

THE CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING URBAN RENEWAL INITIATIVES. CASE STUDY: DARUL HANA, KUCHING, SARAWAK

Cabaran Melaksanakan Inisiatif Pembaharuan Bandar Kajian Kes: Darul Hana, Kuching, Sarawak

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ABSTRACT *The aim of this study is to highlight the challenges of sustainable urban renewal and redevelopment project faced by key stakeholders and project implementers based on a case study i.e. the Darul Hana Redevelopment Program in Kuching, Sarawak. Urban renewal in developing country often involves redevelopment of congested and unplanned settlements or dilapidated brownfield areas into a liveable, vibrant, sustainable, neighbourhood and new urban centres. This is fundamental and equally complex approach to promote sustainable development and improve the quality of life of the people. The method involves interviewing key experts i.e. officials from Ministry of Natural Resources and Urban Development Sarawak, Land and Survey Department, Land Custody and Development Authority and Private Consultant. Transcriptions of the in-depth interviews of the key informants are thematically analysed. The key findings reveal that improving the quality of life, sustainable environment, spur economic growth for the benefit of the impacted population through urban renewal or redevelopment is a complex process. The core elements of sustainable development are the areas that require political will, governance, administrative and governance require reforms; provision of infrastructure, facilities and heritage preservation; regulations and guidelines need to be improved; and stakeholder and public participation in planning must be intensified.*

Keyword: Urban renewal, Redevelopment, Project Implementation

ABSTRAK *Matlamat kajian ini adalah untuk menonjolkan cabaran projek Matlamat kajian ini adalah untuk menonjolkan cabaran projek pembaharuan dan pembangunan semula bandar mampan yang dihadapi oleh pihak berkepentingan utama dan pelaksana projek berdasarkan kajian kes iaitu Program Pembangunan Semula Darul Hana di Kuching, Sarawak. Pembaharuan bandar di negara membangun selalunya melibatkan pembangunan semula penempatan yang sesak dan tidak terancang atau kawasan usang menjadi pusat bandar yang boleh didiami, bertenaga, mampan, kejiranan dan bandar baharu. Ini adalah pendekatan asas dan sama kompleks untuk menggalakkan permanganate mampan dan meningkatkan kualiti hidup rakyat. Kaedah ini melibatkan menemu bual pakar utama*

iaitu pegawai dari Kementerian Sumber Asli dan Pembangunan Bandar Sarawak, Jabatan Tanah dan Ukur, Lembaga Penjagaan dan Kemajuan Tanah dan Perunding Swasta. Transkripsi temu bual mendalam terhadap informan utama dianalisis secara tematik. Penemuan utama mendedahkan bahawa meningkatkan kualiti hidup, alam sekitar yang mampan, memacu pertumbuhan ekonomi untuk manfaat penduduk yang terjejas melalui pembaharuan atau pembangunan semula bandar adalah satu proses yang kompleks. Elemen teras pembangunan mampan ialah bidang yang memerlukan kemahuan politik, tadbir urus, pentadbiran dan tadbir urus memerlukan pembaharuan; penyediaan infrastruktur, kemudahan dan pemeliharaan warisan; peraturan dan garis panduan perlu diperbaiki; dan pihak berkepentingan serta penyertaan awam dalam perancangan mesti dipergiatkan.

Kata kunci: Pembaharuan bandar, Pembangunan Semula, Pelaksanaan Projek

1. Introduction

The response by the urban managers in urban development and management is pivotal to addressing the need of the urban community, including those who migrate from rural to urban centres, which often seek economic and employment opportunities, including the demand for better urban services such as education, health and proper housing. Urban renewal in a developing country usually involves the redevelopment of congested and unplanned settlements or dilapidated brownfield areas into a liveable, vibrant, sustainable and orderly neighbourhood and new urban centres. Urban renewal, redevelopment or regeneration are fundamental to promoting sustainable development and improving the quality of life of the people through unlocking economic benefits, encouraging social inclusivity and ensuring a sustainable environment within vibrant urban living conditions associated with activity concentration, the diversity of land-use design, and the accessibility of a place (Barreca et al., 2020).

For the past two decades, Sarawak has been experiencing population concentration, where more than 1.7 million currently live in Kuching, Miri, Sibul and Bintulu (Economic Planning Unit, 2021). Thus, orderly and sustainable development, including urban renewal, is crucial to accommodate more population and their needs. Urban issues and problems require holistic and comprehensive planning and implementation plans. Therefore, it is vital to fill the gap by understanding the challenges and indicators towards sustainable urban renewal initiatives. This article aims to fill this gap by proposing a urban renewal framework based on data obtained from a sample of expert opinions of a case study, i.e. the Darul Hana Urban Renewal Program. The findings can inform the local or state planning authority's efforts and face the challenges of urban renewal program implementation.

2. Urban Renewal

Urban renewal is vital to stimulate the economy, revive dilapidated and unused buildings to provide great urban spaces and leverage the sustainable urban environment. Urban renewal as a tool for elevating the significance of urban fabric and recuperating the sustainability of the urban environment (Zheng et al., 2021). As urban development takes place, urban areas are constantly changing in terms of sprawling, declining, or facing transformation in response to the current economic situation, social pressure, and environmental condition (Couch, 1990; Shen & Wen, 2021). *Urban renewal* is as an initiative of an interventionist to transform and change an urban area by improving its physical environment, infrastructure, and provision of social services, thus enhancing the quality of life (Maculan et al., 2020). Urban regeneration refers to reinvestment in various aspects, predominantly physical infrastructure development and social, economic and cultural development of developed urban area areas (Alzamil, 2018).

In most cases, urban renewal programs and projects generate higher land values, where many benefits may accrue to landowners rather than low-income households, particularly those rented households (Pinto & Sablik, 2016) as rented households struggling with the disadvantages of low-income, unsustainable urban renewal may lead to more unaffordable prices of the housing unit in the inner city due to gentrification. In principle, gentrification refers to the shift from a low-income area to a middle and high-income neighbourhood (Mehdipanah et al., 2017).

Urban renewal also requires a good and efficient urban management as stated by Xu et al. 2020. An urban renewal framework covers a broad area of planning and management of scarce physical and financial resources for the provision of infrastructure and services, as well as the practice of good governance for administration and finance by the competent government (Xu et al., 2020). The policies, plans, programs, and operational practices are the key concerns of urban management for urban renewal programs, which aim to provide access to basic needs such as infrastructure, housing, and job opportunities for the urban population (Engin et al., 2020). Therefore, to ensure access and successful delivery of the plans and programs, the government policies and public sector roles in the operational process to facilitate and encourage private initiatives such as urban renewal programs are crucial (Engin et al., 2020). Hence, to provide the needs of the urban population with limited resources, particularly land and funding, the operational framework of integration and collaboration between the public and private sectors is imperative towards successful urban renewal implementation.

3. Study Area

The study area is Darul Hana Redevelopment, Kuching, an urban renewal program of transformation of the village living into a modern environment by revitalising past day culture among the present generation towards a sustainable new township (LCDA, 2012). Darul Hana redevelopment area is located along the Sarawak riverfront covering approximately 320 hectares that includes the existing urban environment of low-lying mangroves and flood plains scattered by several traditional Malay 'kampung'. The village settlements house most vulnerable groups of over 15,000 people, who evolved on the waterfront over the last 100 years (LCDA, 2014). In principle, this redevelopment provides a more significant opportunity for integrated planning and achieving sustainable urban development in the new township area while redeveloping social, environmental, and economic sustainably in the traditional Malay village settlement into a thriving place to live, work and learn. See Figure 1&2.



Figure 1. Key Plan of Darul Hana Development

Source: LCDA 2014



Figure 2. Site of Darul Hana Development

Source: Adapted from Google Imagery

The planning of the Darul Hana urban redevelopment programme was mainly government-led, particularly in funding and implementation mechanisms consisting of the traditional Malay villages of *Kampung Seberang Hilir* along the Sarawak River

4. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology with a concern for qualitative data. i.e. the understanding of meanings in how people as an individuals or group make sense of their world and how they interpret and experience different events that attribute to a social problem (Cresswell, 2013; Wilson et al.,2015).

4.1 Participants

Access to participants is crucial in qualitative data approach (Saunders and Townsend, 2018). The participants fit the criteria set by the researcher. The criteria are that they are experts in the field relevant to the issue with more than 10 years' experience in social and environmental challenges projects; have been directly involved with the project in the case study area and attached to organisations relevant to the project in the case study area. In this study, the respondents selected had a special relationship with the case or phenomenon under investigation, have extensive work experience in urban planning and urban renewal. In addition, they were actively involved in several master plan preparations and implementation. Table 1 summarises the details of the key informants. The participant of this study were senior officials from four significant stakeholders that are responsible for both general urban planning in Sarawak and specifically in urban renewal namely:

- 1) Ministry of Natural Resources and Urban Development (MUDeNR),
- 2) Land and Survey Department Sarawak (L&S),
- 3) Urban Planner Practitioner from Private Consultant, and
- 4) Land Custody and Development Authority (LCDA)

Table 1.

Details of the Key Informant for In-depth Interviews

Key Informant	Position	Organisation	Year of Experience
Key Informant 1	Assistant Director of Planning	Government Survey Department	>25years
Key Informant 2	Senior Urban Planner	Ministry of Natural Resources and Urban Development	>15years
Key Informant 3	Company Director/Town Planner	Planning Consultant	>20 years
Key Informant 4	Property Development Manager	Land Custody and Development Authority	>20 years

4.2 Data Collection

Qualitative data i.e. participants' responses were collected through the interview method. Each participant had an appointment at a time convenient to both the interviewer and the participants. Interviews were in-depth and semi-structured, and guided. The seventeen structured questions were organized into four (4) parts relevant to the study's objectives, i.e. focusing on the expert opinions regarding governance, social aspects, environmental challenges and urban renewal recommendations. During the in-depth interview, the sessions were recorded using voice memos and short notes.

4.3 Data Analysis

The aim of the qualitative data analysis is to capture the rich insights of qualitative interview data. Qualitative data analysis often rely on thematic analysis i.e. a generic approach in the analysis of qualitative data (Stone et al., 2020). According to Casterle et al. (2012), the researcher themselves must process the data and subsequently identify the themes, categories, or concepts based on meanings, perspectives and connections while the process of analysis starts once the first interview has been conducted and continues until the point of data saturation. This study employed the data analysis process in thematic analysis involving the five main steps: familiarizing with data, coding to organise the meanings, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes (Casterle et al. 2012; Sandelowski 1995; Stone et al., 2020;). The procedure include manually transcribing, reading, and capturing the initial ideas. Thus, the codes facilitate the search for potential themes in the data. The researcher continuously ask the question “does the content of the interview reflect the concepts to answer the research question”?

The researchers systematically sort and sift through the participants’ remarks to identify similar phrases, relationships or connections between variables, and common sequences, which result in interpretation of themes; this practice is common across many qualitative analytic approaches (Miles & Huberman, 1994.) The summary in Table 2 below shows the remarks of the participants in the first column and the second column identifies the common interpretations among the remarks. The interpretations are descriptive in nature. In the last column, the researchers group this common interpretation into themes reflecting concepts and/or ideas that relate to the focus of the study. Patton (1980) noted that “inductive analysis means that the themes and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data. Themes are aligned with the conceptual goal of the study i.e. to highlight the challenges faced by stakeholders in urban renewal program implementation and therefore are designed in response to the study’s primary research focus. The five (5) primary themes emerged. They are

1. program development governance;
2. extensive inter-agencies collaboration and intervention;
3. stakeholders, public and community engagement;
4. Provision of public facilities and amenities;
5. Development of distinct criteria and guidelines for urban renewal.

Table 2. Interpretations of participants' remarks and Themes

Excerpts Responses from Key Participants (P)				Commonalities within the Data	Relationships/ Connections	Theme
P1	P2	P3	P4			Theme 1
<p><i>“ the government was trying to acquire the land but it was not with the intention of moving kampung folks out, it was to rebuild and give them better living condition “urban renewal project it’s a lot of political will.</i></p>	<p><i>“In Kuching the government has identified the renewal project which is Kampung Seberang Hilir now they name it’s as Darul Hana Project”</i></p>	<p><i>“About Darul Hana, I think the intention of the government policy want to modernize the kampung, very unstructured kampung there, they go called big scale total change or facelift,”</i></p>	<p><i>“urban renewal project in Kuching is only Darul Hana, the one and only”</i></p>	<p>The government intends this Project to benefit the people</p> <p>The government recognise that the Project brings about Social change</p> <p>This Project aims towards creating better living conditions</p>	<p>Government and Local People/ Kampung folks. Government agencies and private sectors</p>	<p>The governance of the program ensures that a systematic framework of management and implementation.</p>

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Excerpts Responses from Key Participants (P)				Commonalities within the Data	Relationships/Connections	Theme
P1	P2	P3	P4			Theme 2
<p><i>“All agencies that involved in planning, policy making for urban areas as well as those involved in actual development, from the policy making up to the implementation part”.</i></p>	<p><i>“it should be the government , in Sarawak context ... as implementing agencies, ..in Sibul, local council involved in planning, physical condition of...”</i></p>	<p><i>“In the very beginning when this idea was being conceptualized, the challenges was actually explaining to the Ketua Kampung and the people what the</i></p>	<p><i>“For Darul Hana, the most difficult thing is to convince the people to move out from the kampung, it’s</i></p>	<p>Government agencies involvement in planning and policy making.</p> <p>Government implementation is necessary for this kind of renewal project.</p>	<p>Government agencies and private sectors</p>	<p><i>Extensive inter-agencies collaboration and intervention required for efficient management of resources.</i></p>

		<p>government is trying to do, of course there is always a lot of presumptions and accusation that the government is trying to, by force to chase this people away and acquire the land,"; and "Urban renewal, by right should be with public participation unless government is ready to go and acquire everything and have it redone, redo the whole thing".</p>	<p>easy to move the river rather than move people, because they have different thought and different thinking so that why, they have 40,000 people there, so they have 40,000 thoughts, so it's very difficult to convince them to move out"</p>	<p>Government actions and involvement in the project Requires intervention over land matters.</p> <p>Government has to convince the benefits are for the people affected by the project redevelopment nt.</p>		
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Excerpts Responses from Key Participants (P)				Commonalities within the Data	Relationships/Connections	Theme
P1	P2	P3	P4			Theme 3
<p>"I think sustainable renewal programe have to be, cannot be heavily subsidize d by</p>	<p>"It is a real pity, to have those kind of very centralise location a dying out"; and "Urban</p>	<p>"urban renewal referring to redevelopment project for problematic area, or area that</p>	<p>the responsibility of the private sector to assist government in developing</p>	<p>Project needs support from other sector.</p> <p>Development needs all sectors</p>	<p>Private investors and Government</p>	<p>The redevelopment project success depends on the support and participation of various</p>

<p><i>government it needs to be supported by the private investment as not only CSR but part of the responsibility of the private sector to assist government in development</i></p>	<p><i>renewal is sort of every development that relook into existing area, it's not greenfield it is actually an upgrade or improvement to brownfield area, whether its involved change in land use or an improvement to existing land use."It's the responsibility of all.</i></p>	<p><i>need to be revived for example kampung areas or any areas within the city center or within the suburban area, especially kampung that close to city area".</i></p>	<p><i>in what we call that to come out with more vibrant area within the city area".</i></p>	<p>involvement . Project involves kampong and suburban areas. Project will involve relocation of people. Project involves government to convince those affected there will be benefits for them. Project will bring benefits eg. better infrastructure and living conditions.</p>		<p>stakeholders affected by the project.</p>
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Excerpts Responses from Key Participants (P)				Commonalities within the Data	Relationships / Connections	Theme
P1	P2	P3	P4			Theme 4
<p><i>"they need special attention, they need special facilities, they need open space, they need drainage, they need</i></p>	<p><i>the physical appearance and the economic activities can attract people, so especially the inner city the old town area</i></p>	<p><i>there a real problem, is that problem is actually that kind of huge intervention with a lot of investment in terms of money (for facilities</i></p>	<p><i>"if you fit in to that master plan or progress can you make it faster" a problem there can be resolved through some kind of heritage action plan..</i></p>	<p>Those affected need better infrastructure, drainage and space for living. People want preservation of historical buildings. Master planning must include</p>	<p>Physical plan and social benefits Physical modern planning and historical preservation</p>	<p>Theme 4 <i>Provision of adequate public Facilities amenities and respect the Heritage</i></p>

<p><i>facilities, but how to provide the facilities without replanning the area, because we having problem with the space for special planning for that area,"</i></p>	<p><i>you have to preserve the historical building".</i></p>	<p><i>development), the man power and the time to go into all that infrastructure & facilities</i></p>	<p><i>not everything is urban renewal, some is preservation</i></p>	<p>historical preservation. Project must preserve significant memories of the site. Proper planning is required.</p>		
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Excerpts Responses from Key Participants (P)				Commonalities within the Data	Relationships/Connections	Theme
P1	P2	P3	P4			Theme 5
<p><i>"incentive is that can you the approval is it faster or do you have a guidelines saying that ok you have urban renewal and you must have master plan or local plan that in place in your mind, ...that facilitate your application .</i></p>	<p><i>"we need to look at it, in terms of whether we want to maintain the same land use or we want to change land use"</i></p>	<p><i>planning is about certain kind of idealism to achieve some goals, whether we plan of fresh area or planning for urban renewal kind of thing we look at it in that kind of sequence, is</i></p>	<p><i>"the main point, we want to plan for people, plan for people, if you want to plan for people, first we must know people's need".</i></p>	<p>The need for guidelines and criteria of urban renewal projects Master plan and zoning plan promote a balance development and organised approach. Guidelines and incentives able to facilitate submission of plans.</p>	<p>Guidelines and regulation can facilitate submission of plans The masterplan must be in tandem with the action planning and community/peoples' needs and aspirations</p>	<p><i>Developing Distinct Criteria for Urban Renewal Guidelines and Incentive to Attract Private Sector</i></p>

Adapted from: de Casterlé B.D, Gastmans, Bryon, Denier, (2012), QUAGOL: A guide for qualitative data analysis, International Journal of Nursing Studies, Volume 49, Issue 3.

5. Findings and Discussion

The following are findings on the five themes, which emerged from the qualitative analysis conducted.

5.1 Theme 1 Program Development Governance

Based on the participants' perspectives, the Darul Hana programme sets an example of a substantial-scale government-led urban renewal programme and management that aims to benefit the people through relocation and restructuring of a resettlement scheme towards better facilities, safety and environmental improvements in the study area. In addition, they posit that transformation in governance through government policies, aspirations, and commitment to improving quality of life is necessary. The political will and vision are only sufficient if the transformation of governance through translation into the formulation of policy and organizational aspiration, and the more significant commitment by every level of agencies into operational processes towards improving the quality of life of the people.

5.2 Theme 2 Extensive inter-agencies collaboration and intervention are necessary

Collaboration among agencies is necessary to solve the challenges the Local Planning Authority faces in implementing urban renewal programs. The findings of this study show that the local planning authority i.e. the State Planning Authority (SPA) must collaborate with the implementing agency responsible for coordinating and addressing the challenges in the implementation of Darul Hana Redevelopment i.e.the Land Custody and Development Authority (LCDA. In addition, it has to engage with the Land and Survey Department (L&S) as well as Housing Development Corporation (HDC). As a government-led program, the main challenges of Darul Hana evolve around technical land matters, particularly in determining the land value of each unit lot boundaries of the affected communities, the number of families and extended families in each house. In addition, a challenge is convincing the local communities of the government vision and strategies regarding relocation and resettlement of the existing communities. The key informants have given different perspectives on ensuring a sustainable approach to urban renewal, as highlighted in Table 1. Key informant 1 highlighted that convincing people is the hardest part in the implementation process. In addition, informants emphasized that convincing the people to accept the idea and understand the government's vision for urban redevelopment through local community engagement is a challenge.

5.3 Theme 3 Stakeholders involvement, public, private investment

The informants accentuated that the sustainable approach to urban renewal should involve the private sector as the leading player. In addition, a pertinent challenge faced by the key stakeholders and implementing agencies such as the Ministry of Natural Resources and Urban Development Sarawak, Land and Survey Department Sarawak and Land Custody and Development Authority is to convince the people to accept the ideas for relocation and resettlement to the new development area in i.e. Darul Hana. The stakeholders' engagement and public participation is a strategy of bottom-up planning approach in designing sustainable urban renewal programs. Nonetheless, various agencies have made significant efforts to strengthen the engagement and involvement of stakeholders and the local community in the planning process to meet the community's needs.

5.4 Theme 4 Provision of Adequate Public Facilities and Amenities and Heritage Preservation

Given the initiative to improve the existing brownfield area, urban renewal, redevelopment, regeneration, and revitalization often ties in with the critical needs for adequate and meet basic social needs of the current community in the old, dilapidated, derelict and unplanned settlements. To be able to provide better facilities and amenities for the local community, the planning, especially the urban renewal and redevelopment approach will make the space available for community new facilities and amenities. The problem is how it is relevant to the plan for urban renewal by key informant two below:

The local context of the culture and heritage significance of the designated area must appropriately document and address the master plan and design. The culture and heritage imposed significant essence on the vibrancy of the new and surrounding development. Both quotations briefly accentuated the significance of heritage preservation and conservation of the area.

5.5 Theme 5 Developing Distinct Criteria for Urban Renewal Guidelines and Incentive to Attract Private Sector for Sustainable and Balance Development Approach

In this study, the findings show that the urban renewal program and project require the formation of specific guidelines and incentives to facilitate and ease the process of planning and implementation of the program. The finding shows the similarities of the views shared by key informants three and four on the need for detailed configuration and establishment of distinct criteria urban renewal guidelines, particularly on types of urban renewal programs or projects, an incentive to the developer and, notably, the availability of the master plan.

The urban renewal program and project require a different set of guidelines and incentives in terms of redevelopment control standards and the change use of land under the master plan or zoning plan of the designated area. In addition, the

incentives can attract the private sector and implementing agencies to promote a sustainable and balanced development approach. The responses indicate importance of guidelines, incentives, and master plan to facilitate the proposed concurrent submission of urban renewal and redevelopment.

The significance of the political will and commitment set the direction of policy formulation in respective urban development areas, especially urban renewal and redevelopment in Sarawak as addressed in the 12th Malaysia Plan. The policy may lead to reviewing the legal framework or amendment of laws relevant to the respective area, formulating new regulations, strengthening the monitoring and integrated spatial planning for development plan or master plan and establishing detailed guidelines for urban renewal and redevelopment initiatives. A rational planning process can guide the actors in government, people representatives or stakeholders, and the private sector to participate and contribute towards sustainable development and to be competitive and incorporate vital social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Identifying the criteria for development project types is pivotal to avoiding unnecessary or unsustainable approaches in the action plan. While quotation from other key informants highlighted the critical needs for local community engagement. Based on the in-depth interviews and thematic analysis findings, the themes set a foundation for developing a comprehensive framework for sustainable urban renewal in Sarawak

6. Conclusion

The existing communities within the Darul Hana Redevelopment area are mainly involved in informal economic activities such as hawkers and small cottage industries that generate relatively low income for its population. Urban renewal or redevelopment of Darul Hana is necessary to regenerate and revitalise the area in line with sustainable development, where it can unlock the economic potential and balance the social and well-being of the people within the area and its surrounding. Future research questions include *How best to attract private sector investments to lead urban renewal in a less vibrant urban area; How can we mitigate the impact of relocation and resettlement of the local community in Darul Hana Redevelopment?*

Urban renewal or redevelopment is inevitably a complex approach to improving the quality of life, promoting a sustainable environment and generating economic growth for the benefit of the affected population. Future research direction includes formulation of indicators that support redevelopment efforts. The analysis and findings proved that the fundamental dimensions of sustainable development are the key areas that need addressing through political commitment, governance, and transformation in governance, administration, improvement in regulations and guidelines, and the intensification of stakeholders' engagement and public participation and involvement.

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