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Exploring stakeholders' perceptions and priorities in promoting social sustainability through building design and public participation: a case study in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to enhance stakeholder participation in public facility design to foster socially sustainable urban environments. Addressing gaps in public participation frameworks, it explores how increased engagement can improve social sustainability within Malaysia's unique socio-political context. Using a qualitative approach with purposive sampling, in-depth interviews were conducted with 24 stakeholders, including industry experts, policymakers, and the public, to gather insights on current practices, challenges, and participation effectiveness in fostering social sustainability. Findings reveal low public participation due to insufficient political will and guidance. Key recommendations include improving communication, transparency, government support, and streamlining procedures. The study highlights stakeholder perspectives on socially sustainable development, emphasising community needs, continuous facility use, and accessibility. These insights provide valuable guidance for policy-makers, practitioners, and researchers aiming to strengthen public participation and advance sustainable urban development in Malaysia.

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Public participation; social sustainability; stakeholder engagement; urban development; public facilities; Malaysia

1. Introduction

Public participation, involving affected individuals in decision-making, is crucial in fields like architecture and urban planning. Public participation refers to the process by which individuals and groups, particularly those directly affected, are involved in decision-making processes related to planning and development. This concept is widely recognised in fields like architecture and urban planning for its role in fostering more inclusive and democratic decision-making (Arnstein 1969; Sanoff 2000). Effective public participation not only provides a voice to diverse stakeholders but also ensures that development projects reflect the needs and values of the communities they serve.

This study addresses a key issue in modern urban development: the disconnect between public facilities and the communities they serve. In Malaysia, low public participation has led to underutilised public spaces that fail to meet local needs. By engaging stakeholders in the design process, this Research fills a gap in the literature and offers practical insights for creating socially sustainable and inclusive environments. Its findings have the potential to inform future public participation frameworks, enhancing the alignment between urban spaces and community needs.

Lefebvre's book, *The Right to the City* (Lefebvre et al. 1996), emphasised public participation as a response to commodification and capitalism's con-

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trol over urban spaces. While Lefebvre highlighted the need for public engagement in urban spaces, the formal introduction of public participation in planning processes has broader historical roots, including democratic participation frameworks (Arnstein 1969; Pateman 1970). The idea was to address the disconnect between residents and the city they built and reclaim ownership of urban spaces.

Social sustainability, focused on social equity, community cohesion, and quality of life, is closely tied to public participation (Dempsey et al. 2011; Ghahramanpouri et al. 2013). As noted by Colantonio (2009), emerging themes in social sustainability emphasise inclusivity and empowerment, which are central to meaningful community participation. Vallance et al. (2011) argue that fostering community involvement in decision-making processes directly contributes to social sustainability by promoting equity and resilience. In the context of urban development, the design of public facilities must prioritise these principles to ensure long-term community well-being (McKenzie 2004). By engaging stakeholders in designing public spaces, participation aligns development with community needs, fostering a sense of belonging and cohesion – key elements of social sustainability (Ghahramanpouri et al. 2013). Additionally, participation enhances transparency and accountability, building trust in institutions and contributing to long-term social resilience (United Nations 2002).

Community public facilities, such as libraries, schools, market halls, and sports complexes, offer key opportunities for implementing public participation frameworks. In Malaysia, however, public participation is often limited to exhibitions or hearings of local and state plans, leaving the design phase largely devoid of input. There are many opportunities for public participation in the development of public facilities, such as during the design phase, which is usually devoid of public participation despite catering to the general public. This mismatch between local needs and building functionality highlights the need for public participation during design. Previous attempts to implement participation frameworks in Malaysia have had mixed success (Omar and Ling 2009; Abdul Halim et al. 2011; Samah and Aref 2011; Li et al. 2012; Andersen et al. 2015; Abdul Manaf et al. 2016; Beyerle 2018).

Commercial development often leads to public facilities that fail to meet local needs, resulting in

spaces that cannot be sustained socially (Zanudin et al. 2019). Therefore, it is important to empower communities to participate in the design of public facilities, addressing the lack of public authority initiatives and private sector interest in fostering social sustainability. By involving communities, the Research seeks to create a socially sustainable environment through enhanced stakeholder participation.

Although public participation exists in Malaysia, it is mostly confined to urban planning and landscape design. Initiatives like the Green Building Index (GBI) and State Structure and Local Plans incorporate participation but often fall short of comprehensive citizen control, as advocated in Arnstein's (1969) level of participation ladder. They resemble more of a 'tokenism participation' approach (i.e. participation that is not authentic). This limited scope underscores the need for a robust framework that allows communities to shape their urban environment and achieve social sustainability (Marzuki 2009; Tang 2019; Makmor et al. 2020). This framework could serve as a practical guideline for industry and local communities, providing the tools and resources needed to facilitate meaningful public participation in the design and planning of their built environment.

Research on public participation in Malaysia has attracted academic interest from various fields, with studies yielding mixed results in the field of public participation. However, the level of engagement in the study was unequal among the industry sectors, leading to disparities in understanding and implementation (Marzuki 2009; Tang 2019; Makmor et al. 2020). Many studies on urban and architectural development have focused on public participation during the planning stage, primarily led by the planning industry. While the literature on public participation in landscape design is prevalent, there remains a significant gap in exploring public participation in building design, hindering a comprehensive understanding of architectural design in the Malaysian public context.

Public participation in Malaysia is often limited to consultation, falling short of the more active involvement seen in contemporary frameworks. This lack of a robust participation model for building design hinders social sustainability. This discrepancy highlights a gap in the local literature, necessitating the development of a participatory practice aligned with the contemporary definitions of public participation. While sustainability is a common topic, the focus in

Malaysia tends to be on environmental and economic aspects, neglecting social sustainability. Public participation is essential for achieving holistic sustainability by addressing community needs and fostering social cohesion.

This Research proposes a practical framework for fostering public participation to achieve social sustainability. The study addresses two key questions: 1) How does the current public participation process impact the social sustainability of urban development in Malaysia? 2) What are the critical factors inhibiting effective public participation in building design? The primary aim of this Research is to enhance stakeholder participation in the design and planning process of public facilities in Malaysia. By empowering communities to engage in the design process, this Research seeks to address the lack of public authority initiatives and private sector interest in fostering social sustainability. The study aims to develop a framework that enables meaningful community involvement in designing their built environment, ensuring that public facilities better meet local needs and contribute to long-term social sustainability.

2. Literature review

The term ‘public participation’ broadly refers to including the general public in decision-making processes within an organisation or project. This concept, also known as citizen, social, or community participation, emphasises the role of citizens in shaping outcomes. The importance of such participation in architecture was first underscored by Italian architect and urbanist Giancarlo De Carlo (1969) lecture published in *Architecture's Public*, highlighted its transformative potential.

Building on this foundation, Arnstein's (1969) seminal paper, *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*, stressed the importance of authentic engagement that empowers citizens and grants them control. Arnstein warned against superficial participation intended merely to legitimise decisions, offering a hierarchy of engagement levels – from manipulation and tokenism to genuine citizen empowerment. This ladder model delineates participation levels, ranging from ‘non-participation’ forms like ‘manipulation’ to advanced stages like ‘citizen control,’ emphasising that meaningful involvement moves beyond symbolic gestures. In this context, the public should be viewed as co-

creators and active contributors rather than passive beneficiaries (Lim et al. 2021).

In sustainable development, public participation is pivotal for promoting sustainable practices and ensuring that development is both equitable and effective. Foundational documents like *Agenda 21* and the *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation* reinforce the need for active public engagement in decision-making and sustainable practices. *Agenda 21*, for example, underscores that broad public participation is crucial for sustainable development, advocating inclusivity across social groups (United Nations 1992, 2002). This approach aligns with the practical solution offered by public participation for long-term social sustainability, as it facilitates the minimisation of spatial conflicts through collaborative processes (Xu et al. 2019).

Social sustainability refers to the ongoing process of fostering social equity, cohesion, and a high quality of life within communities (Dempsey et al. 2011). It emphasises fostering empowered, inclusive communities that can sustain their well-being over time (Ghahramanpouri et al. 2013). Integrating public participation into the design and planning of public facilities is essential for achieving social sustainability, as it ensures that diverse voices shape developments to be inclusive and reflective of community needs. This study is particularly timely, as the global push for sustainable development recognises social sustainability as a pillar in creating equitable, resilient urban spaces (United Nations, 2015). By focusing on the Malaysian context, where this area remains underexplored, the research fills a critical gap and offers valuable insights for policymakers and planners.

The connection between public participation and social sustainability is deeply rooted in principles of social equity, inclusivity, and resilience. Social sustainability, which encompasses dimensions like social equity, satisfaction of human needs, social cohesion, and community well-being (Dempsey et al. 2011; Ghahramanpouri et al. 2013), cannot be achieved without meaningful stakeholder engagement. Public participation ensures that development projects are not only environmentally and economically sustainable but also socially sustainable by actively involving the community in decision-making and ensuring that their needs and values are represented in the built environment (Arnstein 1969; Sanoff 2000). This study contributes to this discourse by exploring how public

participation in Malaysia can drive socially sustainable outcomes, particularly in the design and planning of public facilities. Based on this review, this study hypothesised that increased public participation in the design of public facilities will lead to greater social sustainability by ensuring that these facilities meet the needs and priorities of local communities.

Expanding on these principles, Meadowcroft (2004) argued that public participation provides both functional and ethical benefits for sustainable development. It improves decision-making by incorporating diverse perspectives and enhances inclusivity and fairness, which is the key to fulfilling sustainable development goals. Beyond these immediate benefits, participation also supports the unique nature of sustainable development, which involves not only technical solutions but also consciously shaping social change.

In Malaysia, the Town and Country-Planning Act of 1976 formally established public participation in local planning, making community involvement integral to the process. Section 9 of the Act emphasises the importance of public participation in urban development, with a two-phase process that includes community feedback and presentations from the State Planning Committee (SPC) (Malaysia, 2021; Zanudin et al. (2019). The Act forms the basis for how participation was practised in Malaysia.

However, numerous obstacles impede effective public participation in Malaysia, which can be grouped into operational, structural, and cultural limitations. Operationally, the centralised planning system in Peninsular Malaysia limits community involvement, as decision-making follows a top-down approach (Zanudin et al. 2019). Unequal access to information and collaborative opportunities further exacerbate these challenges, leading to favouritism and selective stakeholder engagement (Wiryomartono 2020).

Structurally, constraints in Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) – such as limited administrative and financial resources – compromise the ability to manage the participatory process. Delays in planning due to insufficiently skilled officials hinder meaningful engagement (Mohd Yunus et al. 2015), while a lack of commitment from practitioners, who view participation as burdensome, further hampers success (Mohamed Anuar and Saruwono 2013; Mohd Yunus et al. 2015). Legislative shortcomings

and rigid participation methods also contribute to low participation rates in Peninsular Malaysia (Zanudin et al. 2019).

Culturally, patrimonial norms and low public awareness pose additional barriers to genuine participation. The absence of active NGOs and a lack of public trust in the system undermine efforts to foster effective engagement (Maidin 2011; Nordin 2011; Abdul Manaf et al. 2016; Zolkafli et al. 2017). Trust, institutional support, and awareness emerge as pivotal factors in overcoming these cultural challenges (Mohamed Ali and Arifin 2019).

The legislative framework, which mandates LPAs to facilitate public input in urban planning, nominally grants authority over public facility projects. Yet, public involvement is often limited to high-level planning, with few opportunities for participation in government-initiated design projects (Malaysia, 2021). Local authorities must offer a minimum one-month period for public feedback on structure and local plans; however, participation beyond urban planning is rarely attempted (Mohamed Anuar and Saruwono 2013). This limited mandate restricts public involvement in facility design, as clients are not required to solicit public input.

The relationships between public participation, social sustainability, and stakeholder engagement can be visualised through a conceptual framework, illustrating how these elements interact to influence the design and planning of socially sustainable public facilities. As shown in Figure 1, public participation serves as the central mechanism that drives social sustainability by fostering inclusive decision-making processes. The diagram highlights the critical roles of stakeholder engagement, policy frameworks, and institutional barriers in shaping the effectiveness of participation efforts.

In conclusion, this theoretical framework underscores the critical role of public participation in achieving socially sustainable outcomes. By incorporating diverse voices and addressing institutional barriers, development projects can better meet community needs and enhance social cohesion. This research applies the framework to the Malaysian context, analysing the operational, structural, and cultural challenges that hinder public participation in public facility design. The subsequent sections will delve deeper into these challenges and offer recommendations based on insights from key stakeholders.

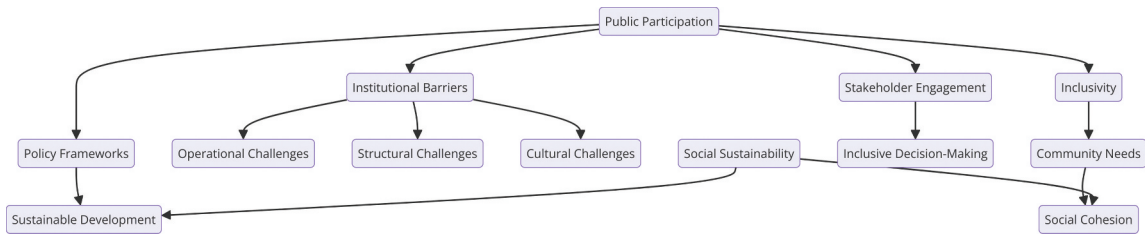


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of public participation and social sustainability.

3. Methodology

Given the limited data on the key processes and phases of public participation in design within Malaysia, this study adopts a novel and exploratory approach to examine how public participation can be effectively integrated into the design of public facilities while accounting for local social and political dynamics. To achieve this, a qualitative approach was chosen as it facilitates an in-depth exploration of the complex social and political factors influencing public participation and design practices in Malaysia. Specifically, qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, are ideally suited to exploratory research, as they capture diverse perspectives and lived experiences – crucial for understanding how social sustainability can be promoted through public engagement (Creswell 2013).

Consequently, the interview method was selected as the most effective way to gather critical data for analysis in this uncharted area. The study employed purposive sampling, specifically judgement sampling, to target a specialised population of professionals with over 10 years of experience. This approach ensured the collection of rich, relevant data from key informants capable of providing valuable insights (Neuman 2013; Patton 2015). This qualitative framework aligns with hypotheses from the literature review, proposing that increased public participation will enhance social sustainability in public facility design. The interview questions were structured to explore how stakeholders perceive this relationship and to identify factors hindering effective public participation.

The study focused on three primary stakeholder groups in public facilities: building industry experts, local policymakers, and the general public, including architects and town planners as building industry experts. Participants were identified using

professional directories and local government records, including directories from the Board of Architects Malaysia, the Board of Town Planners Malaysia, local city and municipal councils, and residential association and NGO directories from previous public participation workshops. Of the 33 stakeholders invited to participate, 24 accepted, offering valuable insights into public participation in the design process, while nine declined due to scheduling conflicts or work commitments. These stakeholders were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience with public participation and building design, aligning with the study's aim to collect informed data from experienced professionals. Table 1 details the participant breakdown, which was compiled based on the methodology outlined in the study.

The selection criteria for interviewees emphasised their expertise and active involvement in the public participation process, encompassing consultants, local resident associations, NGOs, and policymakers in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, and Putrajaya. Purposive sampling, particularly judgement sampling, was employed to ensure a specialised cohort of stakeholders with extensive experience, thus providing an informed perspective on public participation in design.

To gather nuanced insights, the study utilised in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews with stakeholders from both professional and non-governmental backgrounds experienced in public participation. The semi-structured format allowed interviewers to probe complex, context-specific issues while maintaining consistency across interviews (Kvale 2007). This method is particularly valuable in exploratory studies where diverse perspectives are critical. The interviews comprised a mix of structured and spontaneous questions, enabling interviewers to

Table 1. Summary of the interviewees ($N = 24$).

Position of interviewee	Types of company or organisation	N
Architects		
1. Architect & former President of PAM	• Architectural consultant	1
2. Architect & current Vice President of PAM	• Architectural consultant	1
3. Architect	• Architectural consultant	1
4. Architect	• Architectural consultant	1
5. Architect	• Architectural consultant	1
6. Architect	• Public works department	1
Town Planners		
1. Public Town Planner	• Municipal council	1
2. Public Town Planner	• Municipal council	1
3. Public Town Planner	• Municipal council	1
4. Public Town Planner	• Municipal council	1
5. Former Public Town Planner and Academic	• Public University	1
6. Private Town Planner	• Planning Consultant	1
Local Councillors/Polymakers		
1. Local Councillor	• Municipal council	1
2. Local Councillor	• Municipal council	1
3. Local Councillor	• Municipal council	1
4. Local Councillor	• Municipal council	1
5. Former Local Councillor	• Municipal council	1
6. Current ADUN & Former Local Councillor	• Selangor State Assembly	1
7. Current ADUN & Former Local Councillor	• Selangor State Assembly	1
8. Former MP and Public Policy Academic	• Private university	1
Public NGOs/Residential Association		
1. Former ADUN and current RA leader	• Residential association	1
2. RA President and NGO leader	• Residential association	1
3. NGO founder	• Non-governmental organisation	1
4. RA President	• Residential association	1

follow up on participants' responses to clarify points as needed.

The questions focused on stakeholders' perspectives on public participation, socially sustainable building practices, and challenges in the design process for public facilities. Examples included questions such as,

'As an architect, planner, or developer, how do you define public participation?' and 'Research has often cited the public participation rate in Malaysia as low, so why do you think that is the case?' A complete list of interview questions is provided in the [Appendix](#).

Initial contact with interviewees was made through invitation emails and messages, followed by personal calls or WhatsApp messages to arrange a convenient interview time. Throughout the process, participants were reassured of the voluntary and confidential nature of their involvement, with assurances that their identities would remain anonymous in published materials. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw at any point if they felt uncomfortable.

Detailed informed consent was provided to each interviewee, outlining the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, confidentiality measures, and the freedom to withdraw at any time. The ethics committee overseeing the study waived the requirement for individual consent due to the minimal risk posed and the use of anonymised data, determining that the study's potential contributions justified this decision.

Interviews were conducted in person whenever possible, with the interview mode tailored to each participant's availability. All sessions were digitally recorded with participant consent, and the average interview length was approximately 50 minutes. Participants were informed that recordings would be securely stored and destroyed after a specified period. Once transcribed, the recordings were reviewed to ensure accuracy.

Content analysis of the interview transcripts was performed using Taguette and NVivo software, licenced through a UPM research grant. An inductive coding approach allowed themes and patterns to emerge organically from the data. Initial codes were

generated through close reading of the transcripts, and these codes were grouped into broader categories based on recurring themes. This process helped identify key issues, such as challenges in stakeholder engagement and barriers to public participation. NVivo software facilitated systematic data organisation, enabling efficient retrieval and comparison of codes and themes (Bazeley and Jackson 2013). Verification of findings involved traditional methods such as member checking, detailed case descriptions, and the inclusion of contradictory information, with an audit by the academic advisor to ensure reliability and validity (Creswell and Creswell 2022).

These verification methods, including participant feedback and the inclusion of contrasting perspectives, were critical to ensuring a balanced and comprehensive representation of stakeholder views, enhancing the study's robustness. Together, these approaches provided a well-rounded analysis that strengthens the credibility of the findings and supports the study's conclusions.

4. Findings

The findings from the interviews have revealed insightful perspectives across four key themes: 1)

understanding socially sustainable buildings, 2) perspective on public participation, 3) views on public facilities, and 4) assessment of current public participation practices in Malaysia. To provide a clear overview of these findings, Table 2 summarises the key insights gathered from various stakeholder groups, including architects, town planners, local councillors, and public NGOs. This table highlights the stakeholders' definitions of public participation, perceived barriers, and recommendations for improving the process. Additionally, Figure 2 provides a thematic map that visually represents the key barriers and enablers of effective public participation, helping to clarify the factors influencing successful engagement. These summarised themes and visualised relationships will be explored in greater detail in the sections that follow.

4.1. Understanding socially sustainable building design

4.1.1. Defining socially sustainable development

The interviewees were asked what they thought socially sustainable urban or building development should entail. In total, 54 responses were provided by 79% of the interviewees. The 21% of interviewees,

Table 2. Summary of key findings from stakeholder interviews.

Themes	Stakeholder Group	Key Findings
Definition of Public Participation	Architects	Public participation means engaging community input during the design process.
	Town Planners	Emphasis on the need for public feedback in urban development.
	Local Councillors	Public participation is a tool for policy compliance rather than genuine engagement.
Barriers to Public Participation	All Stakeholder Groups	Top-down decision-making, lack of resources, and political interference.
Recommendations for Improvement	All Stakeholder Groups	Improved communication, early stakeholder involvement, and education campaigns.

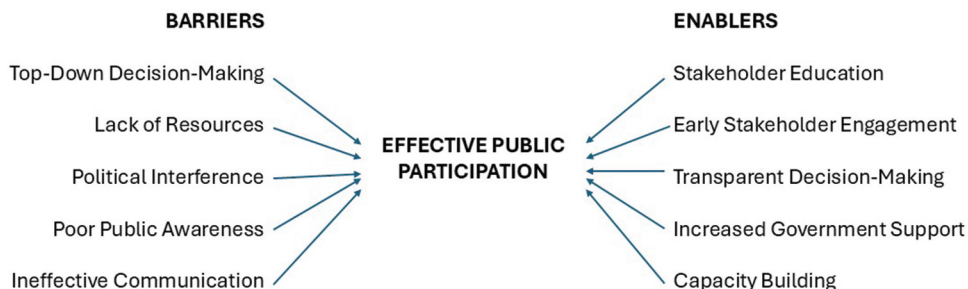


Figure 2. Thematic map: barriers and enables of effective public participation.

mainly from residential associations and NGO leaders, were unaware of the concept of social sustainability.

In fact, most participants demonstrated limited familiarity with this concept. While this 21% lacked knowledge of the formal definition of social sustainability, the study aimed to capture stakeholder awareness based on their own perspectives. The intent was not to impose a predefined definition but rather to cross-reference these views with established concepts of social sustainability in the analysis. The most frequently cited category is 'Satisfy the community' (32%), followed by 'Fulfills community needs' (20%). Most interviewees stressed that development must satisfy the community's demands to be considered socially sustainable.

Furthermore, interviewees emphasised the importance of meeting community demands by highlighting 'Continuous community usage' (22%) and 'Accessibility' (13%) as significant aspects of socially sustainable development. They stressed that socially sustainable development should provide free, low-cost, and easy access to the public, reflecting the consensus that socially sustainable development should satisfy community demands and prioritise usage and accessibility.

4.1.2. Stakeholders actions for achieving social sustainability

Interviewees were asked what they thought stakeholders could do to help achieve socially sustainable urban or building development. In total, 39 responses were provided by 79% of the interviewees. However, the remaining 21%, comprised mainly of residential associations and the NGO leader group, were unaware of social sustainability as a concept.

Among the interviewees who responded, the most prominent answer category was 'Engaging with stakeholders' (47%). Within this category, the most frequently cited answers were 'Stakeholder Engagement' (15%) and 'Engaging relevant stakeholders' (10%), which together formed 25% of the total number of answers. Interviewees frequently replied that engaging with local stakeholders is the most important criterion for achieving socially sustainable buildings. The second-largest category was 'Provide good community facilities' (11%), with 'Develop community-centric design' (5%) being the most frequently cited answer within this category, followed by 'Provide adequate facilities' (3%) and 'Fulfills community needs' (3%).

4.2. Perspectives on public participation

4.2.1. Defining public participation

When asked to comment on what public participation meant and how it was defined, all interviewees provided 47 responses. The largest category, encompassing 'incorporating community input' (42%), featured the most frequently cited answers, including 'Community input' (21%) and 'Involving the public' (9%). The category that received the second highest input was 'public involvement avenues' (23%), which referred to public participation in a specific event or action, with 'public feedback' (9%) being the most cited answer in this category. The third largest category, 'Engaging the stakeholders' (21%), highlighted 'Engaging relevant stakeholders' (19%) as the most frequently cited answer. The remaining categories, including 'Education' (4%), 'Informing the public' (6%), and 'Transparency' (2%), underscored the multifaceted nature of how interviewees defined public participation. It was evident that the interviewees primarily defined public participation as an act of engaging and incorporating community input and, secondly, as a specific type of public event or action from the local authority, reflecting the diverse perspectives on the concept.

4.2.2. Stakeholder awareness of public participation opportunities

During the interviews, the interviewees were asked about their awareness of the available public participation avenues in Malaysia's urban development. Interestingly, 12.5% of the interviewees reported being unaware of the public participation avenues available in Malaysia's urban development. Notably, architects were generally unaware of the public participation process outside their work environments, indicating a lack of involvement in the public participation process.

Despite this, a total of 55 responses were provided and categorised into 13 categories. Among these, 42% of the interviewees expressed awareness of 'public exhibitions' (18%), making it the most commonly known public participation avenue. The second-largest category was 'Public complaints' (16%), which included written complaints to the authority or a public display of dissatisfaction, such as a protest or petition. Additionally, 'Public feedback' (13%), 'Public hearing' (13%), and 'Townhall meeting' (13%) were also frequently cited as public

participation avenues. Overall, these findings suggest that awareness of public participation avenues among stakeholders in public participation is relatively high despite some interviewees being unaware of the available avenues.

4.3. Views on public facilities

4.3.1. Defining public facilities

During the interviews, the interviewees were asked about the meaning of public facilities, with the aim of determining the types of buildings that should constitute a public facility where the public participation framework of the design process can be applied. In total, the interviewees provided 35 responses, which were divided into nine categories. Notably, the 'Used mainly by the public' category (40%) had the most replies, with interviewees expressing that public facilities should be defined as facilities or buildings mainly used by the general public. This was followed by 'Publicly funded' (26%) and 'Free to low cost of access' (11%). These findings suggest that the stakeholder group defined public facilities as publicly funded spaces or buildings mainly used by the general public with a low cost of access, highlighting the importance of accessibility and public use in defining public facilities.

4.3.2. Reasons for underutilisation of public facilities

The interviewees were asked why public facilities were underused in the country. Interestingly, some interviewees contested the premise that public facilities are underused, with one interviewee noting, for example, 'I don't think public facilities are underused. I think some public facilities are underused, while others are overused ...' (*PolicyMaker/Male/8*), the general sentiment among the interviewees was that an underused situation occurred in at least some public facilities. In total, the interviewees cited 46 responses.

The largest category, 'Mismatch with community' (52%), encompassed two answers: 'mismatch demand' (28%) and 'mismatch functionality' (24%). Additionally, the second-largest category cited by the interviewees was 'Poor publicity and awareness' (35%), with the most frequently cited answers in this category being 'lack of engagement' (13%), 'lack of awareness' (9%), and 'lack of publicity' (7%). Therefore, the consensus among stakeholders was that the underused situation

in public facilities was due to a general mismatch in their demand and functionality in the local community and a lack of awareness about the local public facilities in their locality, highlighting the multifaceted reasons contributing to the underuse of public facilities.

4.3.3. Benefits of public involvement in design process

When asked whether involving the public in the design process could help remedy the underused situation in public facilities, all 24 interviewees provided responses, with 22 expressing agreement and two disagreeing with the statement. Those who agreed to participate provided a total of 29 reasons, with the most frequently cited being the belief that involving the public could help gauge the demand for public facilities (29%) and determine their functionality. Additionally, the reasons included the ability to foster a sense of ownership in the community, broadening the public participation channel, collecting community input, and raising awareness about public facilities in local communities.

Interviewees also suggested key prerequisites for effective public participation, including providing a proper discussion and participation platform, early and timely engagement with stakeholders, involving relevant stakeholders with adequate knowledge of development, providing adequate education and capacity building before participation, and offering facilitators to improve communication.

Conversely, both interviewees who disagreed contended that involving the public or the local community had no impact on the usage of public facilities, attributing the underused situation to the public's general apathy towards public facilities rather than a lack of public involvement. They also noted the public's lack of knowledge to meaningfully engage and provide adequate solutions to the underuse situation. Overall, while stakeholders generally agree that public participation positively addresses the underuse of public facilities, they emphasised the need for thorough preparation before involving the public, highlighting the complexities and considerations involved in effective public participation.

4.4. Assessment of current public participation practices in Malaysia

4.4.1. Current practices of public participation

When asked about the prevalence of public participation in Malaysia, only 19% of interviewees agreed that

it was commonly practised. Notably, town planners (50%) were the most likely to agree with this notion. Upon elaboration, two interviewees who agreed cited it as a formal but ineffective process, while the remaining five interviewees noted that although the public participation process was in place, it was not perceived as widely practised due to the lack of publicity.

Conversely, the general sentiment among interviewees who disagreed was that the public participation process lacked authenticity and effectiveness to be considered widely practised. Commonly cited reasons included the lack of genuineness, minimal legislative compliance, selective application, bureaucratic reluctance, and insufficient participation channels. Cultural factors were also highlighted, such as differences between locations, lack of public awareness, engagement from authorities, and knowledge and experience among stakeholders.

Overall, a discrepancy emerged between town planners, who are frequent practitioners, and other stakeholders regarding the perception of how widely public participation was practised. Crucially, practitioners regarded the mere existence of the public participation process as evidence of its practice, while other stakeholders viewed the current practice as lacking the authenticity to be classified as public participation, underscoring the differing perspectives on the matter.

4.4.2. Evaluation of effectiveness in public participation

When asked about the effectiveness of public participation in Malaysia, only seven interviewees (29%) agreed that the current process effectively communicated public input. In contrast, 71% disagreed, citing a lack of transparency, public awareness, and unsatisfactory outcomes as common reasons for the public's perception of the process as ineffective. Notably, 83% of town planners agreed that the process effectively communicated public input, and all interviewees agreed that the process employed by the public sector was compelling.

When asked to elaborate on why the public perceived the process as ineffective, interviewees cited a lack of knowledgeable participants (19%) and practitioners' lack of experience in public participation (16%) as the most common reasons. Additionally, interviewees reported that inexperienced practitioners conducted two-way communication

ineffectively during public participation, and there was a lack of engagement with local stakeholders (13%). Other reasons included a lack of genuine decision-making power (12%), especially among the general public group (Public NGOs/Residential Association), and a lack of representation reflecting local demographics (10%).

Overall, there was a discrepancy between town planners, who are frequent practitioners, and other stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of public participation. While town planners generally agreed that the process effectively communicated public input, other stakeholders cited various issues that hindered the process's effectiveness, highlighting the need for improvement in public participation practices.

4.4.3. Cross-country comparison of public participation

Interviewees were asked about the differences in public participation between Malaysia and other countries, with 75% indicating awareness of public participation practices in other countries. Notably, 25% of respondents expressed no awareness of such differences, and none of the non-professional stakeholders knew other countries' public participation practices.

The most frequently cited answer by interviewees was that other countries had a more robust democratic framework in their systems (22%), enabling public participation to be included and practised more frequently. Additionally, interviewees contended that governments in other countries put more effort into inviting and involving local communities in their public participation programmes (17%). Demographic and cultural differences (28%) were also cited, where communities had a better understanding and experience participating in local developments. Furthermore, the public was more incentivised to participate, with better feedback and collaboration with local government authorities. One interviewee also noted Malaysia's lack of funds and resources. Only one interviewee (3%) expressed no difference between Malaysians and other countries' public participation processes.

In conclusion, interviewees highlighted key differences in four ways: demographic and cultural differences, differences in participation processes, democratic differences between countries, and differences in the government's efforts to involve the

public. These differences indicate the need for Malaysia to improve its public participation practices and learn from other countries' successful approaches.

4.4.4. Genuity of public participation efforts

When asked whether Malaysia's public participation process was genuine, the majority (58%) of interviewees agreed, while the remaining 42% disagreed. Notably, town planners and architects were more likely to agree (66%) than the general public group (75% of Public NGOs/Residential Association group), who expressed that the process was not genuine. Policymakers also agreed (63%), while public sector interviewees (71%) were more likely to express that the process was genuine than private sector interviewees (40%).

Interviewees who disagreed elaborated that the process was merely a formal process mandated by legislation rather than a genuine attempt to incorporate input. The data obtained from public participation was easy to manipulate, and input from the public was often disregarded. For example, one interviewee noted, *'The public participation process can be manipulated depending on who is doing it. For example, those people who are doing the SRI [Sustainable and Responsible Investment] projects ... will call ... the stakeholders that have a more favourable opinion on their projects ...'* (Policy Maker/Male/8).

On the other hand, interviewees who agreed noted that while the process was genuine, the results may not satisfy all parties. They also highlighted structural issues such as a lack of funds, stakeholder engagement, publicity, transparency regarding the outcome, and awareness among participants. One interviewee noted that the government has its own agenda and overrides the public participation process, leaving the impression that the process was not genuine: *'... sometimes when ... it [involved] a public building and a local authority, their intention is just to get validation about what they already want to do. So whatever you say, nothing's gonna change their perspective ...'* (Architect/Male/3). However, all interviewees agreed that the practitioner's intentions were genuine.

Overall, the genuineness of the public participation process was viewed differently by those employed in the public and private sectors. While those in the public sector viewed genuineness from the perspective of practitioners, those in the private sector viewed genuineness as the outcome of the process.

4.4.5. Suitability for integration into public facilities design process

When asked about the adequacy of the current public participation practice for use in the public facilities design process and its shortcomings, the vast majority of interviewees (66.7%) disagreed that the current practice was adequate, while 33.3% agreed. Among those who agreed, central suggestions were provided to improve the public participation process, namely, including enhancing public education, improving engagement with the public, and simplifying the process to make it more accessible. For instance, interviewee *Architect/Male/4* emphasised the importance of simplifying the process to avoid deterring public participation due to time constraints: *'We just take the majority of the words "OK", even if it's not more than 50% [who said] "Yes". Because time is of the essence. Otherwise, no work will be done, and it won't be materialised...'* Interviewee *Townplanner/Female/1* highlighted the need to streamline the process to prevent project delays: *'We cannot just do in one week, because we should, we must understand that people need time to come ... The awareness itself. Maybe the information is not reaching the community. It's extra work; we have to send a letter or some announcement to the public, wait for the public to come, and then give the comments. And then we have to design back ... It's a lengthy process that will drag the systems ...'*

Most interviewees (67.7%) concurred that the current public participation process requires improvement before it can be adapted for the public facility design process. Their responses were categorised into five broad areas: procedural, governmental, personnel, communication, and representation. Procedural improvement was the most frequently cited category (42%), with interviewees emphasising the need to address the knowledge gap among participants, establish clear objectives and guidelines, ensure the relevance and security of community inputs, and diversify participation methods to accommodate different objectives and stakeholders. Additionally, interviewees stressed the importance of simplifying the process to make it concise and understandable for all participating stakeholders.

Communication improvement was the second-largest answer category (25%). Interviewees emphasised the need to improve communication by enhancing engagement timing with stakeholders, educating participants to prepare them for the process, and

increasing stakeholder input and transparency in the engagement process. They also highlighted the lack of effective communication with the public both before and during the implementation of the current public participation process.

Personnel improvement was the third answer category (18%). Interviewees expressed that the current public participation process lacked appropriate personnel to administer the process adequately. They suggested that expert moderation and a facilitator were necessary to ensure that the process's objective was achieved. Additionally, interviewees stated that the current process did not adequately identify and engage relevant stakeholders.

Governmental improvement was the fourth answer category (10%). Interviewees expressed a lack of government support and enforcement in the current public participation process. They also noted that governmental policy and agenda interference were significant obstacles to public participation. Furthermore, interviewees expressed that the current public participation process lacked the power to influence decision-making.

Finally, the smallest answer category was representation improvement (4%). Interviewees expressed that the current public participation process lacked diverse representation among participants and did not cater to all demographics in the community, particularly weaker members of society.

4.4.6. Challenges of low participation rate in Malaysia

When asked about the reasons for Malaysia's low public participation rate, interviewees provided 67 responses, which were categorised into five areas: local community attitude, quality of participants and practitioners, shortcomings in the participation process, publicity issues, and genuineness of the participation process.

The most frequently cited category was shortcomings in the participation process (39%). Interviewees noted that the timing of public participation was a significant issue, with many commenting that organising the process during working hours resulted in low turnout. They suggested that holding such programmes on weekends would encourage greater public participation. Additionally, interviewees cited the length of the process as a barrier to meaningful engagement and the lack of incentives for the public to participate.

The second-most cited category was the quality of participants and practitioners (25%). Interviewees noted that participants lacked knowledge and awareness of the public participation process, and public participation practitioners lacked expertise and experience in the process. A lack of education about the public participation process was also cited as a reason for the low public participation rate.

The third-most cited category was local community attitudes towards public participation (16%). Interviewees expressed that the local community displayed apathy towards participating in community development. Additionally, they noted a cultural reluctance in the local community to engage in the process and highlighted a lack of trust in the public participation process, all contributing to a low participation rate.

Furthermore, the fourth and fifth most cited categories were publicity issues (10%) and genuineness of the participation process (9%), respectively. Interviewees emphasised the lack of publicity about the public participation process in the media as a significant factor contributing to the low public participation rate. Additionally, interviewee *Town Planners/Male/4* pointed out that the current publicity method mandated by legislation was outdated and did not align with the general public's preferred method of receiving information. Regarding the authenticity of the public participation process, interviewees expressed concerns about the lack of real power and genuine participation from stakeholders and the public. One interviewee specifically noted a lack of political will within the government hierarchy to enforce public participation.

4.4.7. Strategies for enhancing participation rate

When asked about potential strategies to improve the public participation rate, the interviewees provided a total of 55 responses, with the highest number of responses falling into the publicity category. Specifically, 38% of the interviewees suggested making public participation programmes more public to encourage greater involvement. Additionally, they recommended expanding the current publicity method to broaden its reach and emphasised the need for more education to raise awareness of the public participation process. Furthermore, interviewees highlighted the importance of increased transparency regarding the final outcome of the decision-making process.

Moreover, interviewees underscored the necessity for enhanced government involvement, expressing the need for greater government efforts to promote and encourage public participation. One interviewee even proposed legislative reforms to improve the current public participation process, along with the allocation of more resources to facilitate public participation and the broadening of participation channels to enable easier access for more people.

Additionally, interviewees emphasised the need to enhance the public participation procedure to increase the participation rate. They stressed the importance of improving communication between the public and practitioners, engaging with the correct stakeholders, particularly local leaders, and introducing a facilitator to enable two-way communication between experts and the public. Furthermore, interviewees highlighted the need for increased professional involvement in the process.

4.4.8. Political impediments to public participation

When asked about the impact of Malaysia's political climate on public participation, 54% of the interviewees agreed that Malaysians faced political incompatibility with participation practices, while 46% disagreed. The interviewees highlighted significant barriers, including the lack of political will from public authorities to enforce public participation and a government incentive deficit for involving the public in decision-making. Moreover, concerns were raised about government interference in the public participation process, with one interviewee noting the government's prioritisation of its agenda over public demands. Additionally, the complexity of the public participation process established by the political system was identified as a challenge, with issues such as barriers to participation, limited participation channels, and a lengthy process hindering public engagement.

In elaborating on their disagreements, interviewees noted that while the general public lacked incentives to participate, there were no political barriers preventing their involvement. They also emphasised that practitioners were independent civil servants without political affiliations. Furthermore, interviewees identified the inefficiency of the public participation process itself as a barrier to participation, attributing issues such as a lack of publicity, expertise, experience, and knowledge among participants and

practitioners, as well as insufficient decision-making power and time constraints. Ultimately, the majority of interviewees concurred that Malaysian political culture posed challenges to effective public participation.

4.4.9. Cultural barriers to public participation

When asked about the cultural compatibility of Malaysians with public participation practices, 13 interviewees (54%) agreed, while 11 (46%) disagreed. The most commonly cited reason for agreement was cultural apathy towards public participation among the public, with interviewees noting that local communities in the country lacked interest in participating in their local community development. Additionally, cultural reluctance to participate was identified as a significant barrier, with interviewees highlighting the tendency of local communities to be timid and introverted, leading to reluctance to participate.

On the other hand, the most frequently cited disagreement answer was a lack of knowledge among the general public regarding the public participation process. Interviewees expressed that the general public was unaware of the existence of public participation and the opportunity to participate. However, some interviewees also noted that while the general public may be less culturally inclined to participate, society has since improved its awareness of its rights to participate. Overall, the responses were mixed regarding society's cultural compatibility with public participation.

5. Discussion

In light of the interview findings from various stakeholders involved in the public participation process, which shed light on the current challenges and struggles, this section discusses the essential elements needed to design effective public participation processes in Malaysia. These elements will inform the methods and processes that should be integrated into the public participation design framework to align most effectively with the local context.

5.1. Elements of social sustainability

The Research revealed a notable disparity in the understanding of social sustainability between professional and non-professional stakeholders, demonstrating a clear knowledge gap. This observation

aligns with the findings of Ghahramanpouri et al. (2013), highlighting the limited understanding of social sustainability among the general population. Furthermore, the absence of a unanimous definition of social sustainability, as supported by Wanamaker (2018), highlights the complexity of this concept. Stakeholders generally perceive socially sustainable public facilities as those that effectively meet the community's demands and are easily accessible, emphasising the pivotal role of the local community in fostering social sustainability. Hence, for public participation to effectively promote social sustainability, the process must prioritise community-centric approaches over professionally dominant ones.

Despite these insights, stakeholders did not reach consensus on specific strategies to help achieve social sustainability. However, there was a consensus on the significance of engaging stakeholders and providing high-quality community facilities as important factors in enhancing the social sustainability of buildings. This highlights the importance of active stakeholder involvement and the provision of community-centric amenities in driving social sustainability within public facilities.

5.2. Assessment of current public participation practices

This study revealed stakeholders' varying levels of understanding and engagement with public participation processes. While most stakeholders viewed public participation as incorporating community input into decision-making, aligning with Arnstein's (1969) and Sanoff's (2000) conventional perspectives, a minority saw it as an engaging event involving stakeholders. This diversity underscores the importance of actively soliciting feedback from the public to ensure transparent and visible outcomes.

Moreover, stakeholders demonstrated differing levels of familiarity with public participation avenues and processes. While architects showed less awareness despite their industry involvement, stakeholders primarily recognised exhibitions as a common public participation avenue. However, stakeholders were more aware of the publicity phase of the current public participation process than the early and later phases, indicating a need for increased communication and transparency throughout the process.

These findings underscored a general disagreement among stakeholders regarding the widespread

practice of public participation in Malaysia, with concerns raised about its effectiveness and authenticity. Stakeholders cited a lack of meaningful engagement with the public and tokenism participation by authorities, resulting in little participation from the public and other relevant stakeholders. The study also highlighted a discrepancy between the town planner (frequent practitioner) and other stakeholders regarding the prevalence of public participation, with practitioners focusing on quantity and other stakeholders on quality when determining its prevalence.

Furthermore, stakeholders largely disagreed that the current public participation process effectively communicated the public's input, with a discrepancy between practitioners and the other stakeholders. Stakeholders in the public sector were more likely to express that the current process was effective, but all stakeholders agreed that the process lacked transparency regarding the outcomes, hindering its effectiveness and causing the perception that it was ineffective and self-congratulatory. These findings underscore the need for increased transparency and meaningful engagement with the public to build trust and ensure effective public participation in Malaysia's urban development.

Stakeholders' awareness of the differences between public participation processes in Malaysia and other countries varied, with non-professional stakeholders showing less awareness than their professional counterparts. This finding reaffirms Sanoff's (2011) observation that the public lacks knowledge compared to professional stakeholders. The differences observed by stakeholders included more eager participation in other countries and a more robust government structure that actively promotes and encourages public participation.

Despite the differences, stakeholders generally agreed that the public participation process in Malaysia was genuine. However, there was a clear difference in perceptions between those employed in the public and private sectors, reflecting differences in access to information and perceptions of genuineness. The lack of transparency in the process outcomes also contributed to public distrust. To build participant trust, practitioners must prioritise transparency in process outcome and ensure that all stakeholders have access to relevant information.

Furthermore, stakeholders' disagreement regarding the adequacy of the current process for the building design process highlighted the need for

procedural improvements. Addressing the knowledge gap between practitioners and participants was identified as a crucial step before participation, confirming Sanoff's (2018) assertion that capacity building is a precursor to effective public participation. Professional practitioners must be urged to determine process objectives, employ suitable participation methods, and conduct feedback sessions to obtain relevant information from participants. Additionally, it was emphasised that current personnel require training and guidelines before administering the public participation process, and local governments must be proactive in setting policies and facilitating public participation. Moreover, the new public participation process should be reflective of local demographics to ensure inclusivity and relevance.

In addition to these improvements, stakeholders identified the need for reform in the timing of the public participation process to better accommodate participants. They also emphasised the importance of improving general accessibility in language, participation channels, and transparency, while suggesting the provision of incentives to boost engagement. Furthermore, stakeholders highlighted the necessity for better general awareness about the public participation process and its significance in building design and urban development.

Besides the identified potential improvements to increase the participation rate, stakeholders emphasised the need for publicity, government support, and procedural reform, as highlighted by Zanudin et al. (2019). Despite the publicity period being mandated by Act 172, stakeholders expressed that the legislation has become inadequate in the current context due to the evolution of communication methods within the population since the law's inception. As a result, stakeholders urged the government to improve legislation or allocate more resources to facilitate broader participation. Stakeholders also stressed the necessity for procedural reform to enhance communication between stakeholders. They emphasised the involvement of vital community leaders and professional facilitators in conveying the community's voice.

Stakeholders reached a consensus that the political system does not impose or prevent the public from participating; rather, it lacks political will and guidance from government officials. This lack of will from government officials aligns with Wiryomartono's (2020) assertion of the government's

role in perpetuating general apathy in the public participation process. The public's apathy can also be attributed to their high dependency on public officials to act without consulting them, stemming from the top-down decision-making structure (Abdul Malek et al. 2019). Consequently, stakeholders recommended the implementation of better publicity and proactive stakeholder recruitment methods to raise public awareness of their right to participate in the public participation process.

Building on the challenges related to local community engagement, stakeholders generally acknowledged a lack of interest and comfort among local communities in participating in their own community development initiatives. Moreover, stakeholders highlighted that the public often lacked awareness of their participation rights, as evidenced by previous studies by Zolkafli et al. (2017) and Muhammad et al. (2015), indicating the need for increased efforts to engage the local population in the public participation process.

Given these observations, it is imperative to consider several factors when conducting public participation studies. The public participation design process should incorporate a standardised framework to ensure a shared understanding of the process's objectives and outcomes. Central to this is addressing stakeholders' primary concern of inadequate communication regarding the process outcomes. Hence, stakeholders must align on the process objectives and results, emphasising the importance of explaining the outcomes of each phase to participants. This approach resonates with Henry Sanoff's (2000) assertion that participatory project objectives should be context-specific to account for varying perceptions based on the project's environment and participants. Failure to establish clear objectives may lead to disengagement and frustration among project participants, ultimately undermining social sustainability through community disengagement.

5.3. Role of public facilities in community development

Stakeholders broadly define public facilities as buildings primarily utilised by the public. Their relatively liberal focuses not on the type of building but rather its end user, emphasising that public facilities are structures funded by and easily accessible to the public, serving a community's needs.

Furthermore, stakeholders have examined the underutilisation of public facilities in Malaysia, acknowledging that while this phenomenon exists, there is no unanimous agreement on its prevalence across all cases. Instead, stakeholders attribute this issue to a mismatch between functionality and community demand, coupled with a lack of awareness and engagement within the community. This highlights the need for increased publicity and community involvement to address the underuse of public facilities.

In light of this observation, stakeholders overwhelmingly agreed that public participation in the design process of public facilities holds the potential to enhance their utilisation and sustainability. They emphasise the importance of thorough preparation and studies to equip participants and practitioners with the necessary skills to meaningfully engage in the process. This preparation enables decision-makers to effectively gauge and meet the community's functional demand for public facilities.

6. Conclusion

To ensure the acceptability of the new public participation design process framework in the local context, it must reflect a deep understanding of local community conditions. Accordingly, this study examined stakeholders' significant concerns regarding public participation by exploring their experiences with existing processes in urban planning.

Within the context of social sustainability, stakeholders recognise public participation in the design process as a fundamental step towards creating socially sustainable public facilities and buildings. Consistent and prioritised engagement with these stakeholders, especially those within the local community, is essential. Including diverse representations from both non-professional and professional stakeholders further strengthens the process, as it leverages a broad range of perspectives and expertise.

Transparency is another critical element of public participation, supported by consistent feedback throughout each design phase. Incorporating public involvement earlier in the process, with engagement methods tailored to each stage, fosters a more inclusive approach. Additionally, feedback sessions can serve as extended fact-finding phases, allowing for a reassessment of community priorities as the project evolves. Capacity building is equally vital and should take place both before and during the engagement

process, with the support of a facilitator who holds local significance, such as a prominent community leader or elected official.

A well-designed public participation framework balances addressing community needs with adhering to a realistic project timeline, where the public's role refines the design decisions of professional building designers. To maximise satisfaction with public facilities, the process should be multi-phased, gathering community input that aligns with their needs and priorities. Further, the stakeholder recruitment committee should strive to ensure that participants reflect the area's demographic makeup based on census data. Current legislation lacks provisions for many of the additional steps stakeholders deem crucial, leading to frustration with existing participation practices. Therefore, significant amendments are needed to the Town and Country Planning Act of 1976 to mandate a more comprehensive public participation process within the law.

However, this study has certain limitations. The sample size and stakeholder diversity may restrict the generalisability of the findings, indicating a need for a larger, more varied sample to fully understand public participation in design. Additionally, these findings may be unique to Malaysia and not directly applicable to regions with differing socio-cultural and political contexts.

To address these knowledge gaps, further Research is necessary. Comparative studies across different regions could reveal how public participation in design varies by cultural, political, and economic context. Longitudinal studies could also provide insight into the evolution of public participation practices and assess their long-term effects on social sustainability. Detailed case studies of specific public facility design projects would further clarify the nuances of public participation and its impact on project outcomes. Exploring the role of technology, such as digital platforms and virtual engagement tools, could offer valuable insights into how technological innovation might enhance public participation and contribute to social sustainability.

The findings of this research underscore existing gaps in Malaysia's public participation policies, particularly in the design of public facilities. Legislation such as the Town and Country Planning Act of 1976, while requiring some degree of public involvement, falls short of facilitating continuous, meaningful engagement throughout the design phase. This

highlights an urgent need for policy revisions to promote a more inclusive, community-centred approach to public participation, especially for socially sustainable projects.

Moving forward, future policy frameworks, including updates to the National Urbanisation Policy, should adopt more flexible participation models that encourage early engagement, enhance transparency, and address challenges such as political interference and resource limitations. Local planning authorities would also benefit from clearer guidelines, mandating that community input is actively integrated into decision-making processes, shifting from tokenistic participation towards true stakeholder empowerment.

To improve the current system, amendments could include the following: 1) requiring public participation at every major phase of public facility projects, 2) establishing capacity-building programmes to prepare both the public and officials for meaningful engagement, and 3) providing clear reporting mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability. These changes would align Malaysia's public participation practices with international best practices, fostering more socially sustainable development outcomes.

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Appendix

Appendix: List of Interview Questions

A) AIM: To gauge the perception of public participation

- (1) What makes a building 'socially sustainable'?
- (2) What can stakeholders do to achieve a socially sustainable building?
- (3) According to you as an architect/a planner/a developer, what does public participation mean to you?
- (4) How aware are you of the available public participation avenue in Malaysia's urban development? Can you name some examples?
- (5) What do public facilities mean to you?
- (6) Public facilities in Malaysia are often said to be underused. Why do you think that this situation happens?
- (7) Public facilities in Malaysia have often been said to be underused compared to their overseas counterpart, making them socially unsustainable. Do you think it could be changed by involving the public in the design process? If so, why?

B) AIM: To investigate the current practice of the public participation process in Malaysia

- (1) Is public participation widely practised in Malaysia? Elaborate
- (2) How is the current public participation process usually run?
- (3) How do you view the current effectiveness of public participation in general?
- (4) In your opinion, are there significant differences in public participation between Malaysia and other countries? What are the differences?
- (5) Do you believe Malaysia's public participation process is genuine? If not, why not?
- (6) Do you believe current public participation practice is adequate for use in the public facilities design process? If not, what is the current practice lacking?
- (7) Research has often cited the public participation rate in Malaysia as low, so why do you think that is the case?
- (8) What do you think can be done to improve the participation rate of the public?
- (9) It is often said that Malaysia's political climate is a major barrier to further public participation in Malaysia. Do you agree with that statement? Why do you think that is the case?
- (10) The literature states that Malaysians are culturally incompatible with participation practices. Do you agree with that statement? And why do you say so, and how can it be overcome if the answer is yes?
- (11) What other challenges do you think are hindering public participation in Malaysia?