CIVIL ENGINEERING CONSULTANTS FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: AN EXPLORATION OF MALAYSIAN FIRMS

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Abstract
Studies on civil engineering consultants from developing nations making an impact overseas are lacking. Research was conducted to explore the internationalisation of Malaysian civil engineering consultants. The mixed method combining a postal questionnaire survey and interviews was adopted. The sampled firms varied in terms of age, size and legal status. They have serviced countries in Asia, the Middle East, Australasia, Africa, and North and Central America. Their overseas ventures were driven by diverse motives, the two most influential being top management decision and unexpected opportunities. Patronage from clients and consultants provided the main source of work. Adopted market presence modes for initial entry and subsequent presence phases ranged from low-cost low-risk piggybacking to high-cost high-risk sole venture companies. Political stability and law and order were the two most considered locational factors. They possessed an array of firm-specific and home-country specific competitive advantages which enabled them to make an impact overseas.

Keywords
Civil engineering services, Malaysia and internationalisation.

INTRODUCTION
Back in the late 1980s, Rimmer (1987) questioned why civil engineering consultants from developing economies had not broken into the ‘western club.’ More than 10 years later, Murray and Mavrokefalos (2000) note that opportunities were available for engineering and design consultants from developing countries to make inroads globally. Almost two decades after Rimmer (1987) made his comment, Bradley (2005) laments that the international market is no longer the preserve of a handful of foreign firms traditionally domiciling in old colonial powers. He claims that indigenous firms in many developing countries have already become competent in many areas to the extent that some compete for jobs overseas. The annual statistics of top 200 international design firms for 2010 compiled by the Engineering News Record illustrates their progression: 25 (12.5 %) of the firms were from developing countries, the majority (14) from China followed by Egypt (5) and the rest (i.e. Lebanon, Kuwait, India, Serbia, Jordan and Turkey) one each. Overseas work is essential for established civil engineering consultancy firms and nations as reflected from various reports and studies in the U.S. (Lieberman 2004), U.K. (Thorn et al.