QUALITY OF LIFE: PERCEPTION FROM THE PUBLIC HOUSING COMMUNITY IN MELAKA

BY

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science in Built Environment

Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design
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ABSTRACT

Quality of life (QOL) is a very delicate and diverse subject matter and have garnered the attention of the masses for centuries. Each individual strives for perfect and harmonious well-being, sometimes interpreted as the QOL, although the accurate factors contributing towards it are elusive in nature. Till this day, QOL has been interpreted by many, but in spite of that, it has never been as diverse as it has since its inception. Different people with varying cultures and aspirations interpreted it according to their beliefs and norms, and sometimes what accounts as a good QOL may differ from others. In this research, a study is conducted to analyze the QOL of the low-income group in Melaka, according to their personal perception and views. As there are no data on wealth available, the low-income group of the population is substituted with the communities living in public houses. The instrument used is derived from the WHOQOL-BREF, which contains 22 social indicators that are assumed to affect an individual's QOL. A total number of 400 surveys were distributed fairly according to the three districts in Melaka and were focused on the public housing community entirely. The methods of analysis adopted in the study include descriptive statistics, Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient, cross-tabulation, and Partial Least Squares – Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Overall, the response obtained from the respondents showed positive feedback, where a majority of them stated that they are experiencing a good QOL. Out of all the domains of QOL, it is identified that the 'environment', which encompasses the aspects of safety and security, home environment, financial resources, health and social care, leisure time, physical environment, and transport is the major contributing factor towards the overall QOL. The study also shows that there are no staggering differences between the B40 income threshold group of the population with the M40 group when it comes to their overall satisfaction with their perceived QOL.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Throughout the centuries, civilizations have always associated Quality of Life (QOL) with material possessions and wealth. The thought that acquiring more and more would ultimately elevate their sense of QOL, is regarded as the main goal and objective in their lives. However, this situation would imply that those who do not have much to begin with have a lower QOL as compared to their wealthier counterparts. This brings about a social dilemma where the progress on social goals is steered only by material possessions.

This ideology started to break apart little by little when in 1964, President Johnson of the United States of America stated in his speech that "social goals cannot be measured by the size of our bank balance. They can only be measured by the quality of the lives our people lead" (Cummins, 1997). As a result, the 'social indicators movement' were materialized in the 1960s where the use of other social indicators such as housing, physical health, and the environment was applied in QOL research.

However, in the case of Malaysia, there is still a lack of awareness on the importance of QOL-based research especially at the local/city level (Mohit M. A., 2014). In addition to that, only a few studies on QOL are conducted at the state level, although the focus of those studies is aimed towards a more quantitative nature. Hence, this research is conducted in order to try and perceive the resident's QOL at a state level and is concerned more towards the qualitative aspect of QOL. The target group for this research is exclusively directed at the public housing community in Melaka in order to perceive their QOL through several social indicators identified.

This research also aims at describing the definition of QOL and its related components which can be considered as of particular interest to environmental designers and environment-behaviour researchers. These components are encompassed within the QOL which revolves around the urban spaces where people reside, conduct their work and indulge in social activities.

This research's methodology is based on a number of models and is supported by an extensive and detailed literature review to assist the research and based on these definitions and methodologies, research is conducted for the purpose of perceiving the QOL of the residents from the public housing community in Melaka.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Melaka, recognized as one of the oldest cities in Malaysia is not susceptible to its fair share of issues and problems. Located just beside Negeri Sembilan, Melaka is known for its historical values and characteristics. However, as mentioned earlier, the effort to conduct a QOL research at the state level had yet to reach Melaka. The growing concerns on measuring the QOL is important particularly in a developing country such as Malaysia, where the QOL is usually measured through objective indicators such as material wealth and educational level. There is a lack of contribution particularly from the subjective aspects of the individual which revolves more on the perception and satisfaction level.

Furthermore, according to Khazanah Research Institute (2015), Melaka is known to have the most affordable housing out of all the states in Malaysia. Hence it would be a great addition to the QOL research focused more towards the low-income bracket of the population, as the majority of the population who bought affordable houses are from

the B40 group. The following list elaborates more on the issues and problems which led to the formulation of this research.

1. **Inadequate Research on QOL particularly in Melaka**

   According to the research made by Khazanah Research Institute (2015), it states that Melaka is considered as the state with the most affordable housing market in Malaysia. In light of this, a QOL study conducted on the affordable/public housing community is crucial as there is a limited number of QOL study on the low-income group of the population. The statement is based on the majority of the QOL research conducted in Malaysia where most of it was conducted at the national level. In addition, most of the research focused only on the quantitative aspect of QOL, as well as none of them focused on the low-income group of the population. The indicators used as mentioned, lacked the qualitative aspect of QOL, and as such, there is an absence of essential indicators such as spiritual well-being. Table 1.1 summarizes the QOL research conducted in Malaysia between 1999-2013.

Table 1.1 List of QOL Research Conducted in Malaysia between 1999-2013

Report/Article	Year	Level	Study Area	Indicators	Comments
Quality of Life Report	1999 2002 2004 2011	National	Malaysia	• Public Safety • Health • Social Participation • Environment • Family Well-being • Working Environment	• Focusing only on quantitative (lacking individual perception). • Lacking spiritual well-being. • Not focused on the low-income group's QOL. • No QOL for Melaka. • No distinction regarding the indicator with the highest contribution to QOL.

Quality of Life Report	2004	State	All States	• Income and Distribution • Transport and Communication • Health • Education • Public Amenities	• Focusing only on quantitative (lacking individual perception). • Lacking spiritual well-being. • Not focused on the low-income group's QOL. • No distinction regarding the indicator with the highest contribution to QOL.
Housing Conditions and Quality of Life of the Urban Poor in Malaysia	2012	Regional	Klang Valley	• Physical Environment • Housing Environment • Health Status • Safety • Social Support • Social Activities	• Focusing only on quantitative (lacking individual perception). • Lacking spiritual well-being. • Not focused on the low-income group's QOL. • No QOL for Melaka. • No distinction regarding the indicator with the highest contribution to QOL.
Perceptions on Quality of Life in Malaysia: The Urban-Rural Divide	2013	National	Malaysia	• Population and Family • Participation in Education • Human Resource • Health Income • Expenditure and Savings • Housing • Environment • Transportation • Culture and Entertainment • National Unity • Communication and Technological Change • Social Participation • Public Safety • Social Security	• Lacking spiritual well-being. • No QOL for Melaka. • No distinction regarding the indicator with the highest contribution to QOL.
Malaysian Well-being Report	2013	National	Malaysia	• Health • Environment • Family • Transport • Communication • Education • Income & Distribution • Working Life • Housing • Leisure • Governance • Public Safety • Social Participation • Culture	• Focusing only on quantitative (lacking individual perception). • Lacking spiritual well-being. • Not focused on low-income group QOL. • No QOL for Melaka. • No distinction regarding the indicator with the highest contribution to QOL.

2. The Social Indicators Dilemma

For the past decades, social indicators were heavily relied upon in order to gauge and measure the QOL of an individual. It is constructed during the early 1960s by Raymond Bauer, the director of a project called the 'social indicators movement' (Noll, 2000). He describes the social indicator as a form of "statistics, statistical series, and all other forms of evidence that enable us to assess where we stand and are going with respect to our values and goals" (Bauer, 1966). In other words, the social indicators were made up of several statistics concerning related domains and facets that provide an indication of an individual's QOL.

While it may be considered as an effective solution in understanding and measuring QOL, there are still some underlying issues which are in dire need of attention. One of them is the over-reliance on the objective indicators. Objective indicators such as material wealth, education level and employment rate wouldn't necessarily be irrelevant in measuring the QOL of an individual as it offers a clear and direct statistical data in regards to his/her position in life. These statistics would then in turn hypothesized into a simple statistical construct which states that the higher the amount of a certain objective indicator, the higher the QOL of the said individual or vice versa. This construct presumes that numbers and quantities are all there is to measure QOL. It neglects a very important criterion which is the underlying subjective circumstances of the individual itself. To illustrate, an individual may accumulate an extensive amount of wealth and thus should be contented and have an excellent QOL. But, in spite of possessing all that wealth, the individual may perceive that he is yet to feel content and doesn't have a good QOL. In this situation, the individual's feelings, perceptions, and values towards his current position in life are what determines his overall QOL. Hence, a thorough

understanding of the subjective aspects of an individual's life (perception and feelings) is important in determining the QOL level of the population.

Another important issue that needs to be addressed is the distinction in terms of ranking among the indicators. Although it has been established that one of the ways in measuring an individual's QOL is through the usage of social indicators, be it objectively or subjectively, the relative statistical importance of the said social indicators are still unknown. In certain cases, an individual may perceive that the condition of their immediate physical surrounding may contribute more towards their overall QOL, while others felt that their personal relationship is much more important than any other indicators. Hence, this research intends to rank the social indicators according to their relative statistical importance based on the perceived assessment of QOL reported by the low-income group in Melaka.

3. Association of Wealth in Regards to QOL

For centuries, the notion that material wealth constitutes better well-being had always been the perpetual belief within a society (Veenhoven 1996). The intense correlation between the two had compelled the society into a never-ending pursuit of wealth accumulation, in the hopes that it would elevate their positions in life and alleviate themselves from feelings of misery and misfortune.

In recent years, however, subsequent research on the determinants of QOL had increased in numbers, and the myth that QOL relied heavily on material wealth is slowly being debunked. As stated by Nolan and Whelan (1996), wealth is considered as an important determinant of QOL, however, we should not neglect other aspects of a household's current situation in measuring their well-being.

In this research, the focus is highlighted on the perceived QOL of the low-income group in Melaka and identifying the extent of correlation between wealth and overall QOL.

4. Inadequate Data on Wealth

This research focuses primarily on the level of wealth of the population along with the level of income. Wealth in this aspect refers mainly to assets and accumulated stocks, while income is a passing flow of resources (Khalid, 2014). The reason why this research focuses on the aspect of wealth rather than income is due to the fact that wealth owners tend to generate more purchasing power while is considered as a significant source of income. Furthermore, wealth is transferrable from generation to generation and are used to generate more wealth while remains more stable across generations than income (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006). In addition to that, households that receive similar incomes may have a different perception on their well-being if one of them possesses an asset such as housing and consumer durables (Wolff, 1998). It may also be possible that households that are earning below the Poverty Line Income (PLI) are living comfortably due to wealth and asset accumulation and vice versa.

The literature and data on wealth in Malaysia, however, is extremely inadequate unlike that of income studies. In addition to that, the data on income is also based on limited publicly available data derived from government publications (Khalid, 2014). Unlike any other countries where the data on wealth is abundant, the situation in Malaysia made it very hard for researchers to conduct a study on wealth and its effect on QOL.

As there is an inadequacy of data, this research inevitably focuses on other forms of wealth, which is the data on property and property ownership. Furthermore, as Tunstall et. al (2012) explained, a household that is from the lower-income, have less wealth, and less access to credit are subject to having fewer opportunities in terms of housing choices and tend to opt for social housing or lower-priced houses instead. In accordance with the situations mentioned, this research will substitute less wealthy communities with public housing communities.

This substitute is considered fair because housing is deemed as the most vital necessities in an individual's life. Hence, the incapacity for an individual to purchase a higher-priced house that is equipped with better facilities and environment indicates that they do not have sufficient funding to obtain one. In 2016, it is revealed by the Department of Statistics Malaysia that housing was the highest contributor to the overall household consumption expenditure, followed by other necessities such as food and transportation.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND QUESTIONS

1.3.1 Aim

The aim of this research is basically to investigate the perception of the individuals from the public housing community in Melaka, Malaysia, in regards to their QOL based on several subjective and objective indicators outlined.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives and Research Questions:

To achieve the aim formulated, specific objectives and research questions have been formulated to give a better insight as well as acting as a milestone for the research. The specific objectives with research questions are given in Table 1.2 below:

Table 1.2 Specific Objectives and Research Questions

Specific Objectives	Research Questions
To identify the indicators that are related to QOL	• What are the indicators related to QOL?
To analyze the factors and effectiveness of the indicators towards the overall perceived QOL of the public housing community in Melaka	• How do the indicators affect the overall QOL of the residents? • What is the highest contributor out of all the social indicators in terms of the effect on QOL?
To provide recommendations on how to improve the QOL of the residents based on the analysis made	• What are the recommendations advisable to be considered based on those findings?

1.4 SCOPE OF STUDY

The scope of the study is usually identified in order to set the limit, in terms of the coverage for the research. Thus, for this research, several scopes of the study were outlined and all of them are included in the QOL study at the state level. These scopes of study include the definition, history, study dimensions, theoretical perspectives and the commonly used social indicators of QOL.

Furthermore, the study area designated for the research is located in Melaka, thus the research concerns only on the demographic and socioeconomic profiles of the residents in Melaka.

1.5 RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

The research that will be conducted is aimed to identify what are the primary influences that affect the QOL of a community, especially from the public housing community and to test the assumed indicators in regards to their effects towards the QOL.

To be able to comprehend and determine the QOL of a community would definitely open up new opportunities and challenges in improving the living standards by providing the infrastructures and facilities required, depending on the requirements needed by a specific community. This effort is in line with the vision and mission stated in the Melaka State Structure Plan 2035, that envisions Melaka as a developed state by the year 2035. To achieve this, several strategies had been outlined by the State Government of Melaka to address the crippling issues such as the large wealth gap in the community and the presence of poverty and unemployment. Therefore, it is imperative to measure the current living environments and QOL of the population in order to set up the measures for those issues. In essence, the community could very well benefit from the accomplishment of the research as the findings acquired from it could

identify the key issues regarding the QOL of the residents. Local authorities could pinpoint the relevant components such as the environment or safety aspects that could be improved in order to enhance the QOL of the residents.

The accomplishment of the research would also assist the policy-makers by providing the recommendations that would contribute to the overall QOL of the public housing community in Melaka. Moreover, the local authority and the private sectors could work hand-in-hand based on the findings made in the research in order to formulate an agreeable course of action that would satisfy the needs of the residents.

In terms of urban planning, as stated by Myers (2007), planners are encouraged to integrate the knowledge of QOL into their professional realm as they are essentially intertwined together and are the main contributor towards development and the dynamism of change. With an increase in the QOL of the population, it would bring about a growth especially in economic development. However, the consequential effects of the said growth would generally incur other social issues such as urban sprawl. Thus, development planning is applied to help in mitigating the damaging effects while effectively monitoring and encouraging more sustainable economic growth.

Finally, the accomplished research would assist future research on the QOL particularly at the state level or within the domain of the lower income group of the population. Currently, limited research was conducted at those level and domain, and even the few identified only focused on the quantitative aspects of QOL. The degree of importance of QOL studies has not yet been comprehended by the masses, especially those from the built environment field. The fact that the QOL of society and the physical aspects of the built environment are both intertwined and interrelated makes it a necessary component to be appreciated and assimilated.