

Public Participation by Resident Associations in Local Authorities Administration in Kuching District, Sarawak, Malaysia

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15520/sslej.v2i11.49>

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to discuss public participations by Residents Association in local authorities administration in Kuching District, Sarawak, Malaysia. This article also discusses the structure of the Resident Associations and the various activities these structures organised which benefitted the communities living in the neighbourhood. All three local authorities – namely the DBKU, MBKS and MPP indicated that Resident Associations play an important role to create mutual relationship with the public towards better local authorities administration. In addition, it highlighted the roles played by the Resident Associations in three local in promoting public participation through various programmes and activities. Resident Associations also play an important in preventing crimes by improving security at their neighbourhood, increasing vigilance, creating and maintaining a caring community. They also play a vital part in the local government administration especially in maintaining cordial relationship between the residents and the local authorities. Finally this article discuss the programmes and activities implemented by the Resident Associations in collaboration with the local authorities. Amongst the activities discussed in this article are safety and crime prevention programmes, recycling programme, recreational and sports activities, community services or gotong royong, and other programmes that are beneficial to communities living in the neighbourhood.

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Key Words: Residents Association, public participation and local authorities, Sarawak.

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Published
2017-12-08

How to Cite

Leha Saliman, A. S. Public Participation by Resident Associations in Local Authorities Administration in Kuching District, Sarawak, Malaysia. *sslej* 2017, 2

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Issue

[Vol. 2 No. 11 \(2017\)](#)

Section

Articles

Public Participation in Local Government: A Study Amongst Local Authorities in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia

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Abstracts

This article attempts to discuss public participation in three local authorities which is the focus of the study. The purpose of this article is to provide an insight on how the local authority enhances public participation in their administration. The discussion focused on the essential factors that influence public participation, the mechanisms and benefits of public participation in local government administration in three local authorities namely DBKU, MBKS and MPP which administers the local government in the Kuching district in Sarawak Malaysia. There are numerous goals or purposes of public participation in MPP, MBKS and DBKU. The main purpose is to improve the quality of their administration and to satisfy the customers. In addition, there are several factors that influence the public participation in all three local authorities, namely top management support, clear public participation goals and policy, early involvement of public and the mechanisms of public participation. MBKS and DBKU also encourage the community or residents to engage actively in the local authority administration. The public demand to keep a close watch on the administrative operations as they seek to receive the benefits of administrative service through administrative participation.

Key Words: Public participation, local authorities, mechanism and local government administration

Introduction

The present local authorities in Sarawak are established under the Local Authorities Ordinance, 1996. As a result, the administrations of local authorities in Sarawak are different from those in Peninsula Malaysia, especially in regards to the implementation of public participation. In Peninsula Malaysia, the public are required to participate in the development planning and implementation of policies by the local authorities as stated in the Local Government Act, 1974 and Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172). In Peninsula Malaysia, public participation is not just an alternative for better planning, but it is a requirement prescribed under the planning laws. These legislations require the public to participate in the process of preparing development plans. However, these rules and regulations do not apply to Sarawak, where the role of public participation is limited and focused only on certain area of local authority administration and does not cover development planning.

Kuching district has a total area of 4,559.5 square kilometres. Due to its vastness, the administration of the district are entrusted in three local authorities, namely the City Hall of Kuching North or Dewan Bandaraya Kuching Utara (DBKU), the City Council of Kuching South or Majlis Bandaraya Kuching Selatan (MBKS) and the Padawan Municipal Council or Maljls Perbandaran Padawan (MPP). The administration of the Kuching city itself is divided into two local authorities namely DBKU and MBKS. The northern section of Kuching is run by DBKU, covering an area of 369.48 square kilometres while the southern section, which covers a small but a more densely populated area of 61.53 square kilometres, is

administered by MBKS. The third local authority, MPP mainly administers the sub urban and the rural areas within Kuching district. It covers a large portion of Kuching district with an area of 1,431.82 square kilometres.

The history DBKU began when Kuching was conferred a city status on 1st August 1988, making Kuching the second city in Malaysia, after Kuala Lumpur. The City of Kuching North Commission administers the northern part of Kuching City. MBKS administered the southern part of Kuching, which was previously under the administration of Kuching Municipal Council (KMC). MBKS includes of a Mayor, a Deputy Mayor and 25 Councillors, who are appointed by the state government of Sarawak. The secretary is the Chief Administrative Officer of the local authority. MBKS covers administration areas of Centre of Business District (CBD) east namely, Pandungan, Pending and Stampin (MBKS, 2010).

Padawan Municipal Council (PMC) has a long history and was previously known as Kuching Rural District Council (KRDC). KRDC was first established in 1957, and its core business was focused on the provision of council services and basic infrastructure such as road construction in the rural areas. During that time, most rural areas are very difficult to access because of the absence of good roads. The local people expect the government to build basic roads and provide water and electricity supply. Other than that, the total number of property was small and the developers only built a small number of commercial centres and housings in the area. After facing many challenges over the past four decades as a Rural District Council, this council was upgraded to the Padawan Municipal Council on 1 August, 1996. The transformation was done due to several factors. Firstly, the increase in the quantity and quality of road network in Kuching which lead to the increase in mobility of the population. Secondly, the rapid phase of development in the property sector has resulted in the increasing prices of Kuching city land in urban centres. The position of the MPP as a suburb that borders with MBKS and DBKU was favourable because many developers have moved toward MPP area to build commercial, industrial and residential houses due to the fact that the land prices are much lower than in the city centre. The pace of land development in the MPP is very significant, particularly between the year 1996 and 2010. In fact, it increases more than double, from 26,820 units to 59, 825 units. Since the upgrade, the MPP roles and responsibilities become more complex and challenging. The opening of special development areas such as Borneo Highlands Resort leads to the construction of new roads from the city to Borneo Highlands. The construction of roads prompted the growth of economic activities especially in the tourism sector like Semenggok Wild Life Centre, Homestay in Bunuk Village and Belimbing Village and hot spring in Annah Rais Longhouse. Due to the increasing involvement in the tourism sector, the expectations of various parties has also increased. Among the expectations is the need for a more efficient and effective provision of waste collection services and a more vibrant city life. In the beginning, the Kuching Rural District Council was located at the Round Tower near the Old Court building at Tun Haji Openg Road. The Kuching Rural District Council moved location to Jalan Satok, Kuching from 1962 to 1991.

On 4 April 1991, the council finally moved to its present location at Kota Padawan Penrissen Road, Kuching. Now the MPP covers an area of about 1,432 square kilometres and it is also the most racially-diverse area in Sarawak. It borders with five areas of the state administration including the district of Kuching, Samarahan, Serian, Bau and Lundu. MPP is the largest local authorities in Sarawak with the total property holdings reaching 61,471 units so far. There are five main urban development areas that are Kota Padawan, Kota Sentosa, Matang Jaya, Bandar Baru Batu Kawah and convergence markets in Siburan, Tapah and Beratok. MPP has formally adopted total quality management since 1993. An efficient, clean and prosperous Padawan municipality is the vision of MPP, whereas the mission of the