

Public Satisfaction in Local Authorities: A Case Study in Kedah

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Abstract

This paper is consists of environmental functions provided by local government focused on Kedah Local authorities in cleanliness matters. Due to public complaints rising in cleanliness and poor services given by the local authorities nowadays lead to this issue to be studied. The primary objective of this study is to investigate the level of users' satisfaction on environmental functions provided by local government in Kedah. This study used Descriptive Statistic and Pearson Correlation for data analysis which one hypothesis was tested and significant was obtained. A finding indicates that independent variable have significance relationship with environmental functions with public satisfaction. Recommendations were

propose to increase better performance for the councils in servicing public in its area. In future research, local authorities should be more active collaboration with the stakeholders to boost up the performance in local services.

Keywords: Local Government, Local Authorities, Environmental Functions, Cleanliness.

1. 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) was promulgated providing a consolidated framework for local authorities. The enlargement of urban areas also means an increase in the problems, needs and complexities relating to urban governance.

Local 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 under-performing 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 reveal the user's perception in demanding new approaches, strategies as well as practical and effective answers and solutions for waste disposal and cleanliness functions provided by local government in Malaysia by referring to Kulim, Alor Star and Sungai Petani as a case to be studied.

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 (Hazman Shah, 2006). 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.

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.

2. Literature Review

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. The functioning of local government is based on the principle of ultra-vires and general competence (Norris, 1980).

In spite of what have been written, local authorities in Malaysia have been given wide powers within the Local Government Act of 1976. 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. Swan (1995) conducted mail questionnaires with responses from 108 local authorities to examine the controversial role played by CCT in these developments. 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 etc.), 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 (MHLG, 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 Council, 2007).

3. Methods

Quantitative method was used by researchers in the research design in order to have better understanding or to the functions provided by local government. The population was among residents in Alor Star City Council, Sungai Petani Municipal Council and Kulim Municipal Council in Kedah. The study used simple random sampling to select the respondent, in which every person of the population has a chance of being selected. The data was collected using questionnaire. Questionnaire is a written set of question to which respondent record their answer (Sekaran, 2006). Every each of these sections represents the identified variables. In order to analyze the data, the statistical techniques used are Pearson Correlation and Descriptive Statistic.

4. Findings

The study makes outline of the finding about the profile of the respondent and in relations of the hypotheses to see whether the hypotheses can be rejected or not to be rejected. In the profile of respondents, 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 years old, 21-29 years old, 30-39 years old, 40-49 years old and more than 50 years old. From the table, 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.

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 PhD. 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:

H₁: There is a significant difference among the users' perception on cleanliness.

H₀: There is no 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 accepted H₁ and rejects H₀.

5. Recommendations

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

5.2.1 Local Government

Based on the findings, the researcher found that the environmental functions provided by local government such as cleanliness and waste disposal programme are well provided by the local government. Among two 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.

5.2.2 Environmental Services Provided by Local Authorities

Based on the findings, the study 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.

5.2.4 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 public perceptions of environmental functions provided by local government.

6. Conclusions

The ability to identify or estimate the possibilities of challenges that will be faced by the Local Authorities in this country needs high level of sensitivity and awareness among top management in running the environmental functions as needed by the public. From the findings, its clear there is a relationship between public satisfactions with cleanliness functions provided by the councils in Kedah. Even the significance was there but the value of public satisfaction perceived should be increased in future. The councils should enact through scientific and systematic process to overcome the issues of public complaints of this functions by the focus group. It can be presented by all staff, entrepreneurs, politicians, state administrative, NGOs, professional associations, community associations and the public

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Table 1 Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	99	43.4	46.0	46.0
	Female	116	50.9	54.0	100.0
	Total	215	94.3	100.0	
Missing	System	13	5.7		
Total		228	100.0		

Table 2 Age of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
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
	Total	223	97.8	100.0	
Missing	System	5	2.2		
Total		228	100.0		

Table 3 Marital Status

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
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 Percent	Cumulative Percent
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	.4		
Total		228	100.0		

Table 5 Monthly Salary

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than RM1000	19	8.3	8.5	8.5
	RM1000 - RM1500	86	37.7	38.6	47.1
	RM1501 - RM2000	56	24.6	25.1	72.2
	RM2010 - RM2050	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 Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Primary School	2	.9	.9	.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
	PhD.	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

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