DOES SOCIAL CAPITAL INFLUENCE PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING? EVIDENCE FROM SUBANG JAYA, MALAYSIA

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Abstract: *The practice of involving public in planning has been in place since the birth of modern town planning in Malaysia. It is strongly felt that social connectedness among members of a community and positive feeling towards neighbourhood do have influence in making people to be more participative in planning. This study attempts to establish relationships between participation and social capital which is characterized by factors such as sense-of-belonging, trust, norms of reciprocity and voluntary association. It is evident from this study that some elements of social capital differed significantly between active and less active residents. This paper concludes that to make participation works, future strategies should not only focus on improving the participation mechanism, but emphasis should be equally given on social capital building.*

Keywords: Public Participation, Social Capital, Urban Planning

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Introduction

Principle 1 of Rio Declaration reads "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development" (Oldham United Nations, 2010). The declaration, among other things, put emphasis on providing platforms to allow the general public to be included in decision-making process by encouraging public awareness and making information widely available. The Local Agenda 21, good governance and the most recent one in Malaysia. "people first", as well as "people-centric"- all these are emphasizing on the importance of creating opportunities for the lay people to get involved in governmental decision-making process. In general, public participation refers to the

practice of consulting and involving members of the public in decision-making of organizations or institutions responsible for policy development. The concept of public participation is seen to be able to diminish the line that separating the urban managers and the public; thus promoting shared responsibilities between government and those being governed, and also shifting the accountabilities of urban decisions to the public. The modern planning Act-The Town and Country Planning Act 1976 has given a new dimension in urban planning practice in Malaysia. Throughout the many amendments that had been taken place since 1976, the Act has improvised the ways of improving the urban planning practice as a whole which includes a more systematic approach on how to involve the public in urban planning process more effectively. Despite having a systematic way of involving the public, however, from past studies, it is noted that most of these publicity exercises receive lukewarm response from the public. Goh (1990) and Kamarudin (1991) emphasized that one of the pre-requisites of it vital to ensure the success of public participation is that the public should be knowledgeable about planning process. Past studies offered many possible explanation on barriers of participation and many have highlighted that one major barrier to quality participation lies in the public themselves. One of the factors associated with this phenomenon is the fact that people nowadays are leading more individualized and impersonal lifestyle and this has result them to be disassociated with their neighbourhood. The absence of social connectedness, which some describe as social capital, seems to be the possible answer on why it is so difficult to get people to be involved in matters that affect their living environment. The notion of social capital (Putnam, 1995) that stresses on social networks, interactions, trust and reciprocity are the basis that foster sturdy social connections among members in a community.

Literature Review

Bourdieu (1984) in Adam and Roncevic (2003) introduces the notion of social capital as "a capital of social connections, honourability and respectability". Although his introduction of social capital lacks systematic empirical analysis, Adam and Roncevic recognizes Bourdieu's contribution as the pioneer who laid down the frame of reference for theorizing and research in this area. Coleman (1990) asserts that:

> "Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspects of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors-whether persons or corporate actors-within the structure" (Coleman, 1990, p.98).

Drawn from the working definition of social capital introduced by Coleman that focused more on sociocentric perspective (Adam and Roncevic, 2003), Putnam offers the definition of social capital as "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating co-ordinated actions" (Putnam, 1993: 167 in Adam and Roncevic, 2003).

Robert Putnam later on elaborates in his book entitled "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Communities" on what distinguishes social capital from other forms of capital:

> "Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the
> properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals-social

networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them".
(Putnam, 2000, p. 19).

In conceptualizing social capital, Putnam develops an instrument to measure social capital which includes four themes: membership of voluntary associations, networks, trust and norms of reciprocity. Paxton (1999) as quoted by Adam and Roncevic (2003) in her study of social capital in United States expands the measurement of social capital by categorizing the indicators into two measureable components: objective associations between individuals and subjective type of tie, which must be reciprocal, trusting, and involving positive emotions (in Adam and Roncevic, 2003, p. 162). The first is measured by three variables which include spending evenings with neighbours, spending evenings with friends, and total number of memberships of voluntary organizations. The second is measured by trust in individuals such as helpfulness, trustworthiness and fairness of people; and trust in institutions (Paxton, 1999 in Adam and Roncevic, p. 163). Her findings challenge Putnam's findings as from what she observes, though in general the social capital in the United States is declining, but only in one aspect-trust in individuals while trust in institution remains the same.

There have been many studies attempt to establish some the connections between the outcome of social capital and civic engagement or participation in local affairs. However, most of these studies try to link the outcome of social capital to political voting (Kahne et al., 2006, Xu Q et al., 2010) and participation in community activities or what some refer it as civic action (Forrest, 2001, Fahmy, 2006). Rydin and Pennington (2000) recognize the potential of social capital in promoting collective action in environmental planning. The authors feel that repeated interactions among members in small group settings allow members to gain trust from one another and consequently work together in achieving common and collective desires.

There is quite a number of studies focus on examining the potential and importance of social capital in Malaysian communities. Roslan et al. (2010) found that social capital correlates positively with household income and quality of life. Not only that, the authors feel that social capital is believed to be able help people in managing problems, thus reducing vulnerability and uncertainty. The potentials of social capital have also been tested in many developing communities both in urban and rural areas. It has been acknowledged that social capital is a critical factor to ensure the success of many community development programmes (Abu Kasim Ali and Ahmad Ezanee Mansor, 2006, Selvaratnam et al., 2008).

Fuzer and Monostori (in Joseph D. L., & Gregory W. S., 2012), in their study on the inequality-distrust dynamic evident in urban centers in Hungary, conclude that the unique patterns of social capital accumulation found in such economically segregated neighbourhoods should be taken into account by urban planners. Specifically, they recommend a community planning model in which local people are linked with city managers, academics, and urban planners in the design, implementation, and assessment of urban rehabilitation efforts.

The theory of social capital not only captures both the social and capital elements but also reminds us that social capital must be viewed as both an endogenous and an exogenous variable in research. As an endogenous variable, it is necessary to investigate what factors lead to differential social capital-the production of social capital. As an exogenous variable, research must

address the consequences that social capital may lead-the returns to social capital (Nan Lin et. Al., 2011).

Social capital, in particular, has been argued to act as a form of collective asset within and across communitites by means of specific norms that promote cooperation, such as trust and reciprocity. In these respects, social capital can be defined as a behavioural norm that favours cooperation (rather than the adoption of self-regarding attitudes) between two or more individuals (Colin Campbell & Silvia Sacchetti, in Asimina C. & John, B. D., (eds.). 2014).

Linking Social Capital and Participation

From the definition of social capital discussed in the previous section, it is clear that social capital relates to the nature and depth of existing social relationships. One major problem that have been highlighted by many researchers in studying public participation in planning, is to actually get people involved in a large scale (Timothy O'Riordan in Sewell and Coppock, 1977; Berry et al., 1993). While there are some remarkable progress that see many people are getting more involved and enthusiastic to participate in governmental decision-making, however in general, most people at large still do not see why they need to worry themselves in neighbourhood problems.

There are many reasons associated with the lack of interest for public to participate in local affairs. One of the reasons that has been established on why people shun away from getting involved in community affairs is lack of ties or relationships among members of a community, and this phenomenon is more apparent in urban and metropolitan communities. According to Louis Wirth (1938) in his essay "Urbanism as a Way of Life", urban communities have their own "urban way of life" and "urban personality". From his observation, he feels that city people, though more socially tolerant, are more impersonal and less friendly as compared to rural people. The development of urban personality or urbanism is a result of the three key characteristics of cities – large population size, social heterogeneity and population density. Large population size contributes to large number of individuals participation in a process of interaction. By having large number of individuals, there is a greater potential differentiation or variation between them. The existence of wide range of variations among the urbanites weaken the bond and kinship and of neighbourliness due to the lack of common trait between each community member (Wirth, 2003).

In some ways, what Putnam proposes in his social capital theory is an updated version of Wirth's work. The urbanites are no longer connected to one another though collective action as people in rural area. Past studies has shown that all measures of social engagement such as political voting, participation in voluntary organizations and even neighbourliness ties, seem to grow weaker. The urban dwellers are getting more impersonalized. Berry and Thomas (1993) states that people nowadays able to live next to each other without being neighbours. Paul Goodman (cited in Berry and Thomas (1993) argues that "as American cities evolved, they became 'slums of engineering' characterized by 'empty belongings'" (p. 36). This phenomena is decribed by Berry and Thomas as "urban crisis" which he feels can be remedied if people could work together and revive the spirit of togetherness in modern communities.

Alejandro Portes (1998, cited in Fahmy and Young, 2006, p.103) observes that:

> "As a property of communities and nations rather than individuals, social capital is simultaneously cause and effect. It leads to positive outcomes, such as economic development and less crime, and its existence is inferred from the same outcomes".

From the above explanation, it is clear that an abundance stock of social capital bring many good things for a community. In Putnam's own words, he stresses that social capital allows citizens to resolve collective problems more easily (Putnam, 2000). Fahmy (2006) believes that social capital is an important driver of civic action as it provides opportunities for co-operative social relations that are a prerequisite of collective action.

Study Area and Empirical Investigation Design

The study took place in Subang Jaya, a suburban area located about 50 km from Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia. Ranked as the fifth largest metropolitan in Malaysia (Jamaliah Jaafar, 2004), Subang Jaya has a fast growing community with an increase of 20 percent in ten years. There are approximately 152,068 people living in Subang Jaya with the population density of 60.5 people per hectare. The community of Subang Jaya is plagued by many problems associated with rapid urbanization such as traffic and crime. On top of that, by being strategically located within crossing of expressways, Subang Jaya has faced extreme pressures of development that threatened the community's quality of life. Out of the struggle in guarding their quality of life, a group of residents in formed an informal residents association in 1991, known as USJ Residents Association. The committee members took a step further to function more effectively by registering the association with the Registrar of Societies in 1993. The association, until today, is actively working on big community issues especially in trying to garner support from the residents in challenging local authority's planning decisions.

The single case study was chosen in this research project. One rationale for using a single case study is when the case is "critical for testing a well formulated theory" (Yin, 1994, p.38). In this light, Subang Jaya communities provide a good case study as these communities had their success stories of public participation. One thing notable about the communities of this suburb is that they have an abundant stock of social capital and this fact is proven by the number of residents' alliances which had been working hand-in-hand in confronting the local council in various planning issues.

Using non-proportional quota sampling, a household survey was done to identify the extent of residents' participation in planning either through formal or informal channels. The survey was done in September 2008 for one month period with the help of field assistants, using face to face interview. The survey include questions on socio-economic profile and social characteristics such as sense of belonging, sense of community, collective efficacy, generalized trust, community awareness and engagement and awareness on planning. The main objective of the survey was to explore the relationships between social capital and participative attitude.

The study included 3 administrative zones of the Subang Jaya local authority namely Zone 1, Zone 3 and Zone 4. The selection of these zones is based on the variations of the housing and

neighbourhood characteristics of these zones. Zone 1 which comprised of 8 neighbourhoods (SS12 – SS19) is the oldest neighbourhood scheme in Subang Jaya. The houses were mostly built in the late 1980s. The most common type of housing here are landed houses with spacious built up. Located in the heart of the Subang Jaya township, over the past years this zone experienced such tremendous growth with the mushrooming of new developmental projects. Zone 3 comprised of 19 neighbourhoods (USJ2 – USJ15). This zone is developed under UEP Subang Jaya project, the second phase of Subang Jaya development. Most of the houses that can be spotted here are terrace houses and some medium to high-cost apartments and condominiums. Zone 4 which is now known as USJ1, is made up of Taman Subang Permai, Taman Subang Mewah and Subang Industrial Park. Due to the heavy concentration of industrial areas in this zone and the availability of low cost flats, there is an influx of foreign workers in this area.

Using the results of 319 questionnaire survey (50,5% Malay, 33.7% Chinese, 15.5% Indian and 0.3% others), this study explores to what extent does social capital influence participation in planning. The definition of "participation in planning" in this research however is not limited to participation within formalized planning channels but it includes other channels such contacting community representatives and politicians, contacting media or resorting to informal channels such as petition signing and street demonstration.

Results and Discussion

i)   Actions Taken

To gauge the extent of participation in planning decision, the respondents were asked to tick all the actions they have made in the past three years to influence planning decisions. As shown in Table 1, more than half of the respondents have never done anything to influence planning decisions. This is expected as it has been proven in many previous studies that many communities are made up of the non-participants (O'Riordan, 1977; Sidney et al., 1987; Wandersman et al., 1987). Among all the actions listed in the survey form, it is observed that contacting local authority and community representatives and attending meeting with fellow residents are the preferred choice of methods to be used for the respondents to voice out their grouses and complaints about planning issues and decisions. It is interesting to note that quite a number of respondents had experience signing protest petition. The acts of communication with the politicians and councilors appear to be lower and the findings do indicate that the respondents prefer to communicate with the JKP (contacted communict representatives) or communicate directly with the local authority. Contacting media such as mainstream newspapers, community bulletin and community forum appear to be the least preferred choice.

Table 1: Actions done by the respondents in the last three years to influence planning decisions

List of Actions	Frequency	%
Never done anything	195	8.7
Contacted local authority	58	17.5
Contacted community representatives (JKP)	56	16.9
Attended meeting with fellow residents	54	16.3
Signed protest petition	50	15.1
Contacted non-governmental organization	33	9.9
Attended public hearing	33	9.9
Contacted State Assemblyman	28	9.4
Contacted local councilor	29	8.7
Discussed in community online forum	25	7.5
Took part in public protest and demonstration	19	5.7
Contacted Member of Parliament	18	5.4
Contacted mainstream newspaper	18	5.4
Contacted community newspaper	10	3.0

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ii)   *The Nature and Magnitude of Social Capital and Its Link to Participation*

As discussed earlier, there is a wide range of indicators that had been tested in past studies to measure social capital. This paper, however, discuss only two aspects of social capital; sense-of-belonging and trust, and its possible associations with participative attitude.

1. *Sense of Belonging*

Sense of belonging refers to the feeling that one belongs in the community and is willing to make sacrifices for the community (Pooley et al., 2005). In the context of participation in planning, participation is time consuming. The willingness of the participants to spend time scrutinizing the local plan, or attending public hearings or meetings, may indicate participants' connection to the community, which is central to the concept of social capital. Key consideration in this study include the following: whether the 'connectedness' of the urban society is achieved in the neighbourhood in this study, and to what extent this feeling of connectedness predict the behavior to participate.

According to Hampton (1970), the feeling of sense-of-belonging is likely to increase with the length of time spent in the home area. The sample consists of quite a balanced composition of 'newcomers' (having resided in the neighbourhood for less than 5 years) and long-time residents

(those who have resided in the neighbourhood for more than 10 years). This is a useful finding as the availability of a balanced composition between the newcomers and long-time residents will provide an opportunity as to whether length of residence plays a role in determining one's extent in participation. However Hampton feels that length of residence alone may not able to promote a feeling of being home, but perhaps previous residence in the immediate area may also be a contributory influence. The survey indicates that the population of Subang Jaya is largely contributed from the people who moved into the town from other places such as from other towns but the same district (22.0%), from other parts of Klang Valley (29.8%) and other wider localities such as other state and country. In terms of type of home ownership, a large proportion of respondents own their houses.

To answer the research question on which sense-of-belonging factors contribute to one's extent of participation, variables that measured sense-of-belonging (Table 2) were compared among respondents with low, medium and high level of participation.

Table 2: Variables Measuring Sense-of-Belonging

Variables used to measure sense-of-belonging	Description
• Years of stay	1= Less than a year, 2= 2 to 5 years, 3 = 6 to 9 years, 4 = 10 to 15 years, 5 = More than 15 years
• Previous place of stay	1 = In this neighbourhood, 2 = In other neighbourhood in Subang Jaya, 3 = In this district, 4 = In other district in Kiang Valley, 5 = In other state, 6 = In other country
• Type of home ownership	1 = Own house, 2 = Rented, 3 = Owned by a family member / friend, 4 = Other
• The feeling of attachment to neighbourhood	A scale of 1 to 5 with 1 represents "None at all" and 5 represents "Very Strong", and 0 indicates "Not sure"
• The feeling of attachment to Subang Jaya	A scale of 1 to 5 with 1 represents "None at all" and 5 represents "Very Strong",
• Feel part of the community	A likert scale of 1 to 5 with 1 represents "Strongly Agree" and 5 represents "Strongly Disagree",
• Feel sorry to leave the neighbourhood	1 = Very sorry, 2 = Sorry, 3 = Do not know, 4 = Not sorry, 5 = Not sorry at all
• Number of neighbours known (based on the number of houses)	1 = Many (more than 10 houses, 2 = Not so many (about 5 to 9 houses), 3 = Few (about 1 to 4 houses), 4 = None (do not know any neighbor)

The study indicates that residents with higher level of participation have longer length of residence. The findings also indicate that residents' who have higher level of participation tend to

feel more attach to their immediate neighbourhoods and Subang Jaya. Those with higher level of participation tend to know more of their neighbours and they feel that they are part of the community. It also appears that those who own the houses in Subang Jaya have higher level of participation. However there are no differences observed between the three groups (passive, mediocre and active) in terms of their previous residences and feeling towards leaving the neighbourhood. The findings in this study found that associations between participation and length of residence, attachment to the immediate neighbourhood to Subang Jaya, feel part of the community and also number of neighbours known, correspond with many previous findings on the positive association between the rootedness in the community and involvement in community activities (Hampton, 1970; Sidney et al., 1987; Wandersman et al., 1987).

2. *Trust*

Trust is the first component in social capital and is usually measured by expressions of generalized trust in people and in institutions. Trust in an important element for a society to be able to work together towards achieving a common goal in their society. Rahn and Transue (1998, cited in Fahmy and Young, 2006) claims that generalized trust is pivotal to virtually all cultural definition of social capital, referring to "a standing decision" to give most people — even those whom does not know — the benefit of the doubt" (Rahn and Transue 1988 in Fahmi and Young 2006: 103).

The prevalence of trust in a community may contribute to the formation of shared values (Fahmy, 2006), which may induce higher level of participation in planning. It has been mentioned in many previous writings that trust in government and community representatives may heighten a person's motivation to play a more active role in planning as they feel that their participation may produce something fruitful and beneficial to the community they are living in. In contrary, there are also perceptions that it is distrust that actually induce participation as the lay citizen do not have faith that the government and their representatives are doing enough to safeguard their interests and needs (Dennis, 1977).

The survey respondents were asked to state their agreement on a likert scale to the statement "most people in my neighbourhood can be trusted". It was found that the residents have high level of trust in their fellow neighbours with more than 50 percent of the respondents agree to the statement. The respondents were then requested to state their agreement on a series of questions to gauge their trust on their community representatives and politicians.

Another two statements that marked significant differences of agreement among the three groups belong to the "trust in local authority" category. It is observed that those who belong to the active group have lower agreement on the statement that the local authority is transparent in its decision-making process and that it is not necessary for them to participate as the local authority knows better than them. These findings may hint that it is actually the lack of trust in the local authority that encourages them to participate. The sentiment of distrust and that "the government just won't listen" kind of perception may be attributed from the past experiences when the resident feel that their participations were fruitless as the government still approving projects that the residents did not favour.

Implications of the study

This study finds some relationships between positive feelings towards neighbourhood and level of participation where people who feel more belonged to their neighbourhoods tend to have higher awareness and participation in planning. The strategy that can be drawn from this finding is for the local government to facilitate physical changes to improve the overall living quality of the neighbourhoods. Among improvements that can be made are by revitalizing parks and playgrounds, improving the traffic situation, cleaning up the neighbourhoods and making the neighbourhoods free from graffiti and money lenders advertisements. All these initiatives must not be done alone by the government, instead they should be done together with the residents. These efforts will not only lead to the enhancement of the physical appearance and quality of life in the neighbourhoods, but also creating chances for interactions to occur, hence will make it easier for all parties to interact and co¬operate in more serious things such as in plan or policy-making.

These initiatives are seem to be taking place in Subang Jaya. Many community programs had been launched in the past. However, those who participate in these social programs are the same people who appear on public participation program. Thus, more publicity shall be made to invite more residents to join the programs. The community reps do have an important role in generating a more participatory attitude among the residents. The community must be educated and encouraged on how they can get involved.

Komito (2004) suggests that increased technology usage over 3 years in Ireland lead to increased social capital building activities, measured by increased amount of informal communication and information transfer among members of the community. Thus, the planners, community leaders should take advantage of online medium to engage with the public, instead of just monitoring from outside on the discussions made. It is worth repeating here that this medium must be made known to all residents to avoid the issues of certain groups monopolizing discussions and pursuing their own agenda, while others remain oblivious about what is going on.

Conclusion

There are just so much more needed to be done to improve the quality of participation to a higher level, but in short, the strategies must target on strengthening both parties: the public and the government. While it is important for the public to be made aware on planning process and the planners need to be creative in engaging public, what equally important factor is that the public need to be more connected to their neighbours. While it is not the planners job to foster community solidarity, however they are in position in helping in making the neighbourhoods a much more desirable place to live in which may help in promoting sense-of¬belonging. As this case study revealed, sense-of-belonging is indeed a factor that correlates with interest to participate. To sum up, planning needs collaboration and for people to engage more effectively in planning, they need to work together in order to achieve common goals and objective. Therefore, apart from focusing on improving public participation process, future policies should also be directed on social capital building.

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