

## Environmental Functions Provided by Malaysian Local Government: User's Perception

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**Abstract: Problem statement:** This research is about users' perception of environmental functions provided by local government focused on Kedah Local authorities. Recently, the local authorities in Malaysia have been soundly criticized for poor management and they are subjected to daily barrage of questions and complaints directly in the press and tougher higher ups at the state and federal levels. **Approach:** Due to the problems arise, this research tried to identify the factors affecting the user's perception of environmental functions provided by local government in Kedah and to examine the environmental functions provided by local government with level of users' perception in Kedah. Hypotheses testing showed the research design and quantitative method through questionnaires provided to the respondents. **Results:** The samplings of this research are 300 respondents in Kulim Municipal Council, Sungai Petani Municipal Council and Alor Star City Council. In this study, simple random sampling was used where only 100 respondents in each local authority. This research used Descriptive Statistic and Pearson Correlation for data analysis purposes. Data were collected from 228 users in October 2007 until January 2008. In this research three hypotheses were testing. The hypotheses which include cleanliness, collection and disposal wastes, drainage and sewage were not rejects. As a result, a finding indicated that all independent variables have significance with user's perception of environmental functions provided by local government in Alor Star City Council, Sungai Petani Municipal Council and Kulim Municipal Council. Overall of the research, all of the two objectives answer in this research which are to determine whether environmental functions provided by local government satisfies the users and to identify which extent users satisfies of environmental functions provided by local government. **Conclusion/Recommendations:** The recommendation was made to the local government and local society. In future research, rules and regulations should be more transparent taking by the government and relying on participation by all parties. Citizens should be more responsible to whatever environmental functions by the government to make every cent and dollars putting is complying with value of public money.

**Key words:** Local government, local authorities, environmental functions, cleanliness, collection and disposal wastes, drainage and sewage

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### INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian administrative system is divided into three major levels of hierarchy: the Federal Government, State Government and Local Government, the latter being the local authority for its area. In 1976, the Local Government Act 1976 (Act 171) (2004) was promulgated providing a consolidated framework for local authorities. The rate of urbanization tends to correlate significantly with economic growth. One

inevitable consequence of this is the structural change and the consequent rapid economic growth that has averaged an impressive 8% per annum in the past decade has been the increasing urbanization of the country. In fact, in 2005 the population living in urban areas was 35% but this figure has shot up to 55% in 2006 (Malaysia, 2006). The enlargement of urban areas also means an increase in the problems, needs and complexities relating to urban governance. It has created a new set of challenges that entail an

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enhancement in the capacity and capability of the Malaysian local authorities.

Local Government Authorities (LGAs) hold a large number of facilities that place demands on resources. They have a responsibility to use and maintain a wide range of property assets including classified and heritage buildings, single purpose facilities and state of the art multipurpose facilities. In addition, amalgamations may have caused many authorities to have surplus property assets that duplicate functions. Resources allocated to running and maintaining underperforming or superfluous facilities directly restrict the authority's ability to provide the community with better services. However, communities often perceive closures as a reduction in service and resist the closing of facilities. Perhaps driven by a distrust of economic rationalism, communities often doubt the motives of managers who wish to close or combine facilities. Councils often have difficulties communicating the reasons for decisions about facility closures to the community with accountability. Thus, this research try to identify the factors affecting the user's perception of environmental functions provided by local government in Kedah and to examine the environmental functions provided by local government with level of users' perception in Kedah.

Over the years, the local authorities in Malaysia have been soundly criticized for poor. Due to the importance of local government services that local authorities provide, they are subjected to daily barrage of questions and complaints directly in the press and tougher higher ups at the state and federal levels. The question on what is meant by performance in the public service context and how can it best be measured always arise due to lack of services and human resources and often times, due to poor management and incompetence and not mention sheer arrogance, fraught with problems. Since local authorities are at the level of government that is close to the people, they also face increased pressure for more accountability for better transparency. In addition, the local authorities are facing greater challenges, due to increase in urbanization and education levels of the population, also industrialization of the country. Besides the administrative pressures, such changes have also exerted pressure on the management of local government finance. A major crisis experienced in the system of local government in developing countries is one of ill-adjusted functions in terms of meeting the demands of its citizens.

Besides that, local authorities have to bear the burden of having to pay for some of privatizes services such as privatization of solid waste disposal and related cleaning services. A number of the poorer district

authorities have been faced with lack of funds to pay the consortium due to higher cost of private provision of the services. Nevertheless, these events have led local government in the country to be more focused in the remaining services. Thus, we need to look hard at what is working well and what is not working well at present by expressing this as "doing more with less" and "doing less with less" by looking for what priority to measure performance in local government.

In recent years, the media has taken an active role in highlighting many issues that concern the public interest, which demand the local authorities to be more accountable. Is the general public receiving the best value for its tax dollars? Because of some circumstances, this question lead to factor that public does not get many explanations from their local authorities until some problem or issues cropped up and received the media coverage in the press or televisions. Because of this, the community is becoming more vocal in voicing their grouses over the services provided by their local authorities. Their also demanding clearer and greater accountability for the way the local authority makes decision.

In large measure, these queries exist because too many local governments conceive of organize and implement various policies by influencing of political circumstances. Admittedly, the all policy maker should rely on organizational theory such as leadership, commitment, decision making and so forth when measuring performance in local government. The "showstopper problems, however, are almost always the problems that flow from the politics of organizational change, in other words, the 'political will' of the leaders in local government is of importance as well as being realistic with the challenges of implementing ambitious in their respect municipality. This study can provide useful of information for the better transparency of local government functions from user's perception. It can help the local government to provide better services (environmental) through the users need. In this research, there are three objectives of this study is to identify the factors affecting the user's perception of environmental functions provided by local government in Kedah and to examine the relationship between environmental functions and level of user's perception in Kedah.

**Hypothesis:**

**Hypothesis 1:**  $H_1$ : There is a significant difference among the users' perception on cleanliness.

**Hypothesis 2:**  $H_1$ : There is a significant difference among the users' perception on collection and disposal wastes.

**Hypothesis 3:**  $H_1$ : There is a significant difference among the users' perception on drainage and sewage.

Due to the big sample sizes, this study only focused on the three local authorities which are Sungai Petani Municipal Council, Kulim Municipal Council and Alor Star City Council, Kedah. This research concentrates on one function only which is environmental including cleansing, collecting and disposal waste, drainage and sewage, sanitation and beautification programme. Therefore, the findings might not represent the actual user's perception of environmental functions provided by local government in Kedah and the findings of the research could not be generalized to all local authorities in Malaysia.

Over the years, some of these district councils have been upgraded to a higher status. These include the Alor Star City Council in Kedah Local Authorities (Kerajaan Negeri Kedah, 2007). The functioning of local government is based on the principle of ultra-vires and general competence (Norris, 1980). The situation is very clear which is "Local government in Malaysia operates on the principle of ultra-vires (...) local authorities may perform those functions as specifically enumerated in its various Acts and bylaws. It has no general competence to undertake any activity according to affordability (...) it cannot undertake any activity that is beyond its powers or else it is ultra vires. Being a corporate [body] it can sue and be sued as well".

In spite of what have been written, local authorities in Malaysia have been given wide powers within the Local Government Act of 1976 (Act 171) (2004). The functions not only include mandatory functions but discretionary functions as well. The mandatory functions include all critical functions such as refuse collection, street lighting and activities pertaining to public health. Discretionary functions include all development functions such as providing amenities, recreational parks, housing and commercial activities (Phang Siew Nooi, 1997).

Additionally, Greenhalgh and Worpole (1996) in a study prepared for the UK Department of the Environment examined 12 main case studies and 26 supplementary case studies of good practice in urban parks across ten major areas: Planning, managing, competing, delegating, maintaining, building, monitoring, involving, funding and moving on. Both these studies were conducted within the context of declining quality in maintenance and development of urban parks and open spaces, also encompassing increased vandalism, lack of cleanliness and fears for public safety. This analysis was subsequently followed up by Clark (1997). On top of this, the role of the tendering process within the wider leisure industry has also been the subject of a number of international case studies collated by Sayers (1997).

In 1993, the Government of Malaysia initiated the privatization of urban solid waste disposal. That concept called for a feasible privatization plan for solid waste management, including storage, collection, transportation, processing and disposal of solid wastes. The stated objective was to provide an integrated, well-planned, well-managed, efficient and effective, technologically advanced solid waste management system in order to enhance the quality of the environment as part of Vision 2020. The thrust of the system is on waste reduction and the use of technology to recover resources from waste (recycling, composting, incineration), thereby minimizing the need for final disposal, which is expected to become burdensome in the future. In fact, before the privatization exercise, some local authorities had already been contracting the waste collection service to a number of contractors. In other instances, the local authorities managed solid wastes by using their own staff and resources (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 2007).

In the case of Kuala Lumpur, City Hall has privatized the solid waste management for most of its area to Alam Flora Sdn Bhd. The privatization exercise includes taking on those staff and workers in the Urban Services Department of City Hall who opt to join the company, movable and immovable properties or assets, as well as contractors previously employed by the city authority for waste collection. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that while solid waste management is now under the responsibility of the private sector, it does not mean that the local authority can pass all its responsibility over to the company (Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 2007).

By referring to Street, Drainage and Building Act 1974 (Act 133) (2005) under the provision of section 133, local authority may to set up fund Improvement Service Fund (ISF) to generate financial contribution prior development approval granted. The fund actually was prescribed only to be used for a specified range of infrastructure uses. In some cases, developers are required to pay for improvement of existing infrastructure or construction of new infrastructure such as drainage system, water and local road. With regards to the infrastructure improvement and infrastructure provision within the local councils' jurisdiction, vests on various ministries or departments including the local authority itself to financing infrastructure projects (Nong, 1990). The local authorities in responses to this have taken steps to upgrade its infrastructure facilities within its areas. Since then millions has being spent on the provision of infrastructures in the form of roads, water, domestic solid waste incinerator facilities and electricity supply, telecommunication facilities and others through various relevant implementation departments in the local authority (Nong, 1990).

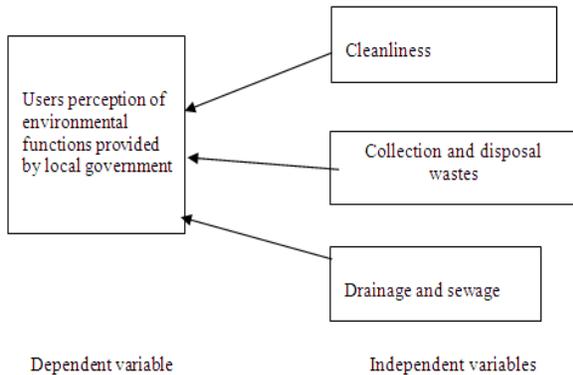


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework

**Theoretical framework:** Theoretical frameworks for this study are based on discussions and past research review. In short, there are five independent variables that can influence the user's perception by local authority functions such as cleansing, collection and disposal wastes and drainage and sewage.

The theoretical frameworks for this research can be seen as in Fig. 1.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The population of the research covers respondents that are receiving environmental facilities provided by three local authorities (Sungai Petani Municipal Council, Alor Star City Council and Kulim Municipal Council) in Kedah. The researcher's used simple random sampling which are 300 respondents was selected. The data was collected using questionnaire. Questionnaire is a written set of question to which respondent record their answer (Sekaran, 2006). In order to analyze the data, the statistical techniques used are Pearson Correlation and Descriptive Statistic.

**RESULTS**

In results, the researchers discuss about the respondents demographic such as gender, age, marital status, race, monthly salary and level of education. Based on the Table 1, majority of the respondents are female which representing 50.88% (n = 116). Meanwhile, males are the minority which representing 43.42% (n = 99).

As indicated in Table 2, Respondents are categorized into four age groups which range from less than 20, 21-29, 30-, 40-49 and more than 50 years old. Majority of the respondents' age are 30-39 years old which representing 37.67% (n = 84), followed by

29.60% (n = 66) under group of 40-49 years old, 23.32% (n = 52), 6.28% (n = 14) under group of more than 50 years old and 3.14% (n = 7) under group of less than 20 years old.

Based on the Table 3, majority of the respondents are married which representing 71.93% (n = 164). Meanwhile 25.00% (n = 57) of the respondents are widow or widower. Minority of the respondents are bachelor which representing 3.07% (n = 7).

In the Table 4, majority of the respondents are Malay which representing 84.65% (n = 193), 8.33% (n = 19) representing Chinese respondents, 5.26% (n = 12) representing Indian respondents and 1.32% (n = 3) representing others.

Table 1: Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Valid	Male	99	43.4	46	46
	Female	116	50.9	54	100
	Total	215	94.3	100	
Missing	System	13	5.7		
Total		228	100.0		

Table 2: Age of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Valid	Less than 20 year	7	3.1	3.1	3.1
	21-29 year	52	22.8	23.3	26.5
	30-39 year	84	36.8	37.7	64.1
	40-49 year	66	28.9	29.6	93.7
	More than 50 year	14	6.1	6.3	100.0
Missing	System	223	97.8	100.0	
	Total	5	2.2		
Total		228	100.0		

Table 3: Marital status

		Frequency	Percent	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Valid	Bachelor	57	25.0	25.0	25.0
	Married	164	71.9	71.9	96.9
	Widow/widower	7	3.1	3.1	100.0
	Total	228	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Race of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Valid	Malay	193	84.6	85.0	85.0
	Chinese	19	8.3	8.4	93.4
	Indian	12	5.3	5.3	98.7
	Others	3	1.3	1.3	100.0
	Total	227	99.6	100.0	
Missing	System	1	0.4		
Total		228	100.0		

Table 5: Monthly salary

		Frequency	Percent	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Valid	Less than RM1000	19	8.3	8.5	8.5
	RM1000-1500	86	37.7	38.6	47.1
	RM1501-2000	56	24.6	25.1	72.2
	RM2010-2050	40	17.5	17.9	90.1
	More than RM2500	22	9.6	9.9	100.0
	Total	223	97.8	100.0	
Missing	System	5	2.2		
Total		228	100.0		

Table 6: Education level

	Frequency	Percent	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Valid				
Primary school	2	0.9	0.9	0.9
SRP/PMR	8	3.5	3.6	4.4
SPM	103	45.2	45.8	50.2
STPM/ diploma/A level	80	35.1	35.6	85.8
Bachelor degree	23	10.1	10.2	96.0
Master degree	6	2.6	2.7	98.7
Ph.D.	3	1.3	1.3	100.0
Total	225	98.7	100.0	
Missing System	3	1.3		
Total	228	100.0		

Table 7: Significant difference among the users' perception on cleanliness

	Users perception	Cleanliness
Pearson correlation	1	0.340(**)
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
N	222	222.000

\*\* : Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

As indicated in the Table 5, most of the respondents' current income are between RM1000-RM1500 representing 38.57% (n = 86). Meanwhile the other respondents' current income are less than RM1000 which representing 8.52% (n = 19).

In the Table 6, majority of the respondents' education level are SPM which representing 45.78% (n = 103), 35.56% (n = 80) representing STPM/Diploma/A level, 10.22% (n = 23) representing bachelor degree, 3.56% (n = 8), 2.67% (n = 6) representing master degree, 1.33% (n = 3) representing Ph.D. and 0.89% (n = 2) representing Primary School.

The Pearson correlation obtained for the eight intervals scaled variables shown as indicated as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference among the users' perception on cleanliness.

In the Table 7, there is a significant difference among the users' perception on cleanliness where p<0.01 (p = 0.000) and r = 0.340. Therefore the researcher does accept H<sub>1</sub>.

**Hypothesis 2:** H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference among the users' perception on collection and disposal wastes.

As indicated in the Table 8, there is a significant difference among the users' perception on collection and disposal wastes where p<0.01 (p = 0.000) and r = 0.300. Therefore the researcher does accept H<sub>1</sub>.

**Hypothesis 3:** H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference among the users' perception on drainage and sewage.

In the Table 9, there is a significant difference among the users' perception on drainage and sewage where p<0.01 (p = 0.000) and r = 0.350. Therefore the researcher does accept t H<sub>1</sub>.

Table 8: Significant difference among the users' perception on collection and disposal

	Users perception	Collection and disposal
Pearson correlation	1	0.300(**)
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
N	222	222.000

\*\* : Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 9: Significant difference among the users' perception on drainage and sewage

	Users perception	Drainage and sewage
Pearson correlation	1	0.350(**)
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
N	226	226.000

\*\* : Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

## DISCUSSION

All of hypotheses were not rejected by the researchers based on the findings. The findings has been evaluated by the researchers and proposed the following conclusion and recommendations.

**Hypothesis 1:** H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference among the users' perception on cleanliness.

The hypotheses which is there is a significant difference among the users' perception on cleanliness, where p<0.01 (p = 0.000) and r = 0.340 and the significant level was p<0.01 while the finding showed that p = 0.000. It means that cleanliness influenced users' perception on of Environmental functions provided by Local Government.

**Hypothesis 2:** H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference among the users' perception on collection and disposal wastes.

The second hypotheses on the significant of different among the users' perception on collection and disposal was not rejected by the researchers due to the there is significant difference among the users' perception on collection and disposal wastes where p<0.01 (p = 0.000) and r = 0.300. The significant level were p<0.01 while the finding showed that p = 0.000. It means that collection and disposal wastes influenced users' perception on of Environmental functions provided by local government.

**Hypothesis 3:** H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference among the users' perception on drainage and sewage.

The hypotheses which is there is significant different among the users' perception on drainage and sewage was not rejected by the researcher due to the there is significant difference among the users' perception on drainage and sewage p<0.01 (p = 0.000) and r = 0.350. The significant level were p<0.01 while the finding showed that p = 0.000. It means that drainage and sewage influenced users' perception on of environmental functions provided by local government.

The recommendations were made to the local government, local society, environmental services provided by local authorities and future research.

**Local government:** Based on the findings, the researcher found that the environmental functions provided by local government such as cleanliness, collecting and disposal waste, drainage and sewage, sanitation and beautification programme are well provided by the local government. Among five environmental functions provided by local government, the highest frequency on user's perception on environmental functions provided by local government is on the cleanliness where 72.86% (n = 153) of the respondents agree that local authority has provides cleanliness in environmental functions. Thus, local government has to make sure that the other four environmental functions such as collecting and disposal waste, drainage and sewage, sanitation and beautification programme provided by local government is having the same perception gain by cleanliness.

**Environmental services provided by local authorities:** Based on the findings, the researcher found that the most environmental functions provided by local government is cleanliness where 72.86% (n =153) of the respondents agree that local authority has provides cleanliness in environmental functions. The other four environmental functions provided by local government have less percentage rather than cleanliness. Environmental services provide by the local authorities should be upgrade for better services. Upgrading the environmental services is very crucial to make sure that users are satisfies with the environmental functions provided by the local government. Functions provided by Local Government will be positive and more satisfied about it.

**Future research:** As for future research, local government can determine the other important environmental functions that influence the users' perceptions of environmental functions provided by local government. The future research also needs to focus more on the demographic background such as salary, marital status and educational background whether to see these three factors influence the users' perceptions of environmental functions provided by local government.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the outcome of the research, the environmental functions provided by local government satisfied users because according to the findings, the

users totally agree that local government provided enough environmental function at their living area which is achieved in first objective. It means that local government has provided good environmental services for the users at their living area. The second objective is to examine the relationships of environmental functions provided by local government with level of users' perception in Kedah. Based on the findings, all independent variables do have relationship with the users' perception towards environmental functions provided by Kedah local government. Overall of the research made by the researcher, it can be said that all of the two objectives were answered in this research. The recommendations should be made to the local government, local society, environmental services provided by local authorities and future research. Thus, local government has to make sure that the environmental functions such as collecting and disposal waste, drainage and sewage provided by local government put in placed and standing in the eyes of the people.

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