings, the chapter provides generic recommendations, on the orchestration of knowledge-based urban development, for other cities and regions seeking such development.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has marked the beginning of the new advancements in the field of information and communication technology (ICT). The rapid development of ICTs has also made a significant impact on the overall socio-economic fabric of cities and thus created an urgent need for urban planners to explore new ways of strategising planning and development that encompass the needs and requirements of the economy and society. The 21st century is also an era that the notion of knowledge economy emerged, where knowledge and ICTs are seen as important

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factors as the classical factors of production (i.e. land, labour, capital) in the creation of jobs and wealth (Cooke, 2001). The era of knowledge economy requires knowledge being the most crucial factor for national, regional and local economic development. Hence, the emergence of a knowledge economy has spawned a new notion of knowledge-based urban development (KBUD) as the latest wave of globalisation that extends over geographical boundaries (Yigitcanlar et. al., 2008a).

Historically cities and metropolitan regions have always been the hubs of knowledge generation and knowledge related activities with highly benefitting from various technologies (Van Doren, 1992). Particularly, advances in ICTs are inevitably making societies and cities increasingly knowledge-based, and responsive and dynamic to answer the needs of residents and to ensure their quality of lives. During the last several decades, following the lead of developed countries, some of the developing countries realised the necessity of starting up their ICT sector in order to compete in an environment of increasing globalisation and emergence of the new knowledge economy. In recent years the nature of the urban development started to change accordingly as activities in the knowledge sector have become more important and they required conditions and environments which are different from the commodity-based manufacturing activities (Knight, 1995). At that instance, KBUD is seen as a new approach in urban planning and development in order to ensure that cities are competitive in the global market of the era of knowledge economy. Hence, in broad sense, KBUD is a new form of urban development for the 21st Century that could potentially bring both economic prosperity and sustainable socio-spatial order to the contemporary city (Yigitcanlar, 2007). In order to realise a KBUD and compete nationally and internationally, Yigitcanlar and Velibeyoglu (2008) suggest that cities need knowledge infrastructure (e.g. universities, research and development institutes), a concentration of well educated people (e.g. knowledge workers), technological, mainly electronic, infrastructure (e.g. ICTs), and connections to the global economy (e.g. international companies and finance institutions for trade and investment).

In the case of Malaysia, the goal of KBUD is taken seriously by policy-makers. Malaysia, being a developing country relies heavily on the manufacturing-led industries for the economic growth due to her rich natural resources and relatively low-cost labour force. However, the structural transformation of the global economy which focuses on knowledge and human capitals has challenged Malaysia to concentrate on activities with a higher level of value addition. In Malaysia, the shift to the knowledge economy is part of a wider plan to achieve the objective of the National Vision for 2020. The Vision 2020 is a 30-year plan to push Malaysia to achieve a level at par with the developed nations in terms of economic performance and technological capability (Mohamad, 1996). With the move towards the knowledge economy and knowledge-based development, Malaysia aims to achieve sustainable gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates in the long run with knowledge playing a dominant role in driving productivity and sustaining economic growth (Economic Research Services Department, 2000). Thus, Malaysia needs to successfully transform herself into a knowledge economy where its growth will be lifted to a new and higher trajectory, which is one of the key requirements for Malaysia to become a developed nation. This shift offers an opportunity for economic growth and prosperity, as well as bringing her faster to the achievement of the Vision 2020 goals. The most significant tangible evidence of Malaysia's commitment to the knowledge economy is the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project, which is the largest KBUD attempt in Malaysia.

This chapter aims to provide an overview of and lessons learned from the MSC project, being the most ambitious KBUD manifestation in South East Asia. Following to this introduction section,