

From Channel to Catalyst - Water Spine

Reclaiming Water as Brownfield and the Origin of Urban Life

Brownfield is commonly understood as vacant shops, abandoned buildings, or unused plots of land. However, in Kuala Lumpur, a much larger and less visible brownfield exists within the urban fabric—along the Klang River corridor. Despite flowing through the city's historic core, the river remains largely underutilised, environmentally degraded, and socially disconnected from everyday urban life.

Water has long been recognised as the origin of life. Since ancient times, human settlements were established along rivers for survival, mobility, and daily activities. Yet today, the Klang River functions primarily as engineered infrastructure rather than a living resource. Pollution, flood-control structures, and informal occupation—including homelessness—have created layered environmental and social conditions that reinforce its brownfield character.

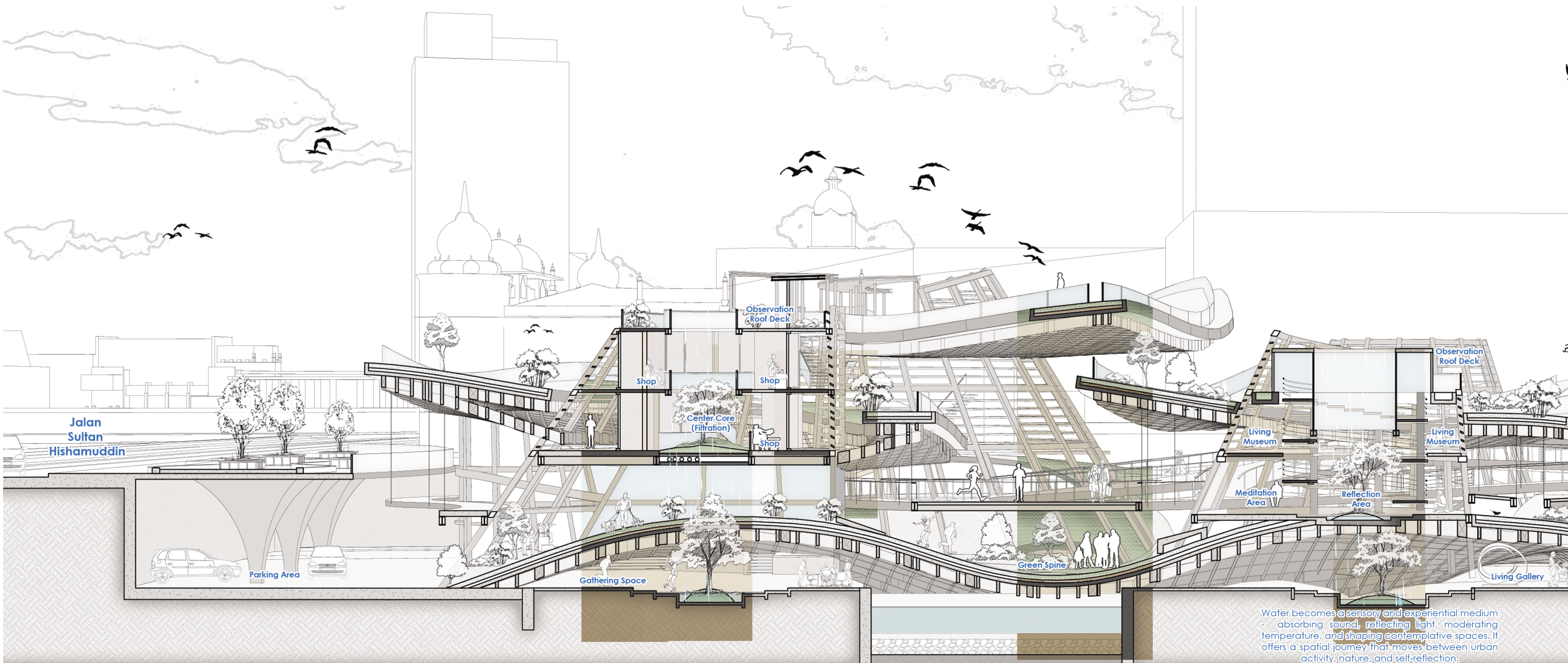
At the same time, Kuala Lumpur is gradually shifting towards a more pedestrian and car-free urban future, as seen in initiatives such as the regular car-free mornings at Dataran Merdeka. This transition opens new possibilities for rethinking urban connectivity. The river is no longer a separator, but can become a continuous journey through the city, reconnecting fragmented urban zones while re-establishing a relationship with water as the origin of life.

The redevelopment of this brownfield therefore presents significant potential. By re-engaging the river as a resource rather than a boundary, the Klang River can be reimagined as an active urban system. More importantly, this site offers a prototype for other river-based brownfields in the city, demonstrating how ecological systems and future urban mobility can collectively redefine Kuala Lumpur's spatial and cultural identity.

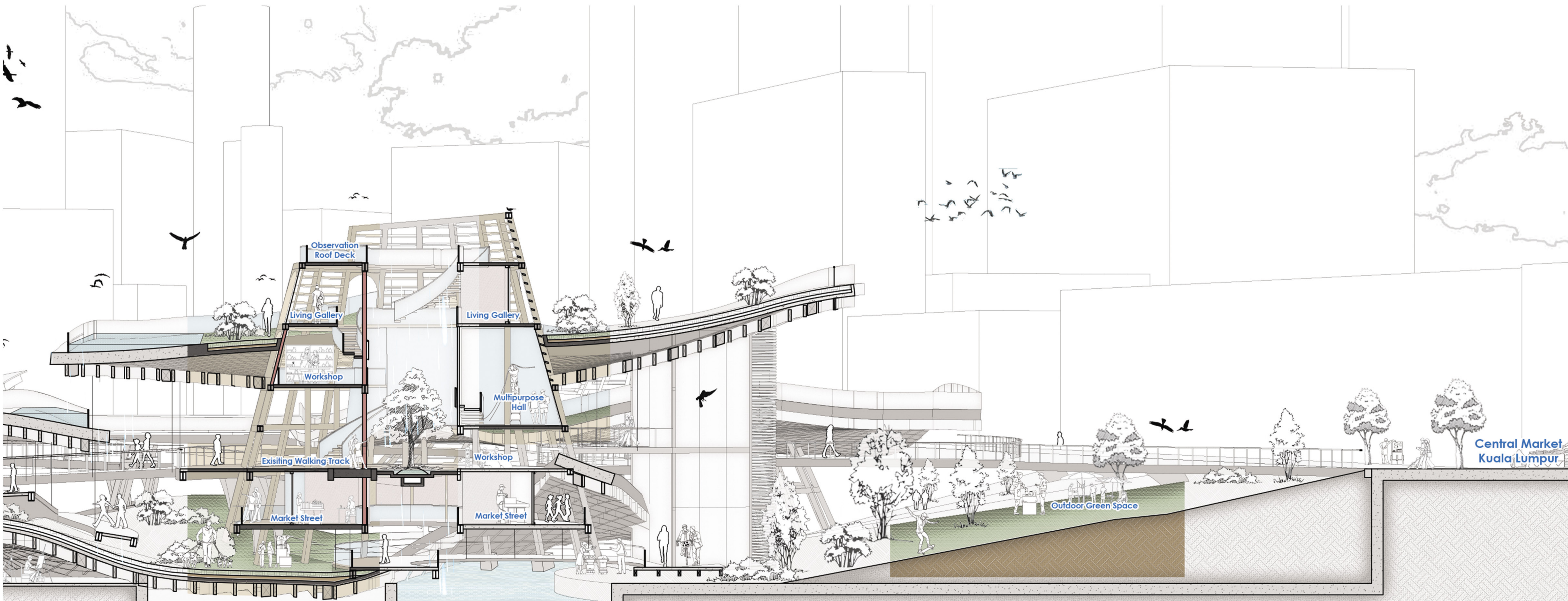
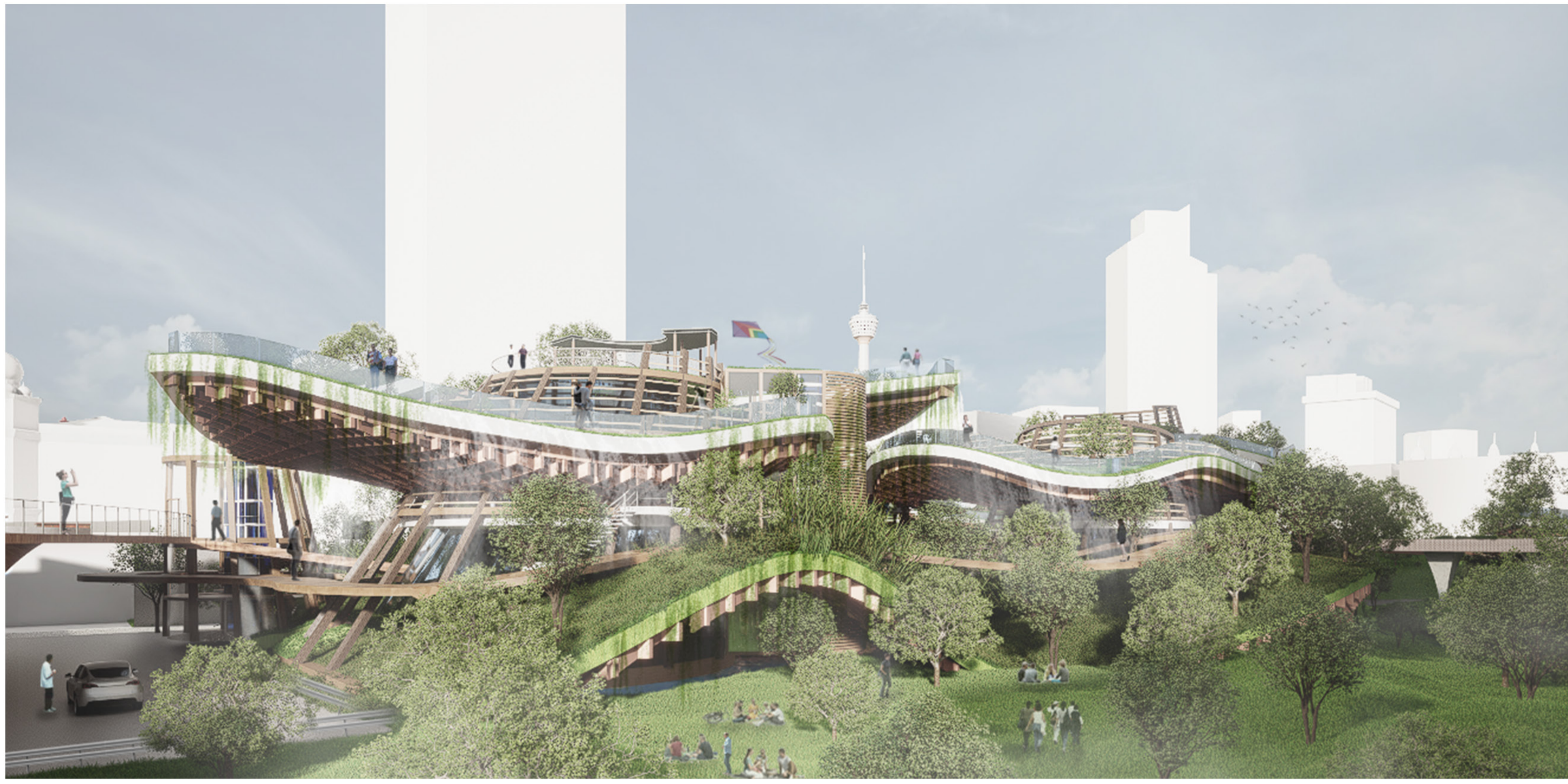
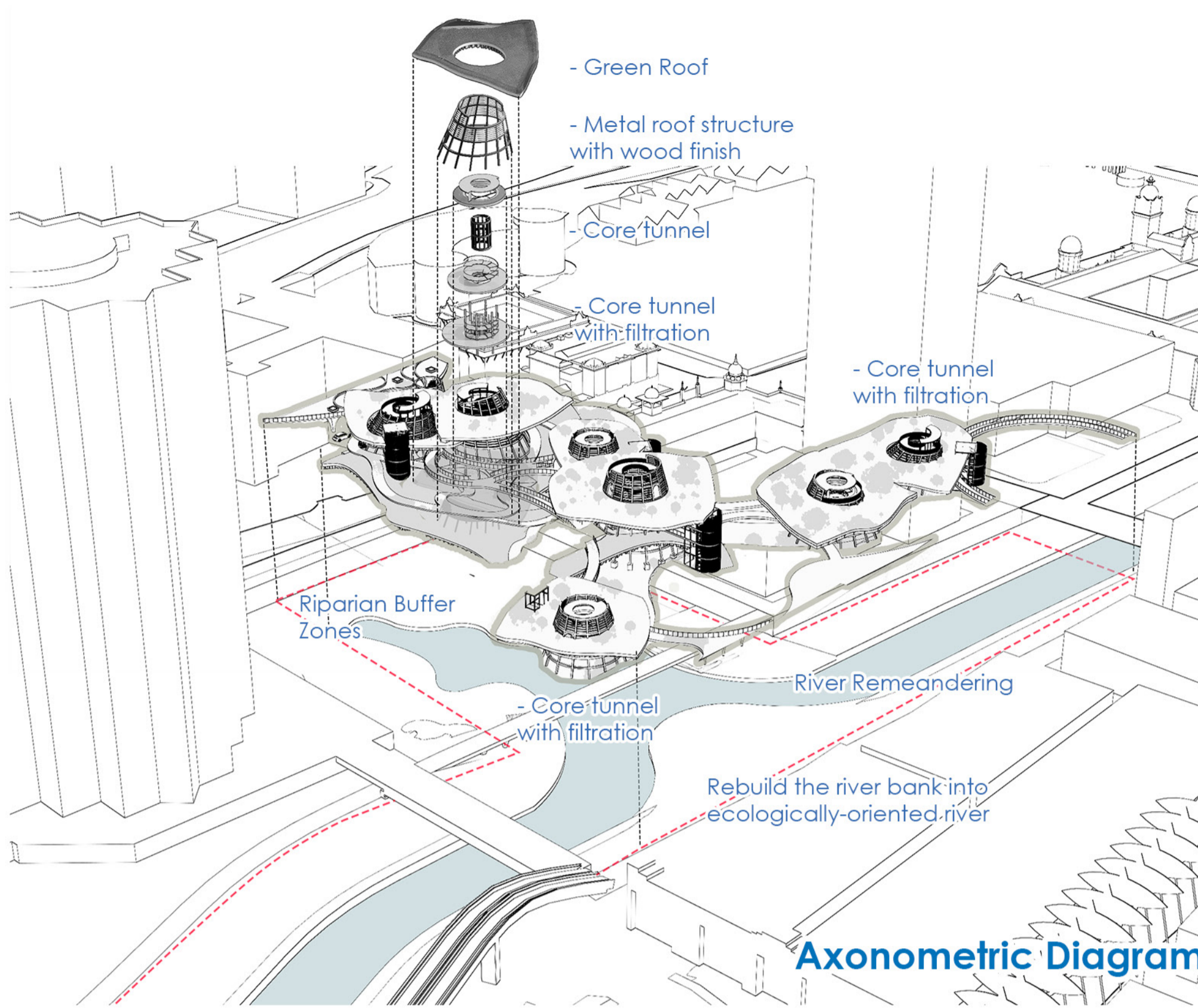


Critique:

Water is the origin of life, and since ancient times human settlements were formed along rivers as sources of daily use, food, and social activity. In Malaysia, water is one of the country's most valuable natural resources, yet in contemporary urban development rivers such as the Sungai Klang have been reduced to engineered infrastructure, disconnected from civic life and architectural expression. This disconnect has transformed river corridors into underutilised urban brownfields, revealing a missed opportunity to integrate natural resources into the identity of the city.



Water becomes a sensory and experiential medium - absorbing sound, reflecting light, moderating temperature, and shaping contemplative spaces. It offers a spatial journey that moves between urban activity, nature, and self-reflection.



Subterranean spaces are reimagined as part of a natural filtration system, where rainwater is collected through building tunnel design and gradually filtered through layered soil strata within it, using natural alkaline processes to improve water quality.

The riverbank is transformed from a rigid, engineered concrete channel into a naturalised river edge, allowing terrain, vegetation, and water to interact dynamically. A green ecosystem is introduced at the river level to support filtration, cooling, and

Sectional Perspective
 SCALE 1:100