

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE LOCAL RESIDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF ISKANDAR MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the perceptions of the local residents on the socio-economic changes of Iskandar Malaysia. The study investigates the local people's knowledge and perception towards Iskandar Malaysia development as one of the main economic accelerators in the southern part of Peninsular Malaysia. A survey involving semi-structured questionnaire on 916 respondents was carried out among the local people within Iskandar Malaysia and interviews with the local authorities and stakeholders were also conducted to assess their perceptions toward the development. Results from the study revealed that the majority of the respondents lacked the necessary awareness and avenue to participate in the Iskandar Malaysia's decision making process. The findings of the study showed that the new regional development area is under Malaysian government's directive and used complete top-down approach in its implementation approach.

Keywords: regional development, regional economic development, perceived impacts, Iskandar Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Regional planning has been one of the ways to enhance economic growth in Malaysia, as claimed by Ngah, (2010) and Salleh (2002). Thus, since the introduction of regional development in Malaysia, various types of regional developmental authorities have been established at local and international levels (Eskandarian and Ghalehtimouri, 2011; Ngah, 2010; Krimi, et. al, 2010). What differentiate Iskandar Malaysia from other regional development in Malaysia, is the large developmental scale and direct financial injection from Federal level amounted to RM 1.92 billion and RM 0.92 billion under the 9th and 10th Malaysia Plans respectively. EPU (2014) highlighted that the total investment allocation for Iskandar Malaysia is the highest among regional economic corridors under the 9th Malaysia plan. The study focuses on Iskandar Malaysia development due to several reasons as listed below.

Formerly known as the Southern Region, Iskandar Malaysia has been formed as a region at the state of Johor in the 5th Malaysia Plan (1986-1990). Consequently, Iskandar Malaysia along with other regions was rebranded as economic regions under the 9th Malaysia Plan. Again, the Southern region has been renamed and restructured as the Southern Johor Economic Region (SJER) (2006-2025), which covers the district of Johor Bahru and part of the Pontian district. Kassim (2006) claimed that the establishment of SJER is a sign of Johor state's aggressive agenda to achieve economic growth. A Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP) and development blueprints were prepared and Iskandar Regional Development Authority (IRDA) was established along in the IRDA Act 20071 under the Federal Act (Act 664). This is to assist the local authorities in the region and it makes Iskandar Malaysia unique in term of its regional form, structure as well as its developmental organisation.

Numerous studies on Iskandar Malaysia development have been conducted (Ibrahim and Ali, 2014; Ali and Ahmad, 2009) but research that evaluates the perceived impacts of the local population on Iskandar Malaysia is limited. One of the ways to assess the stakeholders' perception on the impact of the developmental is through the employment of semi-structured questionnaire survey (Salleh et. al, 2013). Numerous researchers (Olajoke, Aina and Ogini, 2013; Türker and Öztürk, 2013; Aref, Redzuan and Gill, 2009) believed that perception study is useful and significant to bring changes to the population.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of Regional Planning and Development in Malaysia

Some researchers (Wood, 2005; Aslam and Hassan, 2003) found that the objectives of regional developmental strategies in Malaysia have been successfully implemented. On the other hand, other researchers (Eskandarian and Ghalehtimouri, 2011) argued that most of the regional developmental areas implemented under the Federal system may not achieve their objectives due to the unequal distribution of wealth between the States involved in the development. Moreover, according to Jusoh (1992), the attainment of regional objectives has been proven to be elusive, especially when the economic activities are not directly under the control of the federal government. Although the establishment of regional developments in Malaysia is said to be consistent with rapid economic growth, as mentioned by Lee (2004), the issue of regional and urban-rural disparities is still one of the pertinent issues in Malaysia. Nevertheless, review of past literature indicates that the implementation of regional economic development is still unable to solve the socio-economic issues and high cost of living among residents (Salleh, 2002). In addition, unequal income and economic developmental distribution are among the problems that affected the quality of life of Malaysian population (Ragayah, 2008) and past research also indicates that there is a strong connection between economic growth and social well-being (Ülengin et. al, 2011).

The Iskandar Malaysia Development

In line with the establishment of Iskandar Malaysia in 30th July 2006, a single authority, Iskandar Regional Development Authority (IRDA) was established in 2007, under the Federal Act (Act 664). Fundamentally, the town planning system in Malaysia practised a three-tier governmental levels namely federal, state and local levels. At the federal level, the national planning sets out the general policies and directions for the planning and development of the country. Meanwhile, as discussed by Abdullah, Harun and Abdul (2011) and Talhah (2007), the decision making process in Malaysia are mostly using top-down approach. Iskandar Malaysia was developed based on Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP) which has been divided into seventeen chapters and adopted by the relevant Federal authorities and State agencies (Ramli and Akmal, 2006). In addition, Iskandar Malaysia has several blueprints that are formulated to 'provide detailed guidance in terms of development policies, strategies and implementation on subjects such as land use, economy, environment and infrastructure' (IRDA, 2011).

People's Perception on Developmental Impacts

According to Olajoke, Aina and Ogini (2013), the scales and degrees of individuals' perceptions vary according to their social and economic backgrounds. Socio-economic factors refer to income (Arth, Lam and Broadwin, 2002), educational level (Turner et al., 2008), occupation (Baum, 2004) and age (Turner et al., 2008). Limited literature was found on the impacts of developments including: Mensah (2012a, 2012b) and Chindo (2011). Generally, individuals with higher educational backgrounds are more likely to have positive perceptions and receptive towards changes of development (Turner et al., 2008). Literature also illustrates that the increase in job opportunities and the level of income affect individuals' perception and individuals who receive economic gain or personal benefits from the development are more likely to have positive perceptions. Additionally, younger generations tend to be more supportive and have positive expectations on the impacts of development. These findings summarised the relationships between individuals' socio-economic backgrounds and their perceptions towards developmental impacts. (Arth, Lam and Broadwin, 2012, Turner et al., 2008) and Chindo (2011).

METHODOLOGY

The data collection method used in this research is based on the formulated research questions and objectives. The research questions of the study are as follows:

RQ1: What are the types of developmental impacts? RQ2: What are the developmental impacts of Iskandar Malaysia? RQ3: What are the socio-economic factors influencing the local people's perceptions towards the impact from Iskandar Malaysia? From the research questions, two main research objectives were developed which are: RO1: to evaluate the developmental impacts of Iskandar Malaysia development, and RO2: to investigate the local people's perceptions on the developmental impacts in relation to their socio-economic background.

This study used semi-structured questionnaires that were distributed to local residents within the 5 flagship zones of Iskandar Malaysia. According to Yamane (1973), at least 400 samples need to be collected to represent the total population of 1,055,328 in order to achieve 95 per cent of confidence level. Initially, 2,000 questionnaires were distributed based on convenient sampling. However, only 916 questionnaires were fully completed representing 0.087 percent of the total population in the study area. By using convenient sampling, various methods were employed to collect data including face-to-face survey, mail, telephone survey and also structured interview with local authorities and developmental agencies in Iskandar Malaysia. The combination of these methods is either known as the mixed-method as mentioned in Mertens and Hesse-Biber (2012) and Onwuegbuzie, Leech and Collins (2012), while some define it as the triangulation method (Fielding, 2012; Meijer et. al, 2002). Overall, mixed method data collection was applied in the study to validate the findings and complement the methods to gather information for the research.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This section discusses the data analysis and findings based on the data collected from the population in the study. The socio-characteristics of respondents in the study area are presented in Table 1 below. As shown in Table 1 below, a large number of respondents were Malay females with tertiary education. The majority of the respondents were within the age range of 19 to 78 years with an average monthly household income of RM 18,000. This shows that there is an imbalance in the respondents' ethnicity, education and gender distribution. Thus, the survey result could not represent the population in the study area accurately. However, 54.9 per cent of the respondents claimed that they have stayed in Iskandar Malaysia for more than 6 years. This indicates that respondents have experienced developmental changes in the study area.

Analysis on Development Impacts in Iskandar Malaysia

The Relative Importance Index (RII) was used to determine the rank of the perceived developmental impacts by the respondents in Iskandar Malaysia. Hence, a list of 24 developmental impacts on economic, social and environment aspects were listed in the questionnaire and the respondents rated the developmental impacts based on a scale of 0 - 4, with 0 as no knowledge, 1 as the lowest score or totally disagree and 4 as the highest or totally agree. The result of RII of the developmental impacts in Iskandar Malaysia is shown in Table 2 below.

Based on the results shown in Table 2, there was an increase in respondents' perception towards the ability of the project to attract more international investors (0.711), create more job opportunities (0.699) and provide more business centre and areas for local people (0.683). In relation to social developmental impacts, respondents believed that Iskandar Malaysia helped to reduce poverty problem among the local population (0.723) and increase infrastructure development (0.698) followed by improvements in public health centre and facilities (0.686). These findings show that respondents believed Iskandar Malaysia did help to improve the social well-being of population in the study area.

Results in Table 2 also show that the RII score of 0.713 on environmental impact due to development of Iskandar Malaysia where respondents believed the development in Iskandar Malaysia did caused negative effects to the climate of the local area (0.550). Thus, although Iskandar Malaysia development has been claimed to improve the economic and social well-being of the local population, at the same time, respondents believed that it caused adverse environmental effect to the area.

In referring to results in Table 3 above, a Pearson's r correlation test on respondents' perceptions on developmental impacts with their age found Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) are in negative values and ranged between -0.066* to -0.127**. According to the Guildford's (1973) Rule of Thumb, this would suggest a negative and low relationship indicating the younger generation perceived the developmental impacts in Iskandar Malaysia more positively when compared to the older generation. In addition, as shown in Table 3, Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) results for respondents' perception on developmental impacts with their monthly income indicate positive values ranged between -0.080* to 0.136**. Based on Guildford's (1973) Rule of Thumb, the positive values indicate that the population from middle and high income group has perceived developmental impacts in the study area more positively as compared to low income group. Similarly, the results from Spearman rho correlation coefficient (r) indicates positive values ranged between 0.070* to 0.156**. This shows that as respondents' education level increase, respondents' perception on developmental impacts in Iskandar Malaysia will also increase. In other words, respondents with higher education background perceived the development impacts more positively as compared to those with lower education background. These findings are in line with findings from past literature

Table 1 Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	%	Mean	Skewness
Age in years	Less than 20 years old	3	0.3	36 years old	0.60
	21 – 30 years old	309	33.7		
	31 – 40 years old	368	40.2		
	41 – 50 years old	161	17.6		
	51 and above	75	8.2		
Ethnicity	Malay	680	74.2	1	1.78
	Chinese	172	18.8		
	Indian	60	6.6		
	Others	4	0.4		
Highest Educational level	Never attended School	5	0.5	4	-1.13
	Primary school	43	4.7		
	High School	319	34.8		
	Tertiary Education	549	59.9		
Marital status	Single	215	23.5	2	0.76
	Married	673	73.5		
	Divorced	7	0.8		
	Widowed	21	2.3		
Households' Monthly income (RM)	No Response	23	2.5	RM 2,808	2.17
	Unemployed / student	26	2.8		
	Less than RM 1000	59	6.4		
	RM 1001 – 2000	267	29.1		
	RM 2001 – 3000	280	30.6		
	RM 3001 – 4000	137	15		
	RM 4001 – 5000	58	6.3		
	RM 5001 – 6000	25	2.7		
RM 6001 and above	41	4.5			
Gender	Male	359	39.2	2	-0.44
	Female	557	60.8		
Duration of stay in Iskandar Malaysia (years)	No Response	49	5.3	11 years	0.38
	Less than 1 year	36	3.9		
	1 – 5 years	328	35.9		
	6 – 10 years	195	21.3		
	11 – 15 years	84	9.2		
	16 – 20 years	56	6.1		
More than 20 years	168	18.3			
Occupation	No Response	82	9	4	0.93
	Farmer	2	0.2		
	Self-employed	37	4		
	Government employee	316	34.5		
	Private employee	201	21.9		
	Housewife	153	16.7		
	Odd Jobs	22	2.4		
	Unemployed	76	8.3		
	Retirees	11	1.2		
	Student	16	1.7		

Table 2: Economic Developmental Impacts in Iskandar Malaysia

Development Impacts	Frequency of Respondents										RII Score	Rank
	No knowledge (Score of 0)		Strongly Disagreed (Score of 1)		Disagreed (Score of 2)		Agreed (Score of 3)		Strongly Agreed (Score of 4)			
	F (%)	Score	F (%)	Score	F (%)	Score	F (%)	Score	F (%)	Score		
The development of Iskandar Malaysia reduce poverty problem of the local people	100(10.9)	0	57(6.2)	57	169(18.4)	338	464(50.7)	1392	126(13.8)	864	0.723	1
The development project and economic activity proposed changes the physical environment in Iskandar Malaysia	87(9.5)	0	22(2.4)	22	77(8.4)	154	482(52.6)	1446	248(27.1)	992	0.713	2
The development of Iskandar Malaysia attract more investors from abroad	95(10.4)	0	28(3.1)	28	58(6.3)	116	476(52)	1428	258(28.2)	1032	0.711	3
The development of Iskandar Malaysia provide more job opportunities to the local people	89(9.7)	0	32(3.5)	32	78(8.5)	156	495(54)	1485	222(24.2)	888	0.699	4
The development of Iskandar Malaysia increase the development of infrastructure in the local area	83(9.1)	0	26(2.8)	26	82(9)	164	533(58.2)	1599	192(21)	768	0.698	5
Iskandar Malaysia includes the development of public health centre and facilities	89(9.7)	0	32(3.5)	32	81(8.8)	162	497(54.3)	1491	217(23.7)	868	0.697	6
Iskandar Malaysia includes the provision of public transportation	97(10.6)	0	30(3.3)	30	100(10.9)	200	472(51.5)	1416	217(23.7)	868	0.686	7
The development of Iskandar Malaysia reduce social and crime problem in the local area	118(12.9)	0	31(3.4)	31	89(9.7)	178	415(45.3)	1245	263(28.7)	1052	0.684	8
The development of Iskandar Malaysia includes the provision of business centre and area for local people	97(10.6)	0	39(4.3)	39	108(11.8)	216	439(47.9)	1317	233(25.4)	932	0.683	9
Iskandar Malaysia includes the development of public institution and education centre	114(12.4)	0	28(3.1)	28	121(13.2)	242	413(45.1)	1239	240(26.2)	960	0.674	10
The development of Iskandar Malaysia open the job opportunities for local people in rural area	88(9.6)	0	38(4.1)	38	123(13.4)	246	485(52.9)	1455	182(19.9)	728	0.673	11
The development of Iskandar Malaysia improves the social well-being of local people in Iskandar Malaysia	93(10.2)	0	32(3.5)	32	133(14.5)	266	489(53.4)	1467	169(18.4)	676	0.666	12
The development of Iskandar Malaysia increase income of the local people	93(10.2)	0	37(4)	37	142(15.5)	284	479(52.3)	1437	165(18)	660	0.660	13
The development of Iskandar Malaysia increase local business productivity and profitability	107(11.7)	0	39(4.3)	39	126(13.8)	252	491(53.6)	1473	153(16.7)	612	0.650	14
The development proposed in Iskandar Malaysia affects conservation of natural heritage and culture of the local people	113(12.3)	0	52(5.7)	52	149(16.3)	298	385(42)	1155	217(23.7)	868	0.648	15
The development of Iskandar Malaysia increase the provision of housing for local people	131(14.3)	0	114(12.4)	114	151(16.5)	302	341(37.2)	1023	179(19.5)	716	0.588	16
Impacts on minorities or indigenous people since 2009	198(21.6)	0	121(13.2)	121	168(18.3)	336	220(24)	660	209(22.8)	836	0.533	17
The development proposed in Iskandar Malaysia caused negative effect on climate	187(20.4)	0	123(13.4)	123	147(16)	294	237(25.9)	711	222(24.2)	888	0.550	18
The development proposed in Iskandar Malaysia caused adverse effects on residential areas	186(20.3)	0	114(12.4)	114	183(20)	366	211(23)	633	222(24.2)	888	0.546	19
The development proposed in Iskandar Malaysia includes the exploration of forest areas, virgin forest	213(23.3)	0	118(12.9)	118	140(15.3)	280	197(21.5)	591	248(27.1)	992	0.540	20
The development proposed in Iskandar Malaysia caused noise emissions	201(21.9)	0	111(12.1)	111	173(18.9)	346	211(23)	633	220(24)	880	0.538	21
The development proposed in Iskandar Malaysia caused changes in farmland	219(23.9)	0	130(14.2)	130	143(15.6)	286	215(23.5)	645	209(22.8)	836	0.518	22
The development proposed in Iskandar Malaysia caused improper discharge of waste water	210(22.9)	0	129(14.1)	129	172(18.8)	344	227(24.8)	681	178(19.4)	712	0.509	23

Notes: F: Frequency, %: Percentage

Furthermore, the study also tested respondents' perceptions on the developmental impacts in Iskandar Malaysia against their socio-economic background. The result of analysis is illustrated in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Respondents' Socio-economic Background and their perception on Development Impacts

Development Impacts	Age		Monthly Income (since 2009)		Education	
	Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)	Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)	Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)
Perceived Economic impact						
The development of IM provides more job opportunities to the local people	-0.123**	0.000	0.085*	0.010	0.110**	0.001
The development of IM encourages more establishment of local business	-0.123**	0.000	0.103**	0.002	0.138**	0.000
The development of IM increases local business productivity and profitability	-0.087**	0.008	0.021	0.538	0.106**	0.001
The development of IM increases income of the local people	-0.094**	0.004	0.057	0.088	0.074*	0.024
The development of IM opens the job opportunities for local people in rural area	-0.123**	0.000	0.082*	0.014	0.120**	0.000
The development of IM attracts more investors from abroad	-0.046	0.167	0.136**	0.000	0.118**	0.000
Perceived Social impact						
The development of IM improves the social well-being of local people in IM	-0.104**	0.002	0.063	0.058	0.070*	0.033
The development of IM improves access to public facilities and amenities	-0.078	0.018	0.107**	0.001	0.093**	0.005
The development of IM increases the development of infrastructure in the local area	-0.083*	0.012	0.126**	0.000	0.097**	0.003
The development of IM increases the provision of housing for local people	-0.127**	0.000	0.037	0.268	0.108**	0.001
The development of IM reduces poverty problem of the local people	-0.088**	0.007	0.040	0.227	0.072*	0.028
The development of IM reduces social and crime problem in the local area	-0.066*	0.044	0.053	0.115	0.047	0.151
Perceived Environmental impact						
The project and economic activity proposed changed the physical environment in IM	-0.101**	0.002	0.103**	0.002	0.140**	0.000
The development of IM affects the minorities or indigenous people	-0.053	0.112	0.098**	0.003	0.090**	0.006
The development of IM effects on the local climate	-0.064	0.051	0.080*	0.016	0.094**	0.004
The development of IM increases the noise emissions	-0.098**	0.003s	0.109**	0.001	0.156**	0.000

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has identified that the perceptions of the local population toward the impacts of Iskandar Malaysia on the aspects of economic, social and environment varies depending on the socio-economic factors of the respondents. While the previous regional development strategies in Malaysia have focused more towards agricultural activities and frontier development, the new Iskandar Malaysia has been devised to focus on high-impact economic activities. The study found that greater economic gains or personal benefits received by a person will influence their perception toward the development and therefore an effective and meaningful bottom-up approach, would promote the acceptance of the local people toward new development projects.

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