



IS COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN URBAN PLANNING IN ISKANDAR MALAYSIA EFFECTIVE ENOUGH? A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION

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Abstract

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of community participation in planning and operational decision-making in Iskandar Malaysia. The Iskandar Malaysia region consists of four local planning authorities who are responsible for planning and managing the spatial development in the region. Conceptually, effective community participation helps the local planning authority to make better decisions, hence, providing a sustainable and quality living environment. The study employed in-depth interviews to gather insights into the phenomenon from various key actors to address the questions. Following the 31 interviews performed, it is suggested that the effectiveness of community participation; and the incorporation of community interest in Iskandar Malaysia are substantially influenced by functional variables such as collaboration between stakeholders, community access to information and process, and intergovernmental relationships in planning. Structural and cultural variables include the skill and professionalism of public planners, the capability to influence, public awareness and knowledge, and community representation.

Keywords: community participation, urban planning, Iskandar Malaysia, qualitative research

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INTRODUCTION

Community participation in urban planning provides a clear description of the decision-making process based on public preferences, leading to better decisions by incorporating the community's experiential knowledge into the process (Innes & Booher, 2004). Community participation is fundamental in achieving the agenda of sustainable development as it helps the government, as a decision-maker, to understand the community preferences, and thus make a better decision (Innes & Booher, 2004). Urbanisation has resulted in fast population growth and spatial development in the main urban territories, including Iskandar Malaysia (IM). As a result, it has instigated challenges to the local authorities in the metropolitan region to govern their local areas.

The local authorities in Johor Bahru and Kulai face a daunting challenge to govern urban development, together with providing effective community participation in the process (Ahmad *et al.*, 2013). Subsequently, the study anticipates addressing the questions, "To what extent do the current participatory platforms in Iskandar Malaysia offer a genuine opportunity to the community to effectively participate in both the development plan-making and development control?" and "What constitutes the effectiveness of community participation and the incorporation of community interest in the planning and operational decisions?".

In-depth interviews (IDI) and thematic analysis have been employed to collect and analyse the qualitative data. A total of 31 IDIs are conducted involving key informants, namely, local public planners, private developers' representatives, and community representatives. This paper aims to evaluate the effectiveness of current community participation in urban planning in Iskandar Malaysia. This study concludes that the improvement of the functional dimension of the participation process in urban planning in Iskandar Malaysia will potentially enhance the capability of the community to participate effectively, henceforth, incorporating their interest in the development plan-making and planning permission processes.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN URBAN PLANNING IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

Urban planning in Peninsular Malaysia (excluding Kuala Lumpur) is guided by the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (TCPA 1976) as the main legislative instrument (Ahmad *et al.*, 2013). Urban planning in Peninsular Malaysia is based on the relationship between the development plan-making and planning permission processes. According to Section 22 (2) (a) of TCPA 1976, it is obligatory for the local authority, as the local planning authority (LPA), to refer to the gazetted Local Plan (LP) in granting planning permission, ensuring that a proposed development complies with the LP (Town and Country Planning Act 1976). Therefore, this research focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of