Social Ecology and Survivability Towards Sustainability in Improving the Quality of Life Living in the City

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Abstract

Social ecological support involving institutions, families, local communities and virtual platforms greatly influence the living environment of the youth living in the city in enhancing competitiveness to survive challenges and to improve their quality of life. Competitive ability for the purpose of survival in urban areas requires a high level of knowledge, skills, lifelong learning, and high value as well as creativity to adapt to changes and the dynamics of city life. Social ecology support and their survivability will ensure that the youths to have a good quality of life in terms of physical facilities, financial literacy, health and wellness, family happiness as well as social harmony to achieve personal well-being and contribute to the sustainability of their families and communities. This study surveys youths from various ethnic backgrounds living in urban areas which involving a sample of 2600 people using the City Youth Perceptions on Social Ecological Support, Survival and Quality of Life Inventory, (IPGB - SESKH). This study reveals the relationship between the three variables and the impact of survival as a mediator between social ecological support and the quality of life among youths living in the city of Kuala Lumpur.

Keywords: Social ecology, survival, quality of life, city of Kuala Lumpur

1. Introduction

The city of Kuala Lumpur, located at the junction of the Klang River and the Gombak River, has grown steadily since 1972 when it was declared as Malaysian city and capital which becoming the heart of economic growth and a major hub for foreigners who come to travel, work and emigrate to the capital.

Kuala Lumpur covers an area of 244 sq km (94 miles²) from the area bordering the Karak Highway in the east, namely the Sepapak and Sentul areas, Kepong and Sebinjang areas in the north, Puchong in the west and Cheras in the south making Kuala Lumpur city an interesting region with a variety of attractions. Due to the complexity of the settlements and the diversity of social status of its inhabitants, there is a diversity of social status based-settlements which has created a significant gap between the elite, the moderate and the poor. The elite areas in Kuala

Lumpur such as International Hill, Ampang, Damansara, Bangsar and Taman Tun Dr Ismail are well known for their luxury residential areas in Kuala Lumpur.

Business centers in the golden triangular areas (hotspot) which comprises of Bukit Bintang, Leboh Pasar and Central Market are the centres for business and entertainment which are always crowded with economic, entertainment and tourism activities. Kuala Lumpur's strategic position together with sustainable developmental plan governed by The Kuala Lumpur City Hall make this city a complete destination with all utilities and facilities that meet the needs and life style for city life on a par with other cities in the world.

The Kuala Lumpu City Hall which is led by the mayor of Kuala Lumpur was established on February 1st, 1972 in conjunction with Kuala Lumpur's declaration as a glamorous park city which owns interesting landscape and landmarks that boasts well-maintained public transport facilities with well-planned settlement areas. These organised planning are implemented to eradicate the bad image and stigma about Kuala Lumpur due to its squatter congestion, street beggars, homeless people as wel as growing social illness.

The social ecology which shape and provide the young people's life experiences began with microsystem consist of families, neighborhoods, peers and local communities which influenced the lifestyles, behaviors and needs of youths to gain social recognition, appreciation and significant role in society. This microsystem also determine the sustainability of life to enjoy a bit of city's economic pie as well as having the quality of life necessary to live in a metropolitan city and Malaysian capital.

2. Problem Statement

Living in a dynamic, competitive and individualistic city has put pressure on its citizens who are in the middle and lower classes. The rising cost of living over the years and the need to adapt to the high standard of living require readiness, especially the youths, with the knowledge, skills and social cohesion to stay afloat from the damaging stream of social issues and economic crises which result from the insistence of life that leads to irrational actions.

The understanding of the quality of life can be divided into three categories:

1. Quality of life is a subjective concept related to how individuals feel about the life they experience.

2. A deeper understanding on how individuals enjoy their lives and improve their lives for better and a more harmonious life.

3. Objectively, how individuals interact with the environment and accept external changes

Significant gaps in the standard of living between the rich, medium and poor can be seen through settlement and residential areas. Elite settlements are usually fenced off and have security guards, while middle-class housing is occupied by mostly middle-class people in terraced areas while low-income and working-class people live in low-cost housing areas which often contaminated with low-class mentality of living in unhygienic conditions, , drug addiction as well as the culture of loitering without proper safety areas.

Settlements based on racial segregation has also been a problem for Kuala Lumpur citizens such as the presence of Little India, Petaling Street , Chow Kit and others under the influence of foreign outsiders has raised concerns among residents in Kuala Lumpur. The crime hotspots also pose a threat to the safety of the people in the area and lead to discomfort for their well-being.

In fact, various studies have been conducted to study the lives Kuala Lumpur inhabitants with various issues and concerns raised. According to Junaidi Awang Besar et.al, (2014) , the trend of racial polarization still exists in terms of settlement between the three major races where the Malays who were all Muslims are concentrated in the bucolic elements' settlements like Keramat, Kampung Baru, Kampung Pandan, Lembah Pantai, Batu and Setapak. The Chinese are concentrated in commercial and industrial areas including Bukit Bintang, Cheras, Sungai Besi, Salak, Old Klang Road, Kepong and Seputeh. The Indians on the other hand lived mostly in Sentul, Brickfield and Segambut.

The position of Kuala Lumpur in the middle of the Peninsula and the convenience of the good transportation system is a factor contributing towards its rapid growth. Since the beginning of the development of Kuala Lumpur, the rapid population growth at the rate of 5.4 percent per year resulting in the heavy flow of vehicles using the road as well as congesting the areas which leading to problems such as limited parking spaces and social impact on young people.

Construction for low-cost and public housing can not accommodate the number of people who flooded the city especially the government land and the tailings area. In 1974, it was estimated that 154,000 squatters which comprises of 20 percent of Kuala Lumpur's population and by 1979 that number had risen to 243,000 (UPSB, 1996). The

establishment of the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur makes it easier for the Kuala Lumpur City Hall to function more effectively to govern and guide the development of Kuala Lumpur (DBKL, 1995).

The rapid urbanization process has led to the introduction of various elements from foreign culture which greatly influence the youth deviant behaviour. This is due to their curious behaviour and only seeking entertainment without taking initiative to improve their knowledge, skills and religious values. Most youths are influenced by their peers and associated with hedonism culture that create a scar of social impact.

Fazilah et. al (2005) in a study involving 15 to 30-year olds revealed that risky activities such as gambling, vandalism and alcoholism were among deviant behaviors that affected youths in the city. Factors contributing to involvement in risky activities have also been studied by several researchers. Rozumah et. al. (2005) , for example, in a study involving adolescents aged 13 to 18 found that several individual factors and environment were significantly associated with involvement in social problems.

In a 2012 profile research conducted by the Department of Social Welfare on 1,378 people, the main factor for homelessness was the high unemployment rate which 646 people or 46.6% of the respondents suffered from. The second factor was due to poverty and low income (245 people). Most homeless people found on the streets and shelters were 30-60 years old (Alhabshi dan Abdul Manan, 2012) (Mohamad et al.,2016). Relatively most of them are Malays who are unable to continue with a normal life due to the high rental costs and opted for homelessness.

3. Research Purpose

This study is conducted to review the perspective of Kuala Lumpur youths from various ethnicities background towards ecological social influence which is the institution that govern Kuala Lumpur (Kuala Lumpur City Hall), aspects related to the local community, virtual community and family. The study also looked at the impact of this institution on survival among the youth in terms of knowledge, skills, lifelong learning, values and creativity. The study also reviewed the contributions of these aspects of quality of life involving physical facilities, capacity and financial sustainability, prosperity and health, family wellness as well as social integration based on variables comprises of gender and ethnicities of Malay, Chinese and Indians youths; as well as the status of socio-economy (SES) which includes education, income and employment background to obtain a comprehensive and holistic data in understating and obtaining new information on the quality of life in Kuala Lumpur.

4. Research Conceptual Framework

Based on the purpose of the research presented, a comprehensive overview of the direction of this study can be seen based on the conceptual framework presented below;

Figure 1: Research Conceptual Framework
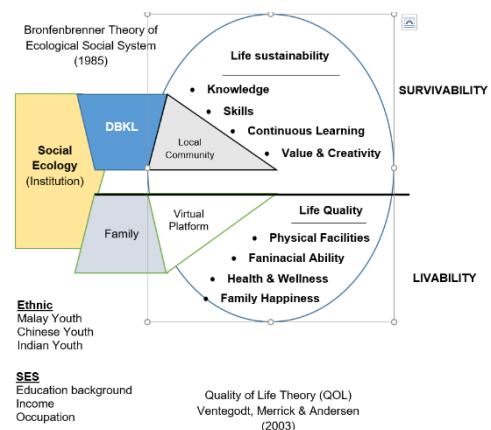
The conceptual framework of the study was based on four (4) influential institutions in shaping the lives of the youths living in the city of Kuala Lumpur by referring to the theory of Social Ecology (Bronfrenbrenner, 1985). The youths need to prepare themselves for high competitiveness in the city life which is very dynamic and challenging in order to survive and high liveability which means high quality of life in the city guided by the theory of Quality of Life (QOL) submitted by Ventegodt, Menrick and Anderson (2003).

5. Literature Review

Imam al-Ghazali viewed social learning through mixing with religious people as one of the three methods that can shape the moral character in a person (Muhamad Abul Quasem 1975). This is because a person is naturally impersonal in that one can acquire both good and bad traits from another person's behaviour. If a person is in contact with a good person over a period of time, he or she will benefit from it and will unknowingly learn something from it (M. Umaruddin 2003).

Berne (1964) stated that human behavior, thoughts and feelings are fundamentally independent of the influence of the environment, especially by the expectations and

demands made by those close to them such as peers, family and adult society. The influence of this environment affects a person's decision-making. However, humans are not necessarily overwhelmed by that decision.

Humans have the ability to understand the decisions they have made and to replace them with new decisions that are more relevant to themselves and their environment at that particular time. However, in many cases, humans often lack the ability to choose and only a few have the awareness to make their own choices. Freud (1974) in his psycho-dynamic theory stated that there are three systems that exist in the human being, id, ego and superego. Id is the original system in each individual since birth. Id is considered a biological component. It is the main source of energy and the center of instinct. The id is abnormal and does not have an organized organizational system. Id only knows urgencies and being forceful.

Ego is a psychological component of the soul that comes from id although it is very different from id. It is an executive who controls the types of actions that a person is expected to perform and selects appropriate environments and determines which instincts to satisfy and how. Ego is guided by the principles of reality and therefore all of its behaviors must be done by weighing deeply on everything that exists in the realm of reality.

Whereas superego is considered a social component and society's moral values. It is the moral or judicial branch of a personality. It is responsible for determining whether a behavior is good or bad, right or wrong. It is idealistic and responsible to control the ego against the will of the id, while encouraging the ego to accept moral values and goals without causing controversy and accepting cultural norms in society.

According to Arbon & Power (2003) , the family influence is very dominant on individuals in the early stages of shaping their values and thinking and how they can solve problems but their dependence is diminished as children and adolescents begin to have peer groups that influence their lives. If an adolescent failed to choose the right friend, there is a possibility of conflicting values that are cherished in the family and the individual environment.

Adolescents are most exposed to environmental influences that can change their personality and attitudes as they are motivated by a desire to try something new, fail to maintain relationships and tend to engage in negative behaviors. As such, Shamsudin (1994) explains that human physical, cognitive and emotional changes are most prominent at the adolescent level because at this stage they are eager to explore, try and can be easily influenced.

Research on the aspect of life satisfaction appeared based on the Erikson Theory of Physical Emotional Development because from psychologist's view, on each stage of development, an individual is faced with a different conflict that certainly will affect the degree of satisfaction of life of the individual (Mcknight, Huebner, & Suldo, 2002). Ma dan Huebner (1998) also emphasized that socializing with peers is an important factor in determining life satisfaction among adolescents.

Ainsworth (1960) suggests that at an early age, an individual is closer to family, especially to parents which fully acting as their social world. However, when an individual experience a transition from childhood to adolescence, the individual becomes closer to their peers and thus develops a stronger bond of friendship. At this stage, teens feel that their friends 'opinions are more important than family members'. Self-esteem is an important part of the individuality concept. This is seen as an important element in which individuals need self-respect regardless of age, gender, cultural background or occupation (Rosern-berg,1965).

Individual responsibility emphasizes on individual's own achievements, emotions and experiences. In a group of individualistic, success, harmony, pleasure and satisfaction is the result of their own efforts. Happiness is not going to becreated on with its own without continuous effort. Efforts and goals are clearly defined as striving toward happiness. Individuals actively seek and strive for a good and happy life such as controlling the external environment, identifying their potential, being creative, and knowing their goals (Lu & Gilmour, 2006).

According to Kashdan (2004) , the measurement of happiness should be based on a clear definition, a solid theoretical framework and an appropriate and accurate methodology. In Islam, the measure of happiness is those who succeed both in this life as well as in the hereafter. How can one do good to others, keep away from worthless acts, and maintain good deeds to spread the good to others.

Empirically, happiness can be classified into three main components, namely, (1) cognitive components based on life satisfaction ratings and emotional components comprising of (2) high levels of positive emotions and (3) low levels of negative feelings (Larsen & Prizmic, 2008) . Ryff (1989) has argued that there are external criteria or factors that drive happiness apart from cognitive and emotion. Hill dan Argyle (2002) who have formulated the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) are based on three main components, namely regular positive mood, higher levels of satisfaction, and loss of negative feelings such as depression and anxiety.

There are many ways to measure a person's quality of life. Often the indicators used are income, employment, health, socialization, education and luxury (Katiman Rostam, 2004) . A happy life will be ruined if we do not have enough food, no neighbors, dirty and unmaintained housing, a lack of recreational areas and a lack of involvement in religious and spiritual activities.

Prime Minister's Office (1999) defines quality of life in a broader context taking into account every activity that involves interactions and networks of relationships between people that promote appreciation and respect between individuals. Norizan Hj. Mohd Nor (2000) refers to Ventegodt's Theory of Quality of Life that sees happiness assessed in two main components which are social desire and social management. The key to happiness is how we can interact in harmony with the people around us because humans are social beings. Those skilled in communication and interpersonal relationship will be easier to make friends, socialize and will obtain happiness faster.

Living in a city full of various issues and problems that has led to the inclusion of many new cultural elements in society can sometimes erode the values that have been displaced for so long. This could undermine the status quo and create a conflict of values between the new and the old generation, leading to predicament and, thus, affecting the happiness and harmony that is being maintained.

All citizens are ready to accept change, modernization and the process of urbanization but in a well-planned and integrated context while maintaining strong cultural values that hold strong to one another's religious and non- selfish social activities, however urbanization processes often lead to erosion of existential culture. There is tendency to bring in foreign cultures that are detrimental to young people and leading to neglection of their own customs and culture. The use of slang language and inappropriate culture is a threat that is rapidly spreading to the younger generation if left untreated. This can create anxiety and becoming a major challenge in forming a positively cultured society and looking for well-being of life.
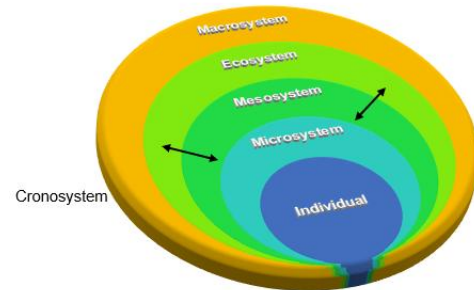
5.1 Social Ecology Theory

Social Ecology Theory by Bronfrenbrenner (1985) which explains on ecological environment that affect and influence the development of community structure comprises of:

1. Microsystem
2. Mesosystem
3. Ecosystem
4. Macrosystem

Which hihgly depending on eact other and affect one's lifestyle.

Figure 2 : Social Ecological Theory

Source: Bronfrenbrenner, 1985

Based on the theory of Social Ecology above, Bronfrenbrenner (1985) presents a social environment that promotes an individual's values, happiness, and well-being, namely:

1. Microsystem

The micro environment refers to the environment in which an individual develops to obtain well-being, acceptance and self-esteem from family, friends, neighborhood communities, schools and religious circles. Adoption, upbringing and guidance in the family in applying good and positive values will be an internal strength of the individual while the surrounding environment further reinforces those values through ongoing interaction, communication, socialization and participation.

2. Ecosystems

The ecosystem is a backbone of the well-being and supportive environment that meets the needs of individuals and enhances their well-being such as good neighbors, family friends, mass and social media, social welfare services and security services that protect families from the elements of crime and harassment.

3. Mesosistem

Mesosystems refer to the harmony that exists between the environment of the micro-system and the ecosystem that promotes a meaningful, enjoyable life and creates a sense of happiness in the living area until an individual's life is calm, undisturbed and feeling secure. This will affect an individual's personal growth and form a pattern of life, character and their personality.

4. Macrosistem

Macrosome is the formation of a culture of life that reflects the shared values of society which shapes the character and attitude of individuals within the environment. This is

particularly evident in the urban environment of the elite, medium and low- cost housing areas , to create a certain stigma and perception for the people in the area.

They are formed as a result of experience from continous socio-cultural progress through a variety of activities and experiences that are referred to as cronosystem interaction involving elements of settlements background, social interaction and acceptance of lifestyle which becoming a customary in establishing acceptable culture.

5.2 Life Quality Theory

Every individual in the city wants a comfortable, prosperous and harmonious life. It is related to the quality of life they enjoy and how do they adapt to developments in the environment in order to get the desired quality of life, although not in the elite area and equipped with all the amenities you want.

Figure 3 : Life Quality Theory
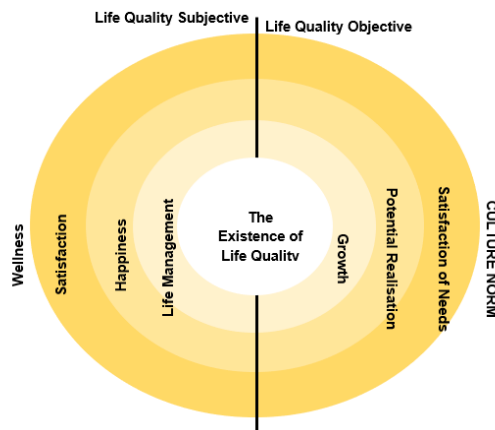
Source: Ventegodt, Merrick & Andersen, 2003

According to the Quality of Life Theory presented by Ventegodt, Merrick & Andersen (2003), two main components of quality of life are reviewed from the objective and subjective quality of life. Objectives are the KPIs or goals of life to be achieved through growth, the pursuit of potential realization and the steps to satisfy the needs until cultural norms are established. The objective of quality of life refers to what needs to be met while another component is the subjective on life quality comprises of on how to obtain the quality of life through life management, happiness and wellness that ultimately lead to life satisfaction.

6. Suggestions to Increase Life Quality in the City

Quality of life is related to the pursuit of individual needs and the development of potential in expanding social networks and participation in activities in residential and community areas that can realise a person's contribution and role in the community they inhabit. Measuring quality of life

is not just fulfilling biological and physical needs but also involves the need for emotional, growth and cultural values.

The measures to improve the quality of life in the city of Kuala Lumpur are based on the role of the Kuala Lumpur City Council in disseminating traffic, providing social services that are important to the well-being of the people, ensuring electrical and water services to the entire city, providing green areas for leisure purposes, expanding children's potential through a variety of activities and programmes, expanding community relationships through local religious and cultural activities, promoting efficient public transport, accessible health services and a clean and pollution-free atmosphere.

Al-Attas (2002) has categorically stated that there are three things; (1) self (nafsiyyah), which involves knowledge and praiseworthy nature, (2) body (badaniyyah), such as body health and safety, and (3) everything other than self and body (kharijiyyah) such as wealth and otherwise promoting the well-being of the body, and other matters connected with it. According to Nurzahidah & Raihanah (2011) , being put simply, the situation within a peaceful and quiet resulting from a heart free from doubt and anxiety as a result of feeling inner peace, a pleasure, a joy and delight.

Al-Ghazali urges that moderation can balance human morality with a modest attitude and does not exceed the limits in all aspects of life because happiness built on the basis of selfishness is temporary, despicable and devastating. He described the external influences of material and physical pleasures such as money, rank, and social statuses were only temporary and should be contained to give way to spiritual calmness.

Human beings have the right to a healthy life and should meet the basic needs for all aspects besides maintaining or protecting integrity ecosystem. Therefore, it is up to this principle that every development undertaken should take into account the quality of life of the people without neglecting any space at the time of development. Malaysia Eighth Plan on life quality status has gained a place in Malaysia where every country's economic growth needs to be accompanied by an improvement in the quality of life of all. This approach explains each progress is not only focusing on the economy but also on human development.

Sustainable concepts are often associated with quality of life encompassing economic, social and environmental systems to ensure a comfortable and productive living environment. This goal is not only to cater the needs of the present generation but also for future generations. It is basically too difficult to measure the quality of life for a community or for an individual in particular.

There is no one method that can include human satisfaction to the maximum quality of life.

7. Conclusion

Living in a big city like Kuala Lumpur is a great challenge for its residents in terms of competitiveness and struggle for survival. Each self potential must be developed to play a role and make a contribution that is relevant to the current situation and reality in the settlement. The vibrant city life of Kuala Lumpur, the country's economic center, the bustling capital of various amenities, infrastructure and employment opportunities has become a focal point for migrants and even foreigners to enjoy the economic prosperity they offer.

The comfortable surroundings of modern life offered make living in the city an ideal space for self and talent development while also enjoying a comfortable, prosperous and happy lifestyle. However, the biggest threat to the city population is the significant gap between rich and the poor and the emergence of various criminal activities and the spread of inappropriate culture that can damage community institutions and destroy the happiness built.

The government is committed in ensuring high quality of life in urban and rural areas in line with Malaysia's aspiration to become a developed nation. This means that urban and rural areas will be attractive places to live with quality housing and services as well as a variety of leisure and cultural activities. Currently, most Malaysians live in areas with stable electricity supply, access to clean water and health services. Moving forward, Malaysia faces new challenges and opportunities including rapid urbanization and rising people's expectations, demographic change and the impact of global climate change. Various initiatives and plans have been undertaken to improve the quality of life, namely:

1. Build a viable and attractive residential area.
2. Establish a public transport system that prioritised the people.
3. Transform healthcare to improve quality and provide universal access.
4. Ensuring access to quality and affordable housing.
5. Provide more efficient public utilities and services.
6. Ensuring a safe living by taking steps to reduce crime and improve the safety of the people.
7. Cherish the country's natural treasures

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