

Managing Towards Sustainable City: Public Participation for Safety and Security

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Abstract

Globalization and urbanization have inevitably changed the social structures of many cities. In parallel with impressive economic and social development, the rise of crime rate could not be separated. Efforts and measures to curb these social problems are many, the government policies and strategies, through built environment design and public participation. This paper discusses the role of public participation and argues that it should be strengthened to achieve safe and livable city. It covers the social changes in the process of urban evolution, and how public participation could facilitate measures for safety and security in effort to create safe and sustainable city, free from crime. In light of current issues of increasing crime due to globalization and socio-economic changes, this paper explores government, NGOs and public efforts in guarding the safety and security, especially in urban areas. It explores the various strategies to enhance the level of safety and security in Malaysia. This paper proposes a higher premium to be put in empowering the public in decision making and government activities as propagated in Local Agenda 21 for sustainable and safe city. It is suggested in this paper, the traditional way of creating strong attachment and sense of belonging through participation could be considered as one important method to create safe and secure neighborhood. Public participation in decision making and planning could ease the burden faced by local authorities. The persistence of resilience of community efforts to make their own space of the city more livable is imperative, considering the increasing probability for them to face daily incidence of crime. Community empowerment will, in itself, produce the kind of defensive barrier for any unwanted activities to penetrate.

Keywords: *managing sustainable city, safety and security, traditional streets, place attachment, social cohesion.*

Introduction

Early civilization started from small settlements, which gradually increase in size and becoming cities. Cities, then evolve through urbanization process, are important economic catalyst for the surrounding areas. Globalization and modernization has changed many parts of the city, which indirectly affects the socio-economic of the population in cities. Increasing structural dominance of global markets seems to leave little room for communities in securing urban livability. Changes in economic and political landscape inevitably bring about some prominent impact to local community. Asian culture, especially in Malaysia, in which social cohesion was built by community activities which dominates the daily living has gradually being corroded with the modern materialistic and individualistic paradigm. The existing measures to reduce crime especially in urban settings could be grouped into three categories. Firstly, developing and implementing strategies by government departments, local authorities and city managers in the form of creating policies and regulations, increasing budgets and strengthening enforcement. The Safe City Programme, Sustainable City indicators, and developing policy related to safety are few examples of these. Besides, policy such as the Malaysia National Urbanisation Policy, Thrust 5 reads, Creation of a Conducive Liveable Urban Environment with Identity (NUP 23) and states that “*safe urban environment shall be provided*”.

Secondly, through built environment such as promoting Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and providing good design to prevent crime. The strategy to provide safe environment through physical built environment has been implemented through Safe City Programme. Actions to be taken by local authorities in term of providing good and safe built environment have been clearly listed in the Programme.

Thirdly, through public participation in activities related to their area and their way of living. This strategy to encourage public participation has been credited in our National Urbanisation Policy, Thrust 6 Effective Urban governance, (NUP 29) which states, “*The involvement of society shall be encouraged in urban planning and governance*”. In addition, it is also one main strategy for Local Agenda 21, which is to involve public in decision making and community activities. As one important key component for sustainable development, Local Agenda 21 promotes public participation to assist in building trust in government, resolve conflicts and educate the public.

It is suggested in this paper, the traditional way of creating strong attachment and sense of belonging through participation could be considered as one important method to create safe and secure neighborhood. Public participation in planning could ease the burden faced by local authorities. The persistence of resilience of community efforts to make their own space of the city more livable is imperative, considering the increasing probability for them to face daily incidence of crime. Community empowerment will, in itself, produce the kind of defensive barrier for any unwanted activities to penetrate.

In light of current issues of increasing crime due to globalization and socio-economic changes, this paper explores government, NGOs and public efforts in guarding the safety and security, especially in urban areas. It explores the various strategies to enhance the level of safety and security in Malaysia. This paper proposes a higher premium to be put in empower the public in planning and government activities as propagated in Local Agenda 21 for sustainable and safe city. It is stressed in this paper that that public participation could lead to greater sense of pride and belonging to a place and sense of ownership which result in positive perception on safety of the area.

Globalization, Urbanization and Social Change Management

Globalization and urbanization have changed many parts of the city, which indirectly

affects physical, economic and social functions. It was during this period, the “*built environments which are culturally rooted, locally produced and technologically adapted in time and spaces are being rapidly eroded*” (Zetter and Watson, 2006:3). In parallel, as famously proposed by Jane Jacobs, our cities are gradually being unsafe, in which “*today barbarism has taken over many city streets, or people fear it has, which comes to much the same thing in the end*” (Jacobs, 1992:40).

Since Malaysia gained independence in 1957, rapid physical, social and economic changes occurred. The shift from agriculture to industrial nation has inevitably led to high urban-rural migration rate. The economic reforms from the New Economic Development Policy encourage rural-urban mobility for the purpose of encouraging economic growth. Increasing concentration of population in urban areas which began during 1970’s has not only facilitated the nation’s growth but also create new problems in terms of unemployment, housing shortage and illegal squatter increasing crime rate. Change in life style from rural to urban gradually being adopted by these immigrants, especially in the subsequent generations. In the Ninth Malaysia Plan, it is stated that the face of Malaysian society has changed and the population has become increasingly urbanized and educated (Malaysia, Ninth Malaysia Plan). It was projected that 63% of the population will become urbanized by the year 2010 with 2.3% average annual growth rate. The Plan also pledged to improve the standard and sustainability of Quality of Life as the one of the five key thrusts in the National Mission. The Mission acknowledges that the quality of life is not only on adequate provision of basic needs but also to maintain peace, security and harmony.

It was reported in one study in China that although majority of migrants in urban centers lead a normal life fulfilling the needs for human resources and cheap labour, small percentage would resort to ‘*spreading urban criminal underworld*’ which is evident in the high percentage of crime rate in urban areas as compared to the rural (Liou. 2000). The change in place for living inevitably leads to ideological and attitudinal change and the rise of materialism and commercialism where the “*socialist norm of collective interests has been replaced by the concern of the self interest and the importance of individualism*” (Liou, 2000: 140-141). Similarly, as many other places in the world, the urban population in Malaysia experiences the same process of change and influx of immigrants. What was considered normal fifty years ago, have become obsolete in the current, fast pace, individualistic, modern living. For example, taking care of others and others property is not a social obligation anymore since everybody is busy with their own life and everybody let the responsibility to be shouldered by relevant authority.

On the other hand, globalization has increased concern to include common people in policy making (Kamariah and Dolbani, 2006). As society has become more urbanized, educated, complex and fluid, social control becomes more challenging. This is where public empowerment can give best result as ownership to programmes and activities could enhance sense of belonging as has been practiced in traditional society.

Sustainable City and Public Participation

Sustainable development stresses for collective action that is closely identified with democratic community. There are currently three major groups identified as the key actors for successful collaboration in policy or decision making. These are the government (politicians, local authority and government departments), those with special interest in government projects (developers and private sectors) and the community (the public including NGOs) (Kamariah and Dolbani, 2006). Therefore it is imperative that we start planning to accommodate the changes as we move towards becoming urbanized and industrialized nation by the year 2020.

For a city to be livable, it should be sustainable. One should look into communities, NGOs, political parties and how these different groups could reach consensus. Livability depends on the extent to which communities and other groups in civil society that are trying to make cities livable can build ties with people and agencies within the state which share the same agenda. Each type of actors – communities, intermediary organizations and state agencies – has a complementary contribution to make the fight for livability. The capacity of each depends on the internal coherence as well as aggregated experience and ability of its individual members, but the power of each to affect change also depends on its relations to others. The key is nurturing these networks and alliances that are particularly oriented toward pursuing livability. A Sustainable City is a city where achievements in social, economic and physical development are made to last. It promotes strong public involvement in decision making for action plans and policies that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Belinda Yuen, in her article on Singapore safe city asserts that safe city ‘is not a spontaneous development but the result of a carefully crafted strategy involving investment in the physical environment and actively engaging community in managing their living areas and preventing crime (Yuen, 2004).

MANAGING SAFE CITY

How safe is our city? How safe is our city to its resident, to its visitors and to our children? How do we perceive that our city is safe? Could we consider a sustainable city is a livable city that is safe from crime? These terms and jargons may have their own connotation and meanings but in general they carry similar aim that is to provide a safe environment for the inhabitants and visitors. The percentage of crime rate has been one indicator to show the level of safety in cities. Urbanization has also been associated with increasing population and high rate of crime.

The Asian culture, especially in Malaysia, in which traditionally social cohesion was built by community activities which dominates the daily living has gradually being corroded with the modern materialistic and individualistic paradigm. What was considered normal fifty years ago have become obsolete in the current fast pace societies. Invasion of global thinking and culture gradually shape the new breed of generation that accepting what were unacceptable before. Taking care of others and others’ property has not been seen as a social obligation anymore. The current norm is that of individualistic in which everybody lets the responsibility to be shouldered by relevant authority. Social cohesion for crime prevention could reduce the authority’s burden.

It was reported by the Malaysian City CID chief Senior Assistant Commissioner (II) Ku Chin Wah, that the Kuala Lumpur crime rate has dropped by 7.1% in 2007 as compared to 2006 (The Star, Jan 2008). Among the categories of crime are criminal intimidation, outraging modesty, causing hurt, extortion and rioting. Several measures have been suggested to cope with crime in the city such as hiring contract police staff who have already retired or are about to retire, installing more closed-circuit television cameras in buildings and common areas, building more police stations near shophouses and in housing estates, providing civilians with administrative positions in the police force to relieve police of such duties and speeding up recruitment of new police staff. In addition, the introduction of volunteers to report crime directly to the police called RakanCop has also gained wide support from the public (Amar Singh, 2005).

A study in China shows that unemployment rate, the masculinity ration, expenditure on armed police, demand for housing and urban development are all important predictors of perception of public safety (Nielsen, and Smyth, 2008). Another study in United States of America linked urban economic change to have significant effect on crime rate in central cities

such as unemployment rate and poverty (Joong-Hwan, 2005). These show that increasing structural dominance of global markets seems to leave little room for communities in securing urban livability. Changes in economic and political landscape inevitably bring about some prominent impact to local community.

Participation could lead to strong sense of ownership and responsibility towards the place and its physical structure. Psychological comfort or feeling of at ease with a particular environment places a high degree of confidence for people to start caring for the place. It was found in one study that local's sense of belonging, sense of ownership and sense of economic security generate comfort, good and positive image to a place (Norsidah, 2008).

Malaysian Government Efforts for Sustainable City

The term sustainable development has become globally favorable and increasingly prominent today, especially in government's policies and decision making. Although it is always being debated that the real meaning of sustainable development is subjected to where, who and when it is being translated, everybody agrees on the need to balance the three dimensions of sustainability, which are, economy, social and environmental sustainability. Since the Earth summit 1992, public participation has been stressed as a way to reduce environmental degradation through public empowerment and to give them their rights to take part in the decision making process that affects their lives. Malaysia, as one member of the summit, has carried out continuous efforts to increase the rate of success towards sustainable development. The fact that sustainable development retains its space in the Malaysian Five Year Development Plan is reassuring. Part of the strategy to achieve sustainable development is through implementing Local Agenda 21, which emphasis on people's involvement in creating good place for them to live in. In this instance, it is simplified that sustainable city can be achieved through strong support from the community.

The Malaysian National Urbanisation Policy (NUP) stresses for liveable communities as well as sustainable urban development. Recent efforts by the government and people to ensure safety and sustainable place to live have been carried out, which will be discuss in this paper.

Developing indicators to measure sustainability of cities in Malaysia are another initiative to achieve sustainable development. In 2007, the level of sustainability of 42 cities (14 main cities and 28 secondary cities) as reported by the committee of National Physical Planning, has shown positive increment. Malacca gained the top score with 81.08%, followed by Kuching Utara 79.82% and Shah Alam 78.38%. The next level with 75.44% was scored by Kuala Terengganu, Georgetown and Kuching Selatan.

According to Malaysian Sustainable City award, by Department of Environment, Malaysia under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Malaysia the concept incorporates many dimensions, i.e. environment dimension, economic growth to meet essential needs, provision of shelter and urban services, efficient transportation, public safety, good governance and community stakeholder participation are equally important. This concept also promotes facilitating the sharing of environment-development information, expertise and building inter-agency partnership. This inter-agency relationship reveals the stress for close cooperation between government, public and people.

Local Agenda 21 was developed from Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 established from the Earth Summit. The Agenda 21 report has 40 chapters and 27 principles of sustainable development. Malaysia signed the pact for Biodiversity Convention pledged its support on sustainable development. Agenda 21 identifies nine major groups whose participation is important for the success of achieving sustainable development. These are women, youth and children, indigenous people, non-government organizations, trade unions, business and

industries, scientists and technologists and farmers. Local Agenda 21 or simply termed as LA21, is based on the premise that public involvement in decision making is of paramount importance to achieve sustainable development especially at the local level. LA21 was first introduced by the Malaysian Ministry of Housing and Local Government in 2000. Although one of the objectives of LA21 in Agenda 21 clearly states that “by 1996 most local authorities in each country should have undertaken a consultative process with the population and achieve consensus on a LA21 for the community” the implementation in Malaysia has not been encouraging at the beginning stage (Kamariah, 2003). However, over time, progress has been reported as reassuring (Kamariah and Dolbani, 2006). Implementation of LA21 was carried out in stages where the first phase was in 2000 where four local authorities were chosen for pilot project. The second phase in 2002 saw 48 local authorities adopted the programme and the last phase at the end of 2005 saw the remaining 97 local authorities to start preparing their LA21 action plan.

Safe city program was launched in Malaysia in 2004 as measures towards achieving high quality of living and sustainable development. According to Department of Town and Country Planning Malaysia, safe city is a city free from all threats, either through physical, social or psychological. The city will provide protected environment that prevent situation that could affect local peace. This is to ensure that inhabitant of the area will also feel safe, healthy and happy. The four goals of safe city are: free from violence, free from natural disaster, free from social and moral decay, free from indoor and outdoor accident. This programme listed twenty three actions in which five immediate actions to be carried out including separation of vehicular and pedestrian paths, establishing bollard and fences, cleaning up or pruning bushes and hidden places, creating open and safe pedestrian paths, lighting up places for monitoring and reducing crime potential. These actions have been successfully implemented in the participating local authorities with rate ranging from 18% (sharing information through GIS) to 100% (Crime Prevention Research through Environmental Design and prohibiting business and parking at five-foot path and pedestrian path). According to the latest report for this programme, overall rate of implementation on 38 local authorities implementing Safe City Programme since January 2005 (53%) has achieved 83% in December 2007 (Report by the Town and Country Planning Department, 2007 in <http://www.townplan.gov.my>).

Conclusion

Strong and quality public participation can evoke the feeling of responsibility and ownership to ensure peace and comfort in that place. It is important to note that strong attachment and sense of belonging to the site could actually reduce the crime rate of the urban area. Planning and designing for safe city should also include measures on increasing sense of belonging or attachment. Such measures could be in the form of increasing public involvement in decision making and giving empowerment to manage the place. A Sustainable city is a city where achievements in social, economic and physical development are made to last. This in turn will ensure comfort and security to its inhabitant. A safe city should promote strong public involvement in decision making for action plans and policies that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

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