



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**RESIDENTS' PERCEPTION OF LIVEABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD ENVIRONMENT IN
SUBANG JAYA, SELANGOR, MALAYSIA**

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ENVIRONMENT IN SUBANG JAYA, SELANGOR, MALAYSIA**

By

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**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti
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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

RESIDENTS' PERCEPTION OF LIVEABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD ENVIRONMENT IN SUBANG JAYA, SELANGOR, MALAYSIA

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September 2008

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The complex interaction between the community and its environment could be exemplified through the term liveability. A liveable neighbourhood is one that offers quality and good environment to ensure inhabitants are able to live their lives in a satisfying way. In relation to these, the three-fold objectives have been formulated for this study. They are (1) to assess the importance residents accorded to various dimensions and attributes in determining neighbourhood liveability, (2) to discover residents' satisfaction level toward the liveability dimensions and (3) to explore the importance of the socio-demographic variable in predicting satisfaction with neighbourhood and liveability dimensions.

Reviewing the literature found that four dimensions (social, physical, functional and safety) are commonly used to understand liveability issues in the living environment. Sixteen attributes are also identified to be relevant and are utilised as an indicator for each of the four



dimensions. Data was collected using mailed questionnaires and from 300 questionnaires mailed, 170 were returned making the response rate of 57%. Analysis indicated that residents are more concerned about the safety dimension while social dimension is deemed to be the least important dimension. An overall ranking for all attributes shown that three safety attributes topped the list. The bottom of the list sees the attributes from social and functional dimensions. Satisfaction rankings were done using the mean value and Yeh's index. Both methods revealed that residents attributed the highest satisfaction toward their functional environment. However, the mean value indicated that residents are most dissatisfied with the social environment while Yeh's index shown that residents were least satisfied with the safety level.

In assessing the importance of socio-demographic characteristics as predictor variables, the variance obtained ranged from 10% to 20%. This means that regression models modestly fit the data and future research should consider including other variables. The length of residency is a significant predictor of satisfaction in four models except for safety dimension. In addition, Indian ethnicity predicted variance in satisfaction for neighbourhood, physical environment and social environment. Among all the models, none of the demographics variables are reliable in predicting satisfaction with the safety level.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Sarjana Sains

**PERSEPSI PENGHUNI TERHADAP KEBOLEHDIAMAN KAWASAN
KEJIRANAN DI SUBANG JAYA, SELANGOR, MALAYSIA**

Oleh

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Interaksi di antara komuniti dan persekitarannya adalah kompleks dan boleh diteliti melalui konsep kebolehdiaman. Kejiranan yang mempunyai suasana yang baik and berkualiti adalah amat mustahak bagi membolehkan penghuninya menjalankan kehidupan yang memuaskan. Sehubungan dengan ini, kajian ini telah dijalankan berdasarkan tiga objektif berikut: (1) untuk mengkaji tahap kepentingan dimensi dan attribut kebolehdiaman berdasarkan pandangan penghuni kejiranan, (2) untuk mengenalpasti tahap kepuasan penghuni terhadap dimensi-dimensi kebolehdiaman dan (3) untuk mengenalpasti kepentingan angkubah sosio-ekonomi penghuni dalam menjangka kepuasan mereka terhadap kejiranan dan dimensi-dimensi kebolehdiaman.

Empat dimensi didapati kerap digunakan dalam kajian berkenaan isu-isu kebolehdiaman sesebuah kawasan. Enam belas attribut berkaitan turut ditemui dan telah digunakan sebagai indikator bagi setiap dimensi



tersebut. Data kajian diperolehi melalui borang soal selidik yang diposkan kepada responden. Daripada 300 borang yang diedarkan, 170 telah dipulangkan dan ini memberikan kadar pengembalian sebanyak 57%. Hasil kajian menunjukkan penghuni lebih menitikberatkan dimensi keselamatan manakala dimensi sosial dianggap paling remeh. Bagi atribut kebolehdiaman, tiga faktor keselamatan mendahului yang lain. Di dasar senarai pula adalah faktor-faktor dari dimensi sosial dan fungsi. Untuk kedudukan berdasarkan kepuasan, dua kaedah telah digunakan iaitu purata kepuasan dan index kepuasan Yeh. Berdasarkan kedua-duanya, penghuni kejiaran menunjukkan tahap kepusasan yang tertinggi terhadap dimensi fungsi. Namun demikian, kaedah purata kepuasan mengesahkan penghuni paling tidak berpuas hati terhadap dimensi sosial wahal indeks kepuasan Yeh menunjukkan penghuni paling tidak berpuas hati dengan tahap keselamatan.

Dalam menentukan sumbangan angkubah sosio-ekonomi sebagai peramal kepuasan kejiaran serta dimensi-dimensi kebolehdiaman, keputusan menunjukkan variasi model-model tersebut adalah di antara 10% hingga 20%. Jangkamasa menghuni adalah angkubah yang menyumbang dalam semua model kecuali dimensi keselamatan. Etnik India pula meramalkan variasi dalam kepuasan kejiaran, dimensi fizikal serta dimensi social. Angkubah sosio-ekonomi adalah tidak signifikan dalam menentukan kepuasan terhadap dimensi keselamatan.

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I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 19 September 2008 to conduct the final examination of Jasmine Lau on her Master of Science thesis entitled “Residents’ Perception of Liveable Neighbourhood Environment in Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.

JASMINE LAU

Date: 3 November 2008



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Malaysia has been experiencing rapid urbanisation since the beginning of the 20th century and this has led to significant pressure on local and state governments to provide land for development and infrastructure as well as housing for growing urban populations. The latest national statistics are shown in Table 1. The total population of Malaysia in 2000 was 23.49 million and expected to grow to 28.96 million 10 years later. This gives an average annual population growth rate of 2.3% which is slightly lower than that of the Eighth Malaysian Plan. With respect to urbanisation, it was observed that the proportion of urban population is projected to increase to 63.8% in 2010 from 62.0% in 2000. The rate of urbanisation in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Pulau Pinang, Labuan, Melaka and Johor was higher than the national urbanisation rate, mainly due to the availability of more business and employment opportunities. Such rapid urbanisation rate requires planning and development that is socially beneficial for all residents, with sufficient and optimum provision of infrastructure, utilities, public facilities, recreational spaces and commercial centres. This is in line with the Ninth Malaysia Plan where the urban development strategies are aimed at improving the quality of urban services to ensure that urban areas are more liveable with its residents enjoying a higher quality of life.



Table 1: Population and Urbanisation Rate by State, 2000-2010

State	Population (million)			Urbanisation Rate (%)			Average Annual Growth Rate of Urban Population (%)	
	2000	2005	2010	2000	2005	2010	8MP	9MP
Northern Region								
Kedah	1.67	1.85	2.04	39.1	39.8	40.3	2.4	2.2
Perak	2.09	2.28	2.44	59.1	59.3	59.3	1.6	1.6
Perlis	0.21	0.23	0.25	34.0	35.1	35.9	2.2	2.2
Pulau Pinang	1.33	1.50	1.60	79.7	79.8	80.0	2.0	1.9
Central Region								
Melaka	0.65	0.72	0.79	67.5	70.6	73.4	2.9	2.7
Negeri Sembilan	0.87	0.96	1.03	54.9	56.3	57.4	2.3	2.1
Selangor	4.19	4.87	5.31	87.7	88.4	89.1	2.7	2.4
W.P.Kuala Lumpur	1.42	1.62	1.70	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.9	1.5
Southern Region								
Johor	2.76	3.17	3.46	64.8	66.5	67.7	2.9	2.6
Eastern Region								
Kelantan	1.36	1.51	1.67	33.5	33.4	33.3	2.0	2.1
Pahang	1.30	1.45	1.57	42.0	43.5	44.6	2.7	2.5
Trengganu	0.90	1.02	1.12	49.4	49.8	50.3	2.6	2.6
Sabah	2.60	3.13	3.33	48.1	49.8	51.6	3.1	2.9
W.P. Labuan	0.08	0.09	0.09	76.3	77.6	78.6	2.2	1.8
Sarawak	2.07	2.34	2.56	48.1	49.5	50.6	2.8	2.4
Malaysia	23.49	26.75	28.96	62.0	63.0	63.8	2.5	2.3

Source: The Ninth Malaysia Plan Report, Table 17-5, p. 361

Neighbourhood has always served as an important tool for the planning and analysis of urban areas. Public administrators have frequently divided the city into neighbourhood units to organise the distribution of goods, services and other resources. The importance of neighbourhood in resident's life has attracted numerous studies (Myers, 1987; Omuta, 1988; Veenhoven, 1996; Lee, 2005), utilising various terms to denote the meaning of good living conditions. One of the commonly used terms is liveability. It is a concept resulting from the interaction between the community and its environment (Shafer, Lee and Turner, 2000). Basically, it is focusing on the subjective evaluation of the residents toward their living environment. Jarvis (2001) maintains that liveability encompasses elements of home,

neighbourhood and metropolitan area that contribute to safety, economic opportunities, health, convenience, mobility and recreation. Werner (2005) summarises that liveability is not only related to spatial housing and urban qualities but also includes quality of community life. The dynamic urbanisation wave makes it becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the perspective of liveability. The liveability of neighbourhoods is a crucial element to the prosperity and development of cities as it reflects the lifeworld experiences of inhabitants.

Various researches had relied upon residents' experiences as a measurement of neighbourhood quality. Reason being, the human-built topography of neighbourhoods cast a great impact on residents' social and psychological outcomes. Hence, residential environment is one of the important factors that influence consumers' choice and the property selection (Visser, van Dam and Hooimeijer, 2005). Due to the wide geographical area in urban setting, a residential environment that is able to satisfy the daily demand of inhabitants is desired. Hence, it is crucial for urban planners as well as neighbourhoods or cities administrators to be interested in the things that are important for people to live their lives in a satisfying way. In other words, to achieve competitive advantage, any neighbourhood must ensure that its overall 'appeal' and the living experience offered to be superior to that of the alternative locations open to potential inhabitants.

1.2 Problem Statement

There is a growing awareness of the deterioration of liveability particularly in urban built environment due to the pressure of rapid development and growing population. Aspects such as social security and the quality of contact between neighbours are believed to be deteriorating whereas crime, anti-social behaviour and vandalism are prevalent. As urban size increases (as shown in Table 1), imbalance development pattern could exist in that some neighbourhoods are prospering while others are deteriorating. Consequently, liveability and quality of life varies from one neighbourhood to another. These possess enormous challenges for authorities who manage cities include providing adequate urban services and amenities, alleviating urban poverty, designing new infrastructure and establishing systems of governance. Most authorities have been applying one-size-fits-all planning solutions to the urban problems and in most situations these policies failed to be effective.

A comprehensive search of the electronic works revealed that there has been limited works on understanding the issue of liveability in Malaysia. A review of literature found that most scholarly activities on local urban living environment are clustered around well being (ie. Dasimah, Puziah and Muna, 2005; Nurizan, Bukryman, Laily and Ahmad, 2004) as well as quality of life (ie. Norhaslina, 2002). Majority of the neighbourhood quality perception studies to date have been conducted in western countries and culture. Hence, it is

questionable if the data from these studies are applicable for the assessment of residential neighbourhood quality in local environment. Environment quality studies done locally are critical as it collect useful information on the local urban conditions and trends, which enable such knowledge to be imparted in formulating and implementing urban policies and programmes.

Similarly, there have been little attempts to investigate people's perceptions about the places they currently live especially what makes their neighbourhoods a good or bad place to live. Most studies have generally focused on residents' satisfaction toward their living environment (Carp and Carp, 1982; Turkoglu, 1997; Savasdisara, 1998; Parkes, Kearns and Atkinson, 2002; Dekker, Musterd and van Kempen, 2007) and rarely on the attributes or dimensions that are important to them. As mentioned by Garcia-Mira, Arce and Sabucedo (1997), a person's response to physical and social environmental stimuli are 'coded' subjectively on internal scales in the individual's mind. They further elaborated that most perception studies has taken this for granted by assuming that all individuals will accord the same importance to the underlying attributes or dimensions.

St. John and Clark (1984) in their studies have reviewed various authors' studies and agreed with them that not everyone finds the same characteristics to be important in their neighbourhood or evaluates neighbourhood satisfaction on the basis of the same

criteria. Hence, it would be important to know what dimensions of neighbourhood characteristics contribute to neighbourhood satisfaction so that urban planners who are interested in improving the living conditions for residents would know if their efforts should be directed specifically to certain group(s) or with a broader focus.

In view of the above, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- a) What are the relevant attributes and dimensions in evaluating liveability of the urban neighbourhood?
- b) What makes some neighbourhoods more liveable than others? Which attributes of the neighbourhood environment, as perceived by inhabitants appear to be important determinant of liveability and neighbourhood satisfaction?
- c) What is the level of satisfaction with each of the liveability dimension as experienced by residents?
- d) What is the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on the perceived quality of the urban residential environment? How readily can we predict how satisfied people will be with their neighbourhood as well as with the liveability dimensions by knowing their socio-demographic background?

1.3 Objectives of the Research

The main aim of this study focuses on understanding residents' perception towards their current neighbourhood environment particularly on what makes it a good or bad place to live. In specific, the study attempts to:

- a) assess the 'salience' or 'importance' residents accorded to various attributes and dimensions in determining the liveability of a neighbourhood
- b) discover the level of respondents' satisfaction toward the liveability dimensions
- c) explore the importance of the socio-demographic variables in predicting neighbourhood satisfaction as well as satisfaction with liveability dimensions

1.4 Significance of the Research

This research supplements the limited pool of current literature by presenting a simple theoretical model that can be adopted in creating livable local environment. Decades of sprawling urban development has created problems of congestion, pollution and automobile dependency. Thus, the findings of this study will assist in better understanding on the issues of liveability in present modern urban neighbourhood through identifying the attributes deemed to be important in creating a healthy and comfortable living environment. This knowledge will also enable municipalities located in various enlarging metropolitan regions to rework their development and

planning strategies by incorporating the liveable communities' principles into their agenda. By enhancing the city living environment that caters to the needs of all stakeholders, this ensures a neighbourhood to continue become or stay attractive as place to live, work and invest.

The objectives of most government policies are not merely focusing on physical aspects such as the quality of construction and affordability of housing stock but also incorporating broader term such as creating attractive and pleasant-to-live resident environments. Nonetheless, individuals occupying a given setting may differ in their subjective assessments, as liveability itself is a subjective concept. Thus an understanding of the term needs to be approached from the perspective of the people that live inside the environment. Knowledge of the subjective, human side to liveability issue can throw light on the situation beyond objective indicators where planners and policy makers are better informed on residents' satisfactions as well as what they really needed. Such understanding may tell a far different story than those by quantitative data, hence will be able to convey the true picture of neighbourhood liveability. It would also present opportunity for other researchers to re-examine and replicate those indicators that continue to represent an important aspect of neighbourhoods and cities.

Apart from creating liveable and sustainable living environment, urban planning could be used as a tool by government in promoting social interaction, community bonding as well as creating place identity. Successful urban planning allows the formulation of suitable design guidelines and review processes that enhances the unique characteristics of every place. Such characteristics could be historic, physical, cultural and ecology features of the neighbourhood that could be utilised to unify and improve place-based social and physical conditions. The incorporation of liveability and sustainability principles in neighbourhood design is important as many problems encountered at the macro-city scale are due to poor planning at the micro-neighbourhood level. Hence, any new development in the cities should adopt principles of high quality and sustainable design that meet economic, social and environment needs of the region.

Neighbourhoods in 21st century have been positioned as a commodity and therefore it is widely promoted as a whole 'package' in selling a property. It is proven in many studies that neighbourhood has effect on children performance (Gibbons, 2002), residents' health (Lawrence, 2004) and house price (Visser et al, 2005; Visser and van Dam, 2006). An appreciation of the liveability issue is essential as it helps to provide a strong and competitive lifestyle components as well as amenity characteristics that appeal to prospective buyers. This type of neighbourhood will create a potential

area for capital growth on housing return-on-investment. Despite this, by establishing a strong and positive impression will enables the respective neighbourhood to stay competitive and alive which also becomes the attraction for talented and creative workers. Such scenario helps to secure skills, job and business retention as well as development amongst existing and new communities.

1.5 Limitations of the Research

It is useful to highlight some of the limitations or obstacles that the researcher has faced while conducting this study. They can be divided into several subheadings to be further illustrated.

1.5.1 External Validity

One of the limitations of this study includes external validity, or the generalisability of the study. Though the sample size collected has reached the minimum number required for regression analysis, this study is unique to the accessible population of Taman Pinggiran Putra, Seksyen 2 and it is limited to double-storey terrace houses. The generalisation of the results of this study to other residential neighborhoods has some limitations as the environment, the way of life and residential composition might differs from area to area.