

EXAMINING GOVERNANCE FOR WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Waterfront development is already a well-established phenomenon internationally. In Malaysia, the importance of rivers as the focal point of the city was established from early times of civilisation and remains forever. After gaining independence in 1957, Malaysian economy has been transformed from water industries to non water industries, and subsequently changed the function of the waterfront areas. The current pattern of waterfront development in Malaysia now focus more on mixed-use development and recreational. Although some riverfront development projects continue to remain profitable and also maintain a successful public access component, many have not. To date, numbers of waterfront development projects were developed in Malaysia and forecasted to be increased in the future. Unfortunately, in many cases, the implementation of these waterfront projects is driven more by investment needs rather than by community and environmental needs, and subsequently having a negative impact environmentally and socially. Therefore, this paper aims to examine whether Malaysia practises “good governance” or “poor governance” in waterfront development and subsequently to identify the barriers behind that. The findings of this research were based on interviews conducted within three case study areas: Kuching’s Riverfront, Malacca’s Waterfront, and Glennmarie Cove Riverfront. The results showed that the low participation and collaboration among the stakeholders involved in waterfront development process as well as other factors shows inefficiency for waterfront governance and finally results unsustainable waterfront development. Therefore, to achieve a sustainable waterfront development, sustainable governance is recommended and better enforcement of the law is needed.

Keywords: Governance; Sustainable Waterfront; Waterfront; Waterfront Governance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Water plays an essential role in people's lives and has long been recognized as one of humanity's most important natural resources. The strong relationship between the waterfront and human society was established very early, and has been discussed extensively in the literature (see for example: Herzog, Herbert, Kaplan, & Crooks, 2000; Hoyle & Pinder, 1992; Wrenn, 1983). Indeed, the allure of water is powerful and universal.

Historically, after waterfronts had been abandoned for a long time for different reasons, the waterfront redevelopment phenomenon began in the early 1960s. The phenomenon grew in the 1970s, accelerated in the 1980s (Breen & Rigby, 1994) and continues to the present day.

In Malaysia, after gaining independence in 1957, Malaysia struggled to achieve urbanisation and focused more on infrastructure developments (Menon, 2009). The rapid development and urbanisation over decades caused the Malaysian government to start including many waterfront areas in future development with the focus on more recreational use, while private property developers concentrated more on mixed-use development. However, in some cases, the implementation of these waterfront projects is driven more by investment needs rather than by community and environmental needs. In addition, in Malaysia, waterfront development and associated environmental and social issues have not gained the same level of attention. Therefore, this paper aims to examine whether Malaysia practises "good governance" or "poor governance" in waterfront development and subsequently to identify the barriers behind that.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *Waterfront and Waterfront Development*

In general, the waterfront refers to land fronting on to water (Dong, 2004), and the water itself being any type of water body such as a lake, the ocean, a river or a stream of all sizes (Breen & Rigby, 1994, p. 10). Moreover, the waterfront is a zone of interaction between urban development and the water and a waterfront area is considered to be a unique and irreplaceable resource where it interfaces between land, water, air, sun and productive plants (Wrenn, 1983). A more detailed definition by Guo (1998, as cited in Dong, 2004, p. 7) describes a waterfront as the point of interface where land and water meet, within 200 to 300 metres from the water line and 1-2 kilometres of the land site and within 20 minutes walking distance.

In the development context, waterfront developments have various interpretations depending on the characteristics of the sites and the cities (Dong, 2004). And, Butuner (2006) sees waterfronts as land to be reclaimed from water in order to create an extension of existing city centres.

Breen and Rigby (1994, 1996) considered that waterfront development may not necessarily need to directly front water but may need only to look as if it is attached to the water. They believed that a property with a commanding view of water can be considered as a waterfront property.

2.2. Characteristics of waterfront zone

The waterfront zone is an area endowed with special characteristics. Table 1 below described the special features and functions of waterfront areas.

Table 1: Special characteristics of a waterfront zone

Characteristic	Description
Ecological	The waterfront zone is a dynamic area with frequently changing biological, chemical and geological attributes. The waterfront zone includes highly productive and biologically diverse ecosystems that offer crucial nursery habitats for many marine species.
Economic	The waterfront contributes significantly to human welfare, both directly and indirectly and, therefore represents a significant portion of the total economic value of the planet.
Social	The waterfront zone is socially important for global transportation, open access and common property and is a unifying element in the cultures of each country.

Source: Costanza, 1999.

2.3. Why Waterfront development?

According to Gaffen (2004), the growing focus on redeveloping urban waterfronts can be attributed to several factors, that include:

(1) Awareness of the natural environment and smart growth

Increased awareness of the natural environment along the water areas and preservation of waterfront resources gave a new direction to new aspects of waterfront redevelopment. The increased awareness of the natural environment has significantly helped to improve the quality of the natural environment as well as improve water quality and subsequently, encouraged many uses at waterfronts such as recreational activities and water based entertainment. In addition, local governments are starting to re-examine the importance of smart growth, particularly the minimisation of urban sprawl, a proven culprit in many pollution problems.

(2) Preservation and adaptive reuse

Many cities throughout the world have been developed at the waterfront. With the preservation and adaptive reuse (regeneration) of abandoned historic buildings, vacant waterfronts space and adjacent areas along the waterfront has been an increase a property values and an improvement in the waterfront environment and neighbourhoods. Also, the preservation and regeneration of abandoned buildings and vacant waterfront spaces has enhanced the waterfront community identity and encouraged community pride.

(3) Federal assistance

The redevelopment of waterfronts requires large amounts of funds. The development also requires a major change in the pattern of use and the image of the waterfront. A stronger focus by government institutions on urban renewal has made possible much waterfront development and redevelopment. Federal governments can assist waterfront development and redevelopment through the management and provision of sufficient funds.

(4) Tourism industry

Waterfront areas have special features that are able to attract local residents and also tourists around the world. The growing popularity of waterfronts contributed income to the local government. Increased numbers of visitors and increased demand on the facilities and accommodation is a main contributor to waterfront development and redevelopment. Therefore, maintaining the number of visitors and the beauty of waterfront environments is important for enhancing the tourist industry.

(5) Recreation activities

One of the special characteristics of waterfront areas is that they offer opportunities for outdoor recreation. The growing popularity of water based entertainment and increased demand for recreation areas from the public has triggered governments to develop and redevelop waterfront areas for public use.

2.4. Sustainable Governance of Waterfront Development

Governance is about local change and reform, and strategies needed to be developed as part of solving certain issues. In addition, governance is important in determining success or failure in management. In response to the increasing pressure on the waterfront, in 1997, six principles for the sustainable governance of waterfronts were developed that incorporated various disciplines and stakeholder groups (Costanza, et al., 1998; Costanza, Cumberland, Daly, Goodland, & Norgaard, 1997) and were known as the Lisbon principles.¹ However, these core six principles are not limited to waterfront resources (including all environmental resources). Therefore, taking the Lisbon principles as a guide, Duxbury and Dickinson (2007) recommended principles for the sustainable governance of the waterfront. Table 2 below presents the principles for sustainable governance for waterfront.

¹ The Lisbon principles were developed during the workshop held in Lisbon, Portugal, on 7-9th July 1997, sponsored by the Independent World Commission on the Oceans (IWCO) in conjunction with Luso – An American Development Foundation.

Table 2: Principles for the Sustainable Governance of the Waterfront

P1: Sustainability	The use of natural capital within the water boundary should sustainable and achieved in an efficient and socially equitable manner.
P2: Adaptive Management	Decision makers should have the ability to integrate ecological, social and economic information and to have the flexibility to cope with changes in the environment.
P3: Participation	Stakeholders participation is vital in the decision making process regarding environmental resources.
P4: Integration	Decision making should integrate policy with input from the scientific community.

Source: Duxbury & Dickinson, 2007.

Table 3: Characteristics of case studies areas

Case study area feature	Kuching Riverfront	Malacca Waterfront	Glenmarie Riverfront Cove
Name of water body	Sarawak River	Malacca River	Langat River
Type of project	Recreational	Recreational	Residential
Project's Owner	State of Sarawak	State of Malacca	DRB-HICOM
Amenities	Restaurants, river access, Shops, waterfront settlement	River access, shops, waterfront settlement.	Restaurants, housing, river access.
Views	River views and city	River views and city	Limited river views
Proximity to river	50 m	50 m	100 m
Proximity to CBD	1km	1km	35km

3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative research strategy was adopted as a strategy for the data collection. The one-to-one in depth interviews were carried out within selected three case studies namely Kuching's Riverfront, Malacca's Waterfront and Glenmarie Cove Riverfront, and finally 17 respondents which were involved directly and indirectly in the waterfront development projects were interviewed. In addition, several related documents have been also reviewed particularly to support interviews' output. Using a multiple-case study as it is considered more compelling and regarded as being more robust (Yin, 1994, 2003). And application of multiple sources of evidence as compared limited to one specific data source by other strategy (May, 2001, p. 173; Yin, 1984, p. 90) is particularly useful to generate of rich information of complex issues. Table 3 summarises of case study areas selected in this study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. *Response Rate*

Interviews were sufficiently well answered to allow a response rate of 100% to be obtained. Respondents in this study were people from government sector which including Federal, State and Local Government. The one-to-one in-depth interviews were mainly to gather a clear view about waterfront development history in Malaysia and about the selected areas.

4.2. *Waterfront Development Practice in Malaysia*

From interviews, majority of the interviewees agreed that waterfront development in Malaysia was established a long time ago, but wasn't commercialized until 1990. Over the last 10 years, Malaysia has begun waterfront redevelopment projects and has focused on recreational, residential and mixed-use development rather than regenerating waterfront businesses (shipping and transportation). This finding was supported by the literature that indicated that in the past, many waterfront redevelopment areas underwent a transition from abandoned spaces to commercial, residential and recreational areas (Bruttomesso, 1993; Butuner, 2006; Sairinen & Kumpulainen, 2006).

Moreover, interview responses indicated that waterfront developments in Malaysia require a similar process as other types of developments. State government has full responsibility for waterfront development projects starting from planning permission approval up to project completion. Nevertheless, the land development process is slightly different for Sarawak and Sabah and OSC is not yet applied in the states. For the state of Sarawak, land development is controlled by the State Planning Authority (SPA) and Local Authority does not get involved directly with the development process unless the development is proposed by them and uses their own budget. The SPA chaired by the Chief Minister has the authority to give an approval to the proposed development with recommendation by the committee. However, due to constraints on resources (skills and expertise), the government has outsourced some of the work through open tender and will be selected by the Chief Minister.

In term of parties involvement in waterfront development in Malaysia, it is clearly shows that waterfront development in Malaysia do not have any involvement from community and Non Governmental Organisation (NGOs) along the process, unless if the development involves public land acquisition. In practical, public participation over land development is directly under the land acquisition, and specifically related to compensation matter² (Omar, 2002).

4.3. *Sustainable Governance for waterfront development*

From the interview, majority respondents agreed that administration and management in land development in Malaysia is considered efficient. This is probably due to existing legislation and management system established in Malaysia to control land issues, for example, The canon

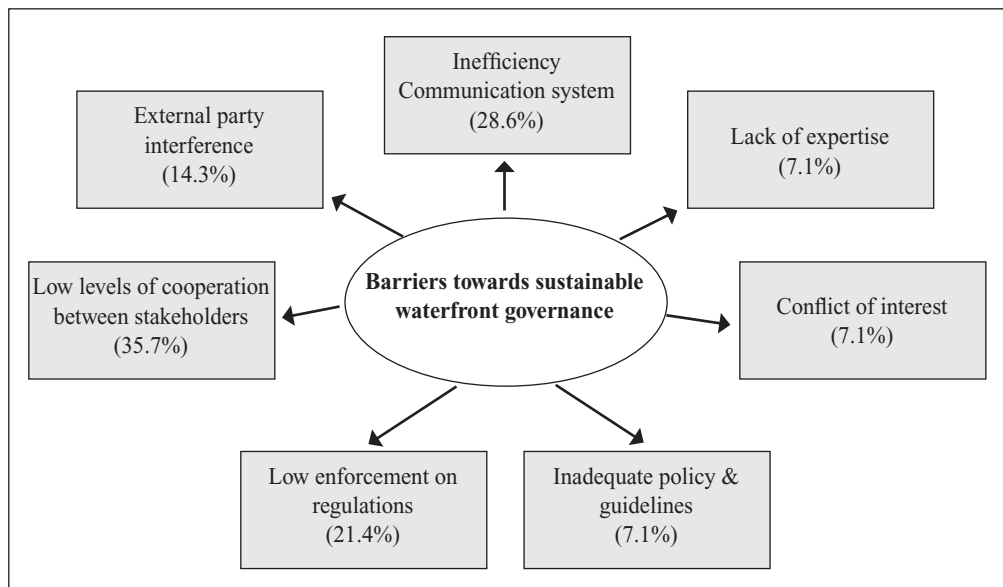
² Schedule 2 of Land Acquisition Act 1960 determines, "government can acquire land for public purposes with adequate compensation".

- National Land Code (1965), Compulsory purchase and compensation - Land Acquisition Act (1960), and Planning and related development regulations – Environmental Quality Act 1974. Referring to sustainable development and sustainable governance of waterfront development in Malaysia, it is not viewed as quite so effective. In other word, the waterfront development does not fully incorporate sustainable practice in the project.

4.4. Barriers on Sustainable Governance for waterfront development

From the results, there were several factor that constraints in achieving sustainable governance on waterfront development which including low levels of cooperation between stakeholders, inefficient communication system, inadequate policy and guidelines, low enforcement on regulation, conflict of interest, external party interference and lack of expertise. Most responses agreed that participation and collaborative is considered low and resulted on unsustainable waterfront development practice. According to Weng (2005), involvement of all stakeholders in natural resource management, such as water management are essential in every stage. On the other hand, inadequate regulation for control waterfront development also contributes to the unsustainable development problem. This results were similar with the research conducted by Latip et al. (2010) whereby they found that the absence of policies and regulations to control waterfront development in Malaysia was identified as a reason for the loss of integration between cities and water bodies. Figure 1 below presents the barriers that constraint in achieving sustainable governance on waterfront development.

Figure 1: Barriers towards Sustainable Governance for Waterfront Development



5. CONCLUSION

This paper attempts to explore the governance role in terms of waterfront development practice in Malaysia. From the findings, it can be concluded that the waterfront development in Malaysia has been established after gaining independence in 1957 and keeping growing until now. Moreover, waterfront development process in Malaysia follows a similar process to other kinds of development. Low participation and collaboration among the stakeholders involved in waterfront development process as well as other factors shows inefficiency for waterfront governance and subsequently caused unsustainable waterfront development. Hence, to achieve a sustainable waterfront development, sustainable governance is recommended and the attributes for sustainable governance for waterfront should be used with modification to suit the local environment.

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