



Communal Living Environment in Low Cost Housing Development in Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper has attempted to interpret the nature of communal living environment in low cost housing development. A quality communal living environment contributes towards good society which practices noble values. It is within the communal living environment that interaction takes place, families are nurtured, noble social values are developed and services are shared. Low cost housing constitute major element of the Malaysian national housing programmes. These programmes are to be implemented together with the provision of social services aimed at improving the quality of life of the community. The study's findings showed that the concept of low cost housing development in Shah Alam was found to be based on noble universal rules as stated in the Total Planning and Development Doctrine which provides communal living environment.

Keywords: Communal living environment, Low cost housing, Community

1. Introduction

In 1997, The Town and Country Planning Department, Peninsular Malaysia introduced a guideline called The Total Planning and Development Guidelines (TPDG) with the objective to create a balance between physical and environmental development, and human development. The primary philosophy is to integrate the spiritual aspects in to planning and to make man as the focus of development. The doctrine has given rise to new emphasis on planning practice and it sets out guidelines in physical planning terms. The main thrust of the TPDG is the integration of spiritual values in urban planning and development. The spiritual values is the result of the combination of three relationships which forms the basis of any society, that is: Man and His Creator, Man and Man, and Man and Environment. The physical planning was to ensure that it is environmental-friendly as well as to provide high quality urban living for the future residents (Government of Malaysia: 2001).

The relationship between man and man means the focus of every development effort is on the development of man and society. Man's need and wants constantly change according to time. The effective planning will always give attention to fulfilling the various needs of every member of society. Even so, no man is an island and life means the wholeness of communal living. Therefore, urban and regional planning and development should be able to create a communal living environment that is complete, capable of fostering the spirit of neighbourliness and brotherhood as well as encouraging interaction among all levels of society. For instance, the establishment of communal clusters and neighbourhood units which are complete and mutually interacting is consistent with the concept of caring society. Such efforts will ensure that the living environment will be able to function well through daily movements of its inhabitants that are effective and meaningful (Government of Malaysia: 2001).

This planning approach provides communal living centres (neighbourhood centres) which can act as residential centres providing living needs for residents. Communal living in low cost housing would be a situation in which the residents knowingly and willingly share the living environment and facilities. Communal living provides a good way to serve each other in a variety of ways. Public participation among the residents in communal life would make an impact on the community. Housing represents the foundation of creating a happy family and a communal living environment

Based on The Total Planning and Development Guidelines human development is the development of man and his environment, physical and socio-culture with the objective of among others, creating people with the following characteristics:

- A. A society of excellence with a sense of personal quality, having knowledge and expertise and capable of facing current and future challenges;
- B. A population with a strong and stable family institution and a strong spirit of neighbourliness, in harmony and cooperative towards ensuring an ethical and moral society.

Malaysia has a very definitive housing policy with set annual targets for housing achievement in the 5-year Plans. The primary objective of the housing policy is to ensure that all Malaysians are accessible to adequate and decent shelter aimed at eliminating slum dwellings and squatter living country (Government of Malaysia: 1971). To achieve this, a housing strategy, with emphasis on the construction of low-cost housing for the lower income groups, was prepared by the Federal Government. As a state matter housing is given high priority by all State Governments and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur under the supervision and coordination of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (Government of Malaysia: 1971, 1973, 1976).

In housing matter, the Ministry is responsible for the planning regulation of residential development; issuance of licenses and permits for advertising and sale to housing developer; ensuring that all parties involved abide by all the legislation and regulations through proper enforcement; and provides financial assistance. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government has been entrusted with the task of enforcing housing related laws and regulations to safeguard the interests of house buyers. All housing developers are regulated under The Housing Developer Act (Control and License) 1966 (Act118) was enforced on August 29, 1969 while the Housing Developers Regulations came into force on April 1989 (Government of Malaysia: 2000).

Besides ensuring the adequate supply of houses for the various income groups, especially for the low income group, the policy also emphasises the importance of a safe and decent living environment to be achieved through comprehensive settlement planning. Social facilities like schools, playing fields, religious centres, community halls, recreation areas and libraries are also provided to improve the quality of life. In designing and providing for such facilities, consultations were held with the target groups to ensure that their needs are met adequately.

2. Aim and objectives

The aim of this research is to interpret and analyse the communal living environment in low cost housing development in Malaysia.

The objectives are as follows:

To identify the low cost housing development progress and house price in Malaysia

To interpret and analyse the low cost housing and communal living environment in Shah Alam, Malaysia

3. Research methodology

The research is based on both secondary and primary data. Secondary data on housing development progress and house price were gathered from Malaysian official documents including the Five Year Malaysia Plans, the Mid Term Review Reports and the Annual Reports of related agencies. Primary data was gathered through personal interviews with 300 residents of low cost houses in Section 7 Shah Alam. These residents were interviewed at their houses during the weekends of Saturdays and Sundays at time convenient to them as majority of them were working. Site visits were made and photographs were taken to confirm the physical development and community facilities provided for the residents.

4. Analysis

This first part of the analysis focus on the low cost housing development and the low cost house price in Malaysia. While the second part focus on the analysis of low cost housing development in Shah Alam and the findings of residents' interview.

4.1 Low cost housing development in Malaysia

The issue of low cost housing development not only covers physical and environmental aspects but also takes place within the human context. This will also to improve the quality of life of the residents and the surrounding community as well as to develop communal living environment.

The urban centers are an important focus where a total of 51,800 units of low cost flats were built in year 2005 in large cities Ong Ka Ting (2001). Different strategies had been adopted to address issues for the lower income group. Among the strategies were the public sector role, housing finance for informal sector, open registration for low cost housing, expanding low cost housing fund, rental for the urban poor, provision of infrastructure grant, housing for estate and industrial workers, housing programmes for government employees, standardising technical and planning standards and continuous research and development in housing (Ghani Salleh and Choong Lai Chai: 1997).

Table 1 shows the breakdown of the housing unit by categories for the year 2000 by states in Malaysia. From Table 1 it can be seen that low cost housing constitutes 13.1 per cent of the total with the highest number of units in the State of Johor 134,775, followed by Selangor with 131,330 units. The trend may be explained by the fact that states of Johor and Selangor are among the most urbanised states. The low cost housing is the third biggest category after the traditional housing of 50.6 per cent and the planned housing of 34.7 per cent (Abd. Mutalib B. Jelani: 2003).

Under the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001-2005) 86.4 per cent of low cost houses with 200,513 units completed. Of this total, 103,219 units or 51.5 per cent was constructed by the public sector including the State Economic Development Corporations. To ensure an adequate supply of low-cost houses for the low-income group, any mixed-development projects undertaken by private developers continued to be guided by the 30 per cent low-cost housing policy requirement (Government of Malaysia: 2005).

As for the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010), the Government will continue to construct low cost houses to ensure adequate houses for the low-income group involving 24,757 units of houses. In addition, 43,800 units of houses for rental as well as for sale will be constructed to meet the expected increase in demand from the low-income group. The National Housing Department is working closely with state governments to ensure that these houses are built in suitable locations and provided with adequate public amenities (Government of Malaysia: 2005).

4.2 Low cost housing price in Malaysia

Under the four tier pricing scheme introduced in June 1998 by the Federal Government, low cost home is a living unit with a selling price of RM 25,000 to RM 42,000 depending on the locality as shown in Table 2. It could be a flat, terrace or detached house with minimum design specifications of a built up area between 600-750 sq feet, with three bedrooms, living room, kitchen, dining, washing and drying areas and also a bathroom. Those eligible to own are household with monthly income ranging from RM750 – RM1500. In some special cases units are to be rented out at a low monthly rate. Social facilities like schools, religious centers, community hall, libraries, open space and recreation areas are also provided to improve the quality of life. The main intention is to provide shelter for all and to ensure sustainable urban living environment. Building affordable housing units requires deep subsidies from both the public and private sectors (Government of Malaysia: 1999).

4.3 Shah Alam new town development

Shah Alam was developed as a new town in 1960 by the Selangor State Economic Development Corporation as a state capital city. As a new town it is to provide a more pleasant and efficient urban environment than existing towns. The ways in which the urban quality of life is influenced by planning activities at this early stage, that bring about changes in the physical reality, are of profound importance of Shah Alam development. The urban quality of life is aimed at providing useful insights of the contested and complex nature of concepts of developments such as community, land use distribution, rules and guidelines, places of interest, infrastructure, homes, community facilities, safety and other attributes. (Government of Malaysia: 1995; Dasimah: 2002). The new town development for Shah Alam was based on the neighborhood-planning concept of Ebenezer Howard as practiced in Britain. Each neighborhood unit, which also known as a section in Shah Alam, covers an area of between 50-600 acres each. Shah Alam is divided into 56 sections (Dasimah: 2002).

Shah Alam became the Selangor state capital city and administrative centre in 1978. It replaced Kuala Lumpur as the capital city of the state of Selangor to Kuala Lumpur's incorporation into a Federal Territory in 1974. Shah Alam was once known as Sungai Renggam and was noted for its rubber and oil palm estates. Its current name was chosen by the then State Sultan of Selangor, Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah after his late father Sultan Alam Shah. Shah Alam is located 28 kilometres to the west of Kuala Lumpur along the main axis of the Federal Highway and the railway line from Rawang to Port Klang. It is about 15 kilometres to the west of Petaling Jaya and was considered an ideal site for a new state capital because of its central position between Kuala Lumpur and Port Klang. It is situated in the most urbanised region of the Klang Valley and of Malaysia (Government of Malaysia: 1995).

Since the 10th October 2000 Shah Alam was declared as City of Shah Alam. It covers an area of 290.3 kilometer square. City of Shah Alam is well connected to other main cities in by highways and railways. It is also well connected to main transportation hubs such as the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) which is 30 km south of the city and KL Sentral in Kuala Lumpur and Klang Seaport. The total population for Shah Alam in 2005 was 433,400 with a total of 155,000 residential units with an average growth rate of 30 per cent per year since 2002. There are seven institutions of higher learning including Universiti Teknologi MARA, Impens International College, Centre for Instructor and Advance Skill Training, Polytechnic, Kolej Universiti Teknologi dan Pengurusan Malaysia and Universiti Industri Selangor. Universiti Teknologi MARA has the biggest number of about 70,000 students. Shah Alam is well served with community facilities. There are 15 secondary schools, 52 primary schools, 121 kindergartens and two vocational schools, 7 health specialist centres, 84 clinics, 10 police stations and five fire stations serving the residents (Government of Malaysia: 2006).

4.4 Low cost housing development in Shah Alam

The low cost housing programme in Shah Alam was aimed at providing comfortable accommodation and communal living environment for the people. Table 3 shows the low cost housing development in Shah Alam by sections. Shah Alam has 6,395 units for low cost housing. The housing development for every section was planned with social facilities. This includes secondary and primary schools, community hall, religious centre, business area and shop lots.

A terminal bus is provided for public transportation service. The planning standard for open spaces provision is 10 per cent of the total area for consistent physical development and environment. The location for all facilities is a symbol for interaction. in the government's efforts to provide shelter for all especially the low income community and communal living urban environment.

4.5 Analysis on housing layout and design, communication systems and neighbourhood centre

The layout and design of internal space and its surrounding provide spaces for interaction among community members through the allocation of open spaces and communal facilities which are adequate, suitable, comfortable, functioning and maintained;

The cluster layout for apartment areas is to optimise the use of land thereby maintaining sensitive areas and establishing public open spaces;

The apartments layout and design creates safe and caring living environment for all levels of society including the children, elderly, handicapped and disabled;

Parking lots constructed at the periphery of the main road and linked to residential areas by means of footpaths are encouraged to ensure safety of residents in neighbouring areas while encouraging interaction among communities

A network of foot paths is provided especially for pedestrians; the pedestrian system which links the main activities, particularly the residential area with school or kindergarten and playground should be given priority in order to create neighbourhood which is children-friendly;

Creating a community which is free from the movement of vehicles by separating through traffic from the pedestrian system, bicycle and motorcycle paths;

Every housing zone is provided with recreational, social and educational facilities and services;

The internal and external design of multi-storeyed residential units take into consideration facilities for the handicapped and disabled such as stairs, ramp, doors, bathrooms and pedestrian system;

The neighbourhood centre, which encompasses open spaces, business and hawker centre as well as social facilities is accessible to all residents and meet the needs of the residents;

Communal courtyard is provided in the neighbourhood area for the purposes of:

Forging a spirit of 'we' and 'ours'

Facilitating the process of outlining the boundary for control and management by the community;

Enhancing social interaction among residents; and

Reducing vandalism (crime free).

Creating a neighbourhood which stresses on education by providing facilities such as religious centre, schools and kindergarten as educational places for children and for local residents;

Allocation of open spaces for children's playground and neighbourhood parks in which the location is strategic, easily accessible and safe;

Creating an integrated community centre comprises of a community hall, and centres for security management, sports and recreation, as well as social group meetings to forge unity and solidarity whilst helping to overcoming social problems;



Open Space



Shop houses

Providing open spaces for activities such as night markets and food courts to reflect the local culture;

The design of traffic system and car parks is to create a harmonious atmosphere to encourage a healthy and positive interaction among neighbours;

Each house unit with three bedrooms to ensure privacy;

The width of the staircase is wide enough for carrying the sick and the dead;

Creating quality communal living through environmental conservation, provision of modern facilities and adequate recreational spaces, ensuring safety of occupants, and attractive landscaping.

The provision of infrastructure and social facilities aimed at promoting social well-being for all and ensure equitable and communal living environment. The low cost housing development in Shah Alam has proven some success. The photographs showed the low cost housing development in Section 7 Shah Alam. There are 2240 units of 5 storey walk up flats. The project was completed in the year 2000. Each unit has three bedrooms, a living room, kitchen area, washing/drying area, and a bathroom. The community facilities provided including secondary and primary schools, kindergartens, religious centres, community halls, bus stops, shop houses, playground, car parking spaces and motorcycles parking bays.

4.6 Residents' perception survey findings

A residents' perception study for 300 low cost housing residents in Section 7 was carried out and the research found that the majority of them were satisfied with their communal living environment. It was found that 60 per cent of the respondents are house owners while another 40 per cent are tenants. House price per unit ranged between Ringgit Malaysia (RM)36,000 to RM38,000. The study found that 50 per cent of the respondents are within the monthly household income ranged between RM1,500-2,000 while another 35 per cent with RM751-RM1,500 (Salina Binti Alang Abdul Rahman: 2004).



Bus stop



Parking for motorcycles

More than 60 per cent of the respondents are working in Shah Alam, about 12 per cent in Subang Jaya while the rest are in Damansara, Kuala Lumpur and Klang. Majority of respondents that is 31 per cent travel to work by cars, 28 per cent on motorcycles, 12 per cent by commuter and only five per cent by bus. The survey finding showed that about 60 per cent would prefer traveling on their own transport. The public transportation service especially the bus circulation route and traveling frequency in this area is not attractive though the bus stop is well designed as shown in the photograph (Salina Binti Alang Abdul Rahman: 2004).



Playground



Car parking area

As for the provision of community facilities majority of respondents were satisfied with the health centre, primary and secondary schools, religious centre, community halls, police and fire service. However, majority of them requested for the improvement of the provision of open space, children playground, car parks, motorcycles bay and also public transportation service.

Conclusion

The underlying aim of the Total Planning and Development Guidelines is to develop a community which should be able to meet changes in values within society and be able to contribute to improving the quality of life. Housing policies and strategies are decisions by the political masters. The future cities and new towns require the Total Planning and Development Guidelines as the basis for communal living environment. The Government has good intentions in helping the poor to own homes. Low cost housing policies created to fulfill the socio-economic objectives. The Government should remain as project holders to ensure the quality of the houses are up to standard and communal living

environment is achieved. The new town development in Shah Alam by the Selangor State Economic Development Corporation has proven some success and has achieved a measure of success in the efforts to provide shelter for all and communal living environment. This was made possible by the joint efforts of all concerned – Federal and State governments, local authorities, financing institutions, the public and private sectors and the target groups themselves.

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Table 1. Housing unit by categories in Malaysia, 2000

State	Planned	Traditional	Low Cost	Squatters	Total	%
Selangor	418,053	397,350	131,330	33,829	980,562	21.2
Johor	276,510	280,575	134,775	7,280	699,140	15.0
Perak	153,341	347,745	68,287	3,540	572,913	12.3
Kedah	92,777	235,660	69,635	2,824	400,896	8.6
P.Pinang	161,216	154,361	40,407	1,803	357,687	7.8
KLFT	214,426	76,370	42,966	23,970	357,732	7.7
Pahang	57,603	210,846	37,505	869	306,823	6.6
Kelantan	23,986	261,639	8,801	1,654	296,080	6.4
N. Sembilan	111,081	97,855	35,041	196	244,173	5.2
Terengganu	17,749	168,760	13,784	632	200,925	4.3
Melaka	76,923	79,175	19,728	42	175,868	3.8
Perlis	6909	37,870	5,431	1,002	51,212	1.1
Total	1,610,574	2,348,206	607,590	77,641	4,644,011	
Percentage	34.7	50.6	13.1	1.6	4,644,011	100.0

Source: Abd. Mutalib B. Jelani (2003)

Table 2. The four tier-pricing scheme introduced by Ministry of Housing and Local Government

House price/unit	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
	RM42,000	RM35,000	RM30,000	RM25,000
Monthly income	RM1,200-1500	RM1000-1350	RM850-1200	RM750-1000
Land price/ sq. meter; location	RM45< Town/city	RM15-44 Town/city	RM10-14 Small town	RM10> Rural, Village
Suitable house type	Apartment more than 5 storey	5 storey apartment	Terrace or cluster	Terrace or cluster
Suitable house type	Apartment more than 5 storey	5 storey apartment	Terrace or cluster	Terrace or cluster

Source : Government of Malaysia (1999)

Table 3. Low cost housing development in Shah Alam by sections

Sections	Types of housing development
Section 7	5 storey walk up flats (2240 units)
Section 16	4 storey walk up flats (1158 units)
Section 19	5 storey walk up flats (200 units)
Section 20	4 and 5 storey walk up flats (1235 units)
Section 24	5 storey walk up flats (480 units)

Source : Salina Binti Alang Abdul Rahman (2004)

