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Access to Parks and Recreational Opportunities in Urban Low-Income Neighbourhood

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Abstract

Dissatisfaction with the living condition and many of the associated issues can be traced to the inability of the city to meet the basic need of its inhabitants. One of the fundamental components of the people's well-being is the feasibility of recreational opportunities. This study attempts to identify the involvement of the low-income community in recreational activities. Four low-income public housings in Kuala Lumpur were selected as the site studies. Findings show that community participation is an essential ingredient in creating a sustainable neighbourhood. The insight gained from this study would be useful in seeking to improve the quality of the recreational aspects of the low-income communities in Malaysia.

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1. Introduction

Low level of physical and recreational activities are more prevalent among lower income, less educated, and unemployed populations compared to higher income individuals. Many suggested that due to the lack of

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opportunities for near-home and at no-cost outdoor activities are among the factors that contributes to the inactive living (Oreskovic ,Kuhlthau, Romm, & Perrin, 2009; Lovasi et al., 2013 ;Ward Thompson, Roe, & Aspinall, 2013). Throughout the past ten years, concerns on the issue of living quality among low-income people have been given much attention. Growing number of Malaysian studies on assessing the quality of life among low-income population suggested that neighbourhood environment such as access to public facilities, amenities and recreational facilities are found to be among the principal indices of living satisfaction (Mohit, Ibrahim, & Rashid, 2010;Aziz & Ahmad, 2012; A. E.Hashim, Samikon, Nasir, & Ismail, 2012; Karim, 2012; Teck-Hong, 2012; Zainal, Kaur, Ahmad, & Khalili, 2012). Although these studies suggested that recreational facilities are important in the living satisfaction, very limited local reference has investigated the recreational accessibility and opportunities that are available for the low-income residents. Hence, this study differs as it looks specifically into the availability of green space and recreational provision in deprived communities in key urban areas of Kuala Lumpur. This study also explored the perceptions of quality and its significant impact on access to recreation from both professionals and local communities.

2. Literature review

2.1. Parks, recreation and socio-economic status

Parks, recreation and socio-economic status has a longstanding relationship. In the 18th century, parks were exclusively for people with high socio-economic status. Private and forbidden garden were among the earliest form of parks and green spaces that these were depicted as the symbols of power and luxury. The roles and perceived definition has simultaneously evolved with the dynamic of people and time. It is no longer perceived as merely recreational ground, but has extended its capability in contributing towards sustainable city and people's well-being (Al-hagla, 2008; Chiesura, 2004; Thompson, 2002) .

Equality in access to better quality of life and living environment regardless socioeconomic status has been discussed seriously around the world (Abercrombie et al., 2008; Adler, Boyce, & Chesney, 1994; Castonguay & Jutras, 2009; Crawford et al., 2008). Disadvantage in accessibility to park facilities and poor park conditions in low-economic population are proven to influence low level of park use and recreational activities and thus, reflected in the poor health status commonly associated with poor people.

In fact, growing number of research has been looking into the differences and how it affect the quality of life of people in different economic status (Abercrombie et al., 2008; Dahmann, Wolch, Joassart-Marcelli, Reynolds, & Jerrett, 2010; Floyd, Taylor, & Whitt-Glover, 2009; Thompson, Aspinall, & Roe, 2014; Veitch, Salmon, Ball, Crawford, & Timperio, 2013). These studies highlighted that people with economic disadvantages have less opportunities to recreational access due to lack of parks and open spaces in their neighbourhood. The provision of park facilities and amenities were noticeably varies and influenced by the socioeconomic factor especially in terms of quality (Godbey, Caldwell, Floyd, & Payne, 2005).

2.2. Access to parks and recreational opportunities in low-income housing

Through historical evolution, the function and benefits of parks has changed. It has become a decisive force in the development of recreational opportunities in many Asian countries like Malaysia and Singapore (Yuen, 1995). Significant changes can be seen in present as the amount of open spaces allocated in every residential development has increased the opportunities for recreation within the proximity of the neighbourhood. Accordingly, Malaysia has implemented the open space and recreational policy in every residential regardless of socio-economic status. Recreational areas in a neighbourhood that meant for recreation, sports and social activities for population catchment between 3,000-12,000 residents is classified as a neighbourhood park (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning , 2011). Hence, it is important to note that, based on the population size in the study areas, the use of "neighbourhood park" in this study is to represent the green open spaces provided in the low-income public housing that are meant for recreation.

Low-income neighbourhood in urban areas is normally found as a walk-up flats with high density of residents built on constraint land. Unlike neighbourhood with individual private yard, open space in low-income

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