PPE in Designing Public Parks

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Public participation exercise (PPE) is defined as citizen participation and implies the involvement of citizens in a wide range of policymaking activities. These include the determination of levels of service, budget priorities, and the acceptability of physical construction projects in order to orient government programmes toward community needs, build public support, and encourage a sense of cohesiveness within neighbourhoods.

public parks | social sustainability | public participation | sustainable development

1. Introduction

Malaysia is a federal constitutional monarchy based on democratic parliamentary governance, which encourages citizens to participate and get involved in their public policies to serve the people and meet their needs [1][2]. This type of public policy displays a bottom-up development framework, whereby the involvement of the public and engagement level of the citizens is central and wide-ranging. Manaf [3] stated that increased public participation in government policies and decisions contributes positively to the enhancement of democracy. Hence, in order to emphasise democratic governance in Malaysia, the public is encouraged to have a role in the formulation and implementation of government civil policies.

In many instances, direct public participation in various governmental processes is intrinsically regarded as a means of democratic freedom of expression and procedural justice [4]. Public participation is strongly associated with democratic governance and is seen as a game changer in terms of decision making, shifting from top-down to bottom-up, with more participatory processes involving diversified factors [5][6][7][8][9]. An ideal democratic governance practise is that the public has a right to influence the decisions that affect them or the things they value [10]. By providing opportunities for citizens to participate in decision-making processes, public participation has proven to be a good exercise in strengthening democratic governance and expanding its horizons, as well as in shifting the present top-down framework for policy development to more participatory processes.

Therefore, researchers aims to develop a set of variables and indicators in proposing a public participation framework in designing public parks in Malaysia. In relation to that, there are two main research gaps identified in the Malaysia context, which consist of the following: (1) issues concerning the underutilisation of public parks and (2) weaknesses of top-down civil policies.

2. Public Participation Exercise—PPE

Human participatory development, which emphasises sustainably managing and restoring ecosystems, will have a simultaneous effect on promoting wellbeing whilst reducing negative environmental impacts [11]. The development of human participation in this context is related to public opinion and community decision making, as transparent communication may leverage support for certain policies, based on individual or social rationality, as long as people perceive the policy as appropriate to tackling the problem [11]. While the significant role of the community in promoting the sustainability agenda is readily apparent [12], the term social sustainability is not well defined, due in part to the difficulties in quantitatively measuring factors of social sustainability as compared to economic or environmental sustainability [13].

Sustainable development at the community level is defined as a dynamic process in which communities can anticipate and accommodate the needs of present and future generations by reproducing and balancing the local social, economic, and ecological systems to address global concerns [14]. In general, four main factors influenced social sustainable development, including social equity [15][16], sustainable community [17][18], community resilience [19], and community engagement [14][16][17]; thus, the significance of PPE in responding to social sustainable development is highlighted by community engagement factors.

Figure 1 depicts the connection between the governance policy, sustainable development pillars, and the social sustainable factors. PPE is supported at the local governance policy level by the three-governance policy, which comprises democratic

governance, SDG, and LA21. The three pillars of sustainable development demonstrate that PPE has a significant effect on social sustainability factors, leading to sustainable development. The concept of community engagement is significant to PPE and emphasises the social sustainability components even more. As a result, PPE is essential to the three criteria mentioned, and this demonstrates the relevance and significance of PPE in Malaysian civil policy implementation.

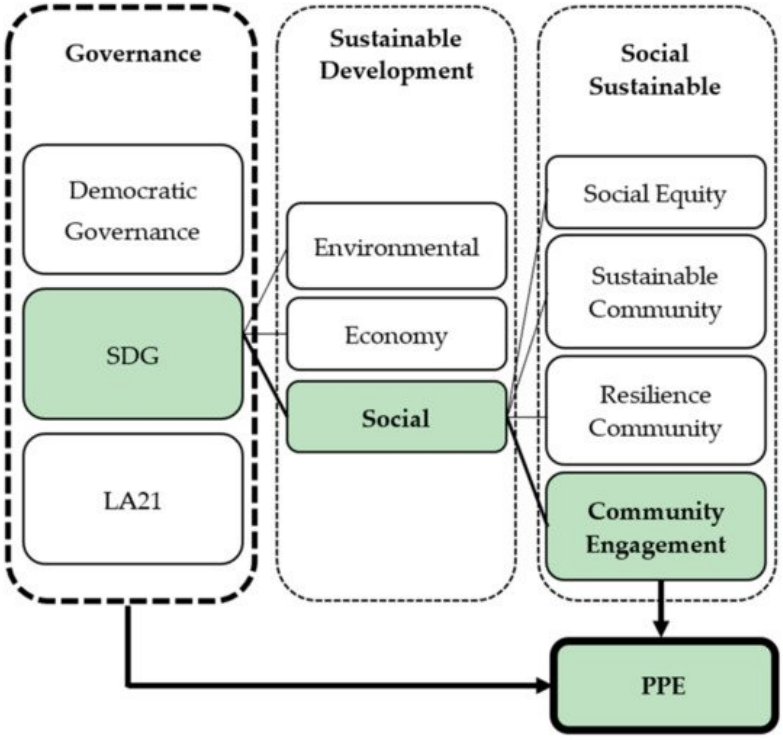

Figure 1. The significance of PPE in a Sustainable Development Framework.

There are six concepts in implementing PPE which are labelled as functionalist, neo-liberal, deliberative, anthropological, emancipatory, and post-modern [20]. The concept is explained by the extent of the public contribution expected under the PPE. In general, each PPE is unique, whereby the location, type of public, type of policy, and the objective of PPE are main factors in identifying the characteristics of the framework to be implemented [5][21]. According to Jibladze et al. [21], there are five rising degrees of PPE on the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum of public involvement. Inform is at the bottom, followed by consult, involve, collaborate, and empower. This spectrum illustrates the substantial degree of public decision-making capacity in PPE implemented by local governments.

The notion of PPE goes beyond just achieving consensus or obtaining mutual understanding in a decision-making context; rather, the PPE itself has considerable benefits to the public in terms of promoting interaction and engagement between the local authority and the citizenry [20]. Furthermore, the PPE is perceived as a pragmatic approach to cope with the complexity of modern societies, given that the public is more informed, educated, and interconnected. Thus, the public is better at accommodating new ideas, different perspectives, and innovative solutions to address issues attended by the local authority [5]. PPE is essential to generate public interest in participating in the local government process, as well as to increase public willingness to play an active role in development planning [20].

PPE has been proven to have a positive effect on public mental wellbeing [22][23][24] and in terms of good design practise in meeting the needs of the end user [25]. Payne et al. [25] highlighted that the implementation of PPE involving the end user should be at the beginning of the design process rather than during the post-occupancy stage, as it is important to ensure that the design meets the needs of the end user. The design brief, which indicates specific design factors during the PPE, is crucial in setting the scope and boundaries of the discussion [25].

It has been suggested that landscape architects integrate with the community in order to include social sustainability factors into the design scheme, as well as in establishing a design and development framework that involves the public [26]. Recent studies on public participation in landscape design have shown that it is superficial and insufficient, thus leading to difficulties in developing a design scheme for public spaces that meets the needs of the people [9].

Based on the current state of sustainable development, the development of an integrated design framework between public and civil policies for public parks is crucial. The role of the public is vital for the development of a design scheme that meets the needs of the public in public spaces. The PPE is an exercise that allows the public to directly contribute towards the decision-making process. Consequently, the PPE in local development projects will increase public awareness and knowledge of sustainable development, as well as motivate the public to care for the development's long-term upkeep [6][27].

PPE, which is also known as the integrated design process, is an iterative process that is inclusive from the very beginning, front-loaded (with time and commitment being invested from the start), and allows for full optimisation with decisions being influenced by the broader team. It also involves whole-systems thinking, requires life-cycle costing, seeks synergies, and continues throughout post-occupancy. In contrast, the conventional design process is a linear approach that involves team members only when it is essential, requires less time, commitments, and collaboration in the early stages, and involves decisions made by fewer people. Moreover, the systems are often designed in isolation and limited to constrained optimisation processes, have a reduced opportunity for synergies, emphasise up-front costs, and typically finish when the construction is completed [28].

PPE is commonly administered by the local authority [5][21] and in Malaysia, local authorities are mainly classified as city councils, municipal councils and district councils. Each of these local authorities has developed their own development framework as referred to the primary guidelines established by the federal government. The present PPE in Malaysia was established by the Department of Town and Urban Planning (JPBD), known as 'Publicity' (SERANTA) for the local development plan in Malaysia, which involves a public exhibition process where local citizens have the opportunity to express their personal opinions to the local authorities during the SERANTA process [29]. According to Ali and Arifin [29], the level of PPE in Malaysia is considered poor and viewed as top-down in the general system instead, whereas it should represent a bottom-up development framework system; thus, PPE in Malaysia at the moment reflects a non-holistic disciplinary approach and is not centralised [29]. Additionally, there is no trace and enforcement of PPE nor SERANTA in landscape departments within local authorities which are responsible for the development of public space projects, including public parks in Malaysia.

Therefore, a further investigation is needed to identify the variables and indicators for PPE by using the Public Consultation Index (PCI) as a main reference. PCI is one of the most referred to in the field of PPE globally [21]. There are six main criteria described in PCI [21] for developing a PPE, which include accessibility, openness, effectiveness of the public consultation process, accountability, diversity of participants, and public engagement/interest.

Consequently, the discussion on PPE and its relevance has led to the study of public parks in Malaysia. This is due to critical issues confronting the Malaysian public parks, which without a doubt have an impact on society, as the function of public parks in society is more than just a public infrastructure facility, but rather has a substantial impact on the development of sustainable communities. Public parks have proven to be beneficial to the general public's mental wellbeing and physical health [30]. Therefore, PPE is an important approach to be implemented in designing public parks in Malaysia.

3. Public Parks Design in Criteria Malaysia—PPDCM

Adiati [31] stated that parks and green spaces are important components of recreation and relaxation. On the other hand, Ahmad [32] noted that public parks are essentially associated with open spaces and recreation activities. Public parks usually consist of three main components: (1) the parks and their facilities; (2) the landscape; and (3) the architecture of the parks. Sakip [33] emphasised that public parks are an integral aspect of an urban setting. The green spaces within the cities play an important role and provide several health-promoting benefits. In this regard, the public parks' components, which also include green spaces, potentially have a similar impact on the public [34].

Sakip [33] noted that the public parks categories in Malaysia are based on the Malaysian Town and Country Planning Department (TCPD) Planning Framework for Open Space and Recreation include the following: (1) national parks, (2) regional parks, (3) city parks, (4) local parks, (5) neighbourhood parks, (6) children's playgrounds, and (7) playgrounds. Ridings and Chitrakar [35] stated that various frameworks designed for public spaces in traditional cities were no longer considered appropriate. One of the major factors is the lack of direct public participation in the establishment of the framework.

Public parks in Malaysia have been developed in urban areas mainly for recreation and relaxation purposes [36], and they have provided significant benefits to the public's mental wellbeing, and facilities for physical activities [31][37]. Furthermore,

Sakip [33] and Ngesan [38] stated that public parks not only offer health benefits to the physical body but also the inter-relationship between the community, and they increase the value of properties. Ridings and Chitrakar [39] stated that a successful public space requires the following components to be embedded: (1) people-friendly urban design factors, (2) human scale, (3) sightliness, (4) activated edges, (5) shelter, (6) seating, (7) engagement, (8) legibility, and (9) permeability. Fu and Ma [40] discussed the significance of PPE and the integration between the community and the local governing system in designing public spaces. Tomlinson [41] highlighted that a successful public space requires the following: (1) places that trigger memories and (2) the cultural and historical meanings of places for individuals and the community.

Ridings and Chitrakar [39] elaborated that people-friendly frameworks were established through various studies by Lynch in 1960, Alexander in 1964, Alexander and Poyner in 1970, Gehl in 1971, Whyte in 1980, Jarvis in 1980, Carr in 1992, Srecnberg in 2000, Tibbalds in 2000, Carmona in 2003, and Crankshaw in 2008. These studies focused on approaches to encourage people to linger in public spaces which were designed for gathering and performing social activities [39]. However, Jan Gehl and Lynch noted that these frameworks do not provide a comprehensive set of rules for the design of public spaces [39].

Fu and Ma [40] argued that the efficient mobilisation of citizens and local governing institutions is required for a sustained interacting mechanism between urban space, social capital, and natural capital. A successful urban space results from a well-functioning community that positively engages with both local authorities and the public. Hence, PPE in decision-making for urban spaces will enhance the quality of urban spaces. Public parks play a crucial role in developing and maintaining the social identities of both individuals and groups [34]. Since public parks are used by various groups of people with diverse backgrounds, the landscape architect is responsible for designing public parks that respond to the needs of the end users. Furthermore, the design of a public park must respond to the local climate and surroundings of the site, historical value, cultural and social influences, as well as security and public safety factors [39].

Brown [42] mentioned that public parks, and in particular community parks, are crucial elements in urban development due to their social and ecological benefits. Hence, the role of the public is crucial and has equal importance with other stakeholders such as the local authorities and development consultants in terms of working towards achieving a public responsive design scheme for the development of public parks in Malaysia. The architectural and design elements of public parks carry social and cultural values for an individual, thus leading to social inclusivity and a sense of belonging to the public parks [12][43].

The discussion of public parks and the issues pertaining to Malaysian public parks demonstrate the significance of the implementation of PPE in designing public parks in Malaysia. An integrated design framework that incorporates PPE in the design of public parks promotes the sustainable development of the long-term growth of public parks in Malaysia. As a result, the PPE in designing public parks has the potential to address the issue of underutilisation of public parks by obtaining direct feedback from the public through the PPE. The PPDCM indicators discovered in this research are tabulated in Lazarsfeld's scheme for further analysis.

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