

UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF LOCAL INVOLVEMENT IN ENSURING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF RECREATIONAL FOREST LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Local involvement in recreational forest landscape development process is very important to be focused on by the management. It can help in avoiding injustice in decision making. An effect of local involvement is necessary to ensure the sustainability of recreational forest. By involving them in the system, they can understand the rationale behind the planning decisions that have been, are and will be implemented. However, it was believed that local involvement in recreational forest landscape development is still at the unacceptable levels and needs improvement. Therefore, the aim of this study is to understand the locals' needs in recreational forest landscape development process. The objective of the study is to explore and analyse people perception towards local involvement in recreational forest landscape development process in selected recreational sites, namely Sungai Chongkak Recreational Forest, Templer Recreational Forest and Sungai Tekala Recreational Forest, located in Selangor, Malaysia. Questionnaire survey has been conducted on a total of 533 participants. Results indicate that the present recreational forest landscape development of study sites will need to improve local involvement and improve their strategy in developing the site for sustainability in the future. The management should realize that locals' involvement is necessary in order to offer a high satisfaction and fulfil local desires as well as to get full support from them. As a result, this could lead towards local economic benefits, active citizenship, and raised awareness of the locals' and long term sustainability of ecological and aesthetic values.

Keywords: local involvement, recreational forest, landscape, sustainability

1. INTRODUCTION

forest landscape development. Their participation is necessary to offer a high satisfaction and fulfil their desires. Conflicts, negative perception, misunderstood, and protest against development always lack of knowledge regarding to the development (Badaruddin & Nikmatul Adha 2007; Yunos et. al. 2015). Thus, by involving the local in the development process, those negative perceptions can be eliminated and supports from them can be strengthening.

The involvement of local people in landscape and tourism project is compulsory because they are the societies who received the impact, either positive or negative (Badaruddin 2008). In Britain, local participation became the main agenda in any outdoor recreation development to make sure improvement can be made on forest recreation (Curry 2000). While, in United States of America, local participation is the must in any design process and development in order to fulfil their needs and aspiration (Sanoff 1999).

Today, recreational forest played an important role in tourism activity, especially in nature tourism based in Malaysia. The most attraction of this site is their landscapes. Their landscapes can range from large, continuous tracts of forest used for multiple purposes (production; cultural, recreational or environmental services; and the like) to mosaics of forests and blocks of trees within the rural landscape (Deweese et al. 2011).

This area is a dynamic complex of plant, animal and micro-organism communities and their biotic environment interacting as a functional unit, where trees are a key component of the system, interact with one another and with the non-living part of the environment – including the soil, water and minerals (Stepankova, Bihunova & Kabai 2012). The beauty and uniqueness of their landscapes has attracted people to enjoy, appreciate and exploit for

their needs. Therefore, local involvement on development process in this area is compulsory to ensure their sustainability in the future.

In ensuring the recreational forest site is being sustainable in the future, local populations need to be getting involved in their development process. For generations, parks including recreational forests have played important roles for people, and contributed to social and cultural aspects of their lives (Osman, 2005). Parks also provide a powerful setting for “social” (Collins et al., 2007) and “sustainability” learning (Tabara & Pahl-Wostl 2007). Thus, local involvement in recreational forest landscape plans and design process is necessary. This is to ensure their requirements are met and to avoid injustice in decision-making as well as to get their full support (Botes & Rensburg, 2000). Buchecker et al. (2003) argued that local participation exercises in planning and landscape design process of recreational forest landscape need to be improved to increase their understanding on landscape sustainability.

Unfortunately, in Malaysia, there are still many local participation exercises that do not take into account people’s real opinions and their needs. This is because when authority organized local participatory exercises, it only involves the authority giving information to the public, but not really getting any real feedback from them (Ahmad, 2001 as cited in Yunos, 2009).

Therefore, the aim of this study is to understand the locals’ needs in recreational forest landscape development process. The objective of the study is to explore and analyse people perception towards local involvement in recreational forest landscape development process in selected sites, namely Sungai Chongkak Recreational Forest, Templer Recreational Forest and Sungai Tekala Recreational Forest, located in Selangor, Malaysia.

2. LOCAL PEOPLE AND RECREATIONAL FOREST LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT

Recreational forest development in Peninsular Malaysia has a closer relationship with local people. The site involve with their well-being. Most of them have a positive perception towards the site because they believe the park development helps in increasing their socioeconomic level.

Local peoples are the source of tourists; tourists are drawn from particular places and social contexts which in themselves will help shape the context of the tourist’s experience in the host community (Richards & Hall 2002). For generations, recreational forests have played an important role for people, and contributed to social and cultural aspects of their lives (Osman 2005).

Local people play an important role in ensuring recreational forest landscape sustainability since they are users of the site. Some authors propose that members of the host community should be involved in tourism planning because they have an historical understanding of how the region adapts to change, they are the ones most closely affected by tourism and they will be expected to become integral part of the tourism product (Scheyvens 1999; Simmons 1994). Therefore, the involvement of local in recreational forest landscape development process is must including in the decision making and access (Selman 2008; Moore-Colyer & Scoot 2005) in order to fulfil their requirements and to get full support from them.

Local participation is an instrument to readjust the balance of power and reassert their views against those of the developers or the local authority, or to redefine professionalism, which may determine the conditions of successful participation and prevent manipulation of a community in the participation process (Tosun 2000). Participatory development approach would facilitate implementation of principles of sustainable tourism development by creating better opportunities for local people to gain larger and more balanced benefits from tourism development taking place in their localities, resulting in more positive attitudes to tourism development and conservation of local resources and by increasing the limits of local tolerance to tourism (Tosun 2000). These may ensure both visitor satisfaction and ongoing benefits for the residents of destination areas (Simmons 1994).

3. METHODOLOGY

The study is conducted using the survey form through a structured questionnaire to gather information regarding local involvement of three selected recreational forests in Selangor. The questionnaire is divided into two sections of demography and local involvement aspects. Demographic information is needed for respondent’s background data. The other section in the questionnaire attempts to elicit various aspects of local involvement, the effects, level of involvement and types of involvement. A ‘3’ point Likert scales are used to measure their answer. The scale is used in order to avoid a neutral response found in 5-point scales that can cause biasness to the middle response.

This study uses the simple random technique approach in which respondents are selected based on their willingness to participate, availability on site (Rea & Parker, 1997) and ability to respond to questions. List of respondents is approached and asked whether they agree to become respondents. The participation is strictly on a voluntary basis.

3.1 Study Sites

This study was conducted in Sungai Tekala Recreational Forest, Sungai Chongkak Recreational Forest and Templer Recreational Forest in Selangor, Malaysia (Figure1). These sites are easy to access by the public using public transport such as bus or taxi or use their own vehicles. The sites are also a popular spot for outdoor activities of Klang Valley dweller as well as it became as tourist attraction (Mohd Kher 2012).

Sungai Tekala Recreational Forest and Sungai Chongkak Recreational Forest are located in the Sungai Lalang Forest Reserved, a lowland dipterocarp forest. The total acreages of these parks are approximately 2,062 hectares and 2,865 hectares respectively. Templer Recreational Forest is located in the Templer Forest Reserved which is also a lowland dipterocarp forest. The total acreages of this park are approximately 853 hectares.

A total of 533 respondents participate in this study. The respondents' breakdown is 189 of Sungai Tekala Recreational Forest; 174 of Sungai Chongkak Recreational Forest; and 170 of the Templer Recreational Forest. The Statistical Programme Social Science (SPSS) package analyzes the data for descriptive statistics such as frequencies.



Figure 1: Location of recreational forest in Selangor (Source: Forest Department of Peninsular Malaysia 2003)

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results and discussion being into two sections which are demography and perception towards local involvement in recreational forest landscape development.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Respondents' background indicates almost equal numbers of male (53.7%) and female (46.3%) respondents (Table 1). This study divides the age of respondents into three categories with scale interval of 14 years; Young (18 - 32 years), Middle (33 - 47 years) and Old (48 - 62 years) (Pallant 2001; Ahmad Mahdzan 1983). The scale interval is derived by deducting the lower ages (18 years) from the higher age of respondents (62 years) and divide by three (3).

The results show that half of the respondents are Young (52.0%), followed by Middle ages (34.5%) and Old age (13.5%). The Malays (72.8%) is found to be the majority participants in this survey, followed by Chinese (18.0%), Indians (9.0%) and others (0.2%). Almost half of the respondents (49.5%) hold certificate / Diploma / STPM / SPM / SRP, followed by bachelor degree (41.7%), master degree (3.8%) and PhD (0.4%). The respondents are all well educated.

Table 1: Respondents Background

Respondents	Total	Percentage (%)
Gender: Male	286	53.7
Female	247	46.3
Age: 18 - 32 (Young)	277	52.0
(Year) 33 - 47 (Middle)	184	34.5
48 - 62 (Old)	72	13.5
Ethnic: Malay	388	72.8
Chinese	96	18.0
Indian	48	9.0
Others	1	0.2
*Education: Bachelor	222	41.7
Master	20	3.8
PhD	2	0.4
Others	264	49.5

Note: *Some respondents did not reply in this section

4.2 Respondents Perception Towards Local Peoples' Involvement In Recreational Forest Landscape Development

Table 2 shows the results of respondents' perception towards local involvement in the selected recreational forests. A high percentage of respondents (64.91%) perceive that the management has neglected to involve local in the recreational forest landscape development process. This had happened because either government or private agencies try to avoid the possibility problems occur, such as their project being rejected by the public (Badaruddin 2008).

78.99% respondents also claimed that the management had failed to play their role in ensuring local involvement in recreational forest landscape development. This has resulted to why the local people support on the recreational forest conservation efforts is low as majority respondents perceive (89.87%).

Results in Table 2 also revealed that the majority of the respondents claimed that the involvement of local is very important to make sure the existence of the park is sustainable. At the same time, the majority of them (88.93%) believe that abandon phenomenon can be avoided through local participation.

Therefore, local involvement in recreational forest landscape development process needs to be increased. Badaruddin (2008) stated that local involvement is necessary in each of development stages which are information gathering, planning, implementation, development, management, maintenance and project evaluation.

According to this study, results have shown that the majority of the respondents (80.68%) agreed that the local should be involved in the whole development phases. The majority of them (88.93%) also believed that the abandon syndrome of recreational forest sites can be avoided through local people involvement in the development process.

Hence, in order to improve and strengthen the recreational forest landscape development, majority of the respondents (93.63%) believes that the establishment of Recreational Forest Development Joint Committee is necessary. Through this committee, they can give an idea, more understanding and can bounce a full support as well as strengthen the development system. Furthermore, their direct involvement is needed because local knowledge is more credible compared with outsiders (Fallon & Kriwoken 2003).

Lastly, more than half of the respondents (54.03%), unsatisfied with the

current local involvement in recreational forest landscape development. This could happen because they are not being involved at the early stages of the development process (Simmons 1994). It's also due to conflicts interest between local needs and requirement with recreational/tourism activities (McKercher 1993; B00 1990).

Table 2: Local peoples' involvement of selected Recreational Forest sites

Item	Agree (%)	Not agree (%)
*Recreational forest development neglects to involved local people	64.91	34.52
*The management failed to play their roles in involving local people	78.99	21.01
*The lack of involvement of the local people led to a lack of support from them to the recreational forest conservation efforts	89.87	10.13
*Local people involvement is very important to make sure the sustainability of the forest recreational site	88.93	11.07
*Local people should be involved in every stage of the recreational forest development process	80.68	19.32
*An abandon syndrome of the recreational forest site can be avoided via local people involvement	88.93	11.07
*The establishment of Recreational Forest Development Joint Committee is necessary	93.63	06.37
*Please state your satisfaction regarding local people involvement in recreational forest development	54.03	45.97

Note: *Some respondents did not reply in this section

4.3 The Needs of Local Involvement in Recreational Forest Landscape Development

In answering the question why local people need to be getting involved in the recreational forest landscape development, analyses in Table 3 shown that almost half of the respondents (45.40%) agreed their involvement is for giving information to the management. While 15.76% of them believed they need for project evaluation.

Whatever perception being made, the simple aim of local involvement is to provide enough information to the local people those who wanted

to know (Keogh 1990). Local involvement is also important in order to make sure that the process of decision making are gearing towards better planning, better approaches, and balance as well as increasing the project effectiveness' (Badaruddin 1995). Furthermore, it enables them to protect community interests, and increase transparency and accountability, and wipe out embezzlements and abuse of offices, which are rampant acts amongst decision-makers (Muganda et. el., 2013).

Therefore, local involvement in recreational forest landscape development will need to be focused by the related parties in the future. It is more proper if the establishment of Recreational Forest Development Joint Committee being realized as mentioned in section 4.2. Some authors propose that members of the host community should be involved in tourism planning because they have an historical understanding of how the region adapts to change, they are the ones most closely affected by tourism and they will be expected to become integral part of the tourism product (Scheyvens 1999; Simmons 1994).

Table 3: The need of local peoples' involvement in recreational forest development

Item	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
*Decision making	29	5.44
*Project approval	47	8.82
*Project evaluation	79	14.82
*Information evaluation	51	9.57
*Giving information	242	45.40
*Combination of the above	84	15.76

*Note: *Some respondents did not reply in this section*

On the other aspect, local involvement in recreational forest landscape development can help to increase their socioeconomic status via business activities (selling agriculture products, food and beverage), involve in maintenance works, become as tourist agent and works as a staff of the park. A result in Table 4 has shown that almost half of the respondents agreed that business activity is the most opportunity that locals' can grasp and benefited from recreational forest development.

Table 4: Opportunity for local peoples' to increase their socioeconomic status from recreational forest development

Item	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
*Business activity	235	44.09
*Site maintenance	78	14.63
*Tourist agent	13	2.44
*As a staff worker	21	3.94
*Combination of the above	183	34.33

*Note: *Some respondents did not reply in this section*

5. CONCLUSION

The results of this study revealed that local involvement in recreational forest landscape development is very important. The current situation where locals' involvement is lower and not as a whole, has given an impact to the recreational forest landscape sustainability in the future. Related parties such as forestry department should realize that many countries in the world had put a step to involve the locals' in the development process. This is because the local involvement can help in producing an effective policy as well as it is a good development process in achieving the sustainable landscape development.

Execution of local involvement in recreational forest landscape development in Malaysia is urgent due to recreational forest had received a high demand from the public. They should not just involve as hawkers only, but, they should be in the management system. This could avoid the problems of injustice in decision making. At the same time, environmental responsibility and sustainable principles should also be implemented wisely.

The management and related parties (e.g. forest department) should understand that local people often view that their involvement in the recreational forest landscape development process could guarantee their rights and interests that make them sincerely volunteer them self and active in giving support to the park development. This could lead towards local economic benefits, active citizenship, and raised awareness of the locals' and long term sustainability of ecological and aesthetic values.

Here, can be understood and conclude that, local involvement in recreational forest landscape development is necessary in order:

- to enable related parties (e.g. forest department) to prepare a policy that meets stakeholders' needs and addresses their concerns.
- to ensure their needs are incorporated in the development process.
- to participate in the decision-making and the implementation of public projects or other government activities.
- to have a voice in development issues that enable them to protect community interests.
- to improve and increase their socioeconomic level as well as to maintain their well-being.
- to fulfil and achieved the sustainability concept.

Cooperation from all parties is needed in ensuring sustainable landscape development of recreational forest in Malaysia towards forest sustainability. When all parties being involved (e.g. local community, politician, and

management) can increase transparency, responsibility and accountability of recreational forest development in the future.

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