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Underlying Concerns of Socio-cultural Aspects in Green Building Rating Systems towards Improving Quality of Life

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Abstract

This paper presents the underlying concerns uncovered from the literature reviews of the noticeable integration of social and cultural aspects as part of the assessment indices for the Green Building Rating Tools towards holistic implementation as the social-cultural values. In addition, the findings also resulted an additional fourth experiential bottom line to the concept of sustainability being proposed, shifting the obsession from increasing the 'standards of living' towards focusing on 'quality of life'. The exploratory research design adopts case study as the strategy where the study focuses on the socio-cultural aspects of the matrilineal custom Malay community in Malaysia.

Keywords: Quality of life; socio-cultural values; home environment; matrilineal Malay

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1. Introduction

The quality of life and human well-being are the primary concerns of the Green Building Assessment or Rating Tools in their aim to achieve Sustainable Development (SD). Recent researches on development in the Green Building Rating Tools showed growing trends of the 'shift' in emphasis of the assessment systems frameworks' criteria from 'green' to 'sustainability' (Poston, Emmanuel, & Thomson, 2010; Ebert, EBig, & Hauser, 2011; Masri, Yunus, & Ahmad, 2015a). The integration of social and cultural aspects forms part of the assessment indices for the rating tools towards more holistic implementation. Moving beyond the technicality of 'green' frameworks in GBRT, the second generation rating systems emerged, placing emphasis on improving the quality of life rather than standards of living. Noticeably, there were underlying concerns regarding the construction of criteria within the system structure. Concurrent with this development, numerous studies that evaluated rating tools by comparing them to their philosophical basis of sustainability supported such move. Furthermore, recently developed philosophies in sustainable design indicated similar paradigm shift.

This paper aspires to highlight these literature findings, the underlying concerns of the paradigm shift. However, the purpose of this paper is not to add to the pursuit of assessment effectiveness but for improving the robustness of this research through the reviewer's feedback and provide a platform for further debate. The findings also assist in developing the research activities' protocol guiding the research.

1.1. Research background

The research from which this paper is written, aimed at fulfilling the gaps identified towards achieving sustainability holistically through incorporating the cultural aspect as an innovative tool in rating the home environment in Malaysia. This exploratory study focuses on the socio-cultural aspects of the unique and complex matrilineal custom Malay communities in Rembau, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Matrilineal custom is one of the ancient characteristics of the Malay culture that prevailed through the sovereignty of Srivijaya (*Seri Wijaya*), Pagarruyung (Minangkabau) and Melaka Kingdoms. The Malay communities of Negeri Sembilan reflected their socio-cultural uniqueness in their traditional built form (Masri, 2012).

A person's perceptions of what entails human quality of life or well-being are shaped by the communities' customs and traditions that determined their norms and moral etiquette, as well as their spiritual faiths or religion (Masri et al., 2015a). Undeniably, one community's socio-cultural values in a home environment setting would differ from another (Omar et al., 2012) and very contextual (Poston et al., 2010; Masri et al., 2015a; Abdul Majid, Shuichi, & Takagi, 2013). Their life and worldview are nurtured within their home environment, affected by physical and mental or physiological aspect (Omar, et al., 2012), tangible and intangible aspect existing congruently, and inseparable. "Home" instead of "house" signifies place attachment, meaning and an association between people and place (Ujang, 2010); a psychological concept (Omar et al., 2010).

1.2. Historical settings: contextual

Further readings about the roots and the historical contextual background would be supportive in comprehending the discussion presented in this paper. Also, refer to Masri et al. (2015a; 2015b), Masri (2012) and Masri (2013).

In brief, Malaysia is a Malay country, stemmed from the dynamic maritime civilization of the ancient Malay kingdoms within the Nusantara Civilization of the Malay Archipelago, and now a Malay country with multicultural population (Ishak, 2009 cited in Masri et al., 2015a; Masri, 2013). The Malay communities (*rumpun Melayu*) are the indigenous communities (*masyarakat pribumi*) of Malaysia. The symbiotic dynamism of Nusantara archipelagic culture that differentiates the Nusantara civilization from other ancient civilization may not be a concept easily grasp by other cultures. An understood concept among the people of Nusantara existed through the indigenous democracy that is founded on the basis of community interest, the Nusantara way (Ishak, 2013 cited in Masri et al., 2015a). Their traditional way has always been community-based, not individual. Even representation too is a community-based. The Malays in Malaysia are communities rooted from this civilization, observed their environment, including built environment as not only an integral part of natural, cultural, social and economic systems but also the universe.