

# The conundrum of professionalising building surveying in Malaysia

Professionalising  
building  
surveying

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Received 9 October 2019  
Revised 23 November 2019  
25 March 2020  
Accepted 14 June 2020

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is to track the series of setbacks by a few like-minded persons since the early 1990s to entrench building surveying as a profession in Malaysia.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data were sourced from elite interviews with authoritative individuals who have been championing building surveying as a profession and supplemented by secondary sources.

**Findings** – Established professional bodies became hostile to what they perceived as attempts to encroach on their professional jurisdictions. There was even a move to subjugate building surveyors to the auxiliary role. The ultimate aim to obtain statutory “ring fence” around the proposed building surveying profession did not find favour with lawmakers.

**Research limitations/implications** – The limitation of small sample size was compensated by referral to past publications.

**Practical implications** – Latecomers face an uphill challenge in negotiating for legitimacy from established professions and lawmakers alike in a situation when no new work demand awaits. Building surveyors in Malaysia have to either wait for external changes which would allow their traditional role to be formally recognised or take up new specialisations.

**Originality/value** – Additional empirical findings were uncovered to complement past studies. The main contribution lies in demonstrating the explanatory powers of the sociological lens for future studies on professions in the construction industry.

**Keywords** Elite interviews, Inter-professional competition, Theory-based explanations

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

It was [Jolley \(1989\)](#) who pointed out that the 20th century was the century in which professions and professionals proliferated. Great occupations vie to be regarded as professions, the prize being recognition, social prestige and economic rewards ([Bilton et al., 1987](#)). The main objective of the professions should be positive functions of servicing and protecting the public above personal gains ([Bollom, 1988](#); [Murray and Zentner, 1989](#)). Clearly, there is nothing wrong with making a lot of money if the professionals do what they are licensed to do, and that is to be trustworthy in offering quality service ([Moorhead et al., 2003](#)). To uphold the public’s trust, the profession regulates the members’ competence and ethics. However for some time now, society has become more critical of professional altruism that claims as a veiled quest for elitism, status, power, high income and restrictive protectionism

The authors would like to express their thanks to Dr Nur Syaimasyaza Mansor for conducting several interviews in 2018.

