Exploratory Research on Sports Facilities Construction in Malaysia

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Abstract: Sports and sports facilities development have improved rapidly over the past years in Malaysia. However, such improvements are inadequate compared to the overall development of sports at international level. In recent years sport is getting more and more influential and it will continue to grow in importance, even for developing countries. Recent developments have witnessed the use of sports facilities as a force for urban growth. The aim of this research is to examine the relationship between sports facilities and urban development in Malaysia. The study uses the expert opinion of town planners, as key players in decision making, working in the specific government's agencies either in Kuala Lumpur or all 13 states, who are responsible for formulating and administrating all national policies relating to town and country planning. The paper argues that simultaneously with emphasis on creating a sports culture among Malaysian, there is a need for a new perspective and a new approach for sports facilities development in the future. In addition, further investigation on the impacts of sports facilities might help to improve the effectiveness and contribution of sports facilities to urban development.

Key words: Sports facilities, Town planners, Development, Malaysia, Town and Country planning.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years sport is getting more and more influential and it will continue to grow in importance as the world develops into global village, sharing the English language, technology, and sports (Majumdar and Mangan, 2005) even for developing countries. In addition, there is growing demands for sports facilities development. In Malaysia, there is currently tremendous interest in sports and a wave of sports investment. However, such improvements are inadequate compared to the overall development of sports at international level (National Sports Policy, 2007). Sport in Malaysia is only considered as an industry in the last ten years (Aminuddin and Parilah, 2008). While in the Eighth Malaysia Plan, emphasis was given to the development of high performance sports programs, in Ninth Plan (2006-2010) emphasis was placed on creating a sports culture among Malaysians to promote a healthy lifestyle as well as achieve excellence and recognition in sports at the national and international levels. Sports and sports facilities developments have improved rapidly over the past ten years especially after the country hosted the 16th Commonwealth Games in 1998.

The sports facilities have changed through the years. Recent developments have witnessed the use of sports facilities as a force for urban growth. Cities have seized upon sports facilities as a means to redevelop specific district within their downtowns (Chapin, 2002). On the other hand, changing the nature of planning and urban development in cities, in addition, increase of globalisation lead to changing the trend of sports facilities in recent years. Recent development of sports facilities has taken in consideration the most important issues of all the environment and actors of the facilities, from fans, to players, from communities to investors. However, they have also considered as an important role in urban development to spur redevelopment in dilapidated districts or to catalyse new development in emerging suburban areas.

This paper is based on exploratory survey on the role of sports facilities in the Malaysian context. It uses quantitative data gathered through postal survey and aims to examine the relationship between sports facilities and urban development in Malaysia. It is structured as follows. The next section reviews the current literature.
on sports facilities particularly regarding to changes in the nature and trends of sports facilities development in cities. The third section concentrates on research methodology. The results and discussion are provided in section four. Finally, conclusions extract lessons from empirical investigation.

2. Literature Review:

There is current sports facilities construction boom universally. These facilities are either for hosting sports mega-events such as Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games or smaller scale facilities. The new Olympic movement was proclaimed in 1894 and held its first competition in Athens in 1896. Ever since then the sports have emerged in their modern forms and the sports facilities have evolved into one of the great public building forms of the twentieth century, regarded, at its best, as an essential and positive element of civic life (John et al., 2007). On the other hand, there is requirement of huge money for construction, almost certainly with substantial public investments, and which involved too much money compared to the cost benefit analyses. There are also needs for ancillary construction that are often built at public expense with every provision of a new facility. In addition, there is a high cost for maintenance and the truth is that it is now very difficult for a sports facility to be financially viable without some degree of subsidy (John et al., 2007). There are requirement for various trends and rationales utilise to support and justify public investment on sports facilities development. But, although so many researches findings there are still an ongoing debate to build new sports facility with public funds (Sam and Scherer, 2008).

Most of the literature on sports facilities come from the North American experience as their professional sports facilities are very famous and popular. The US context involving national sporting league with big crowds at each game, and team franchises which are mobile between cities is distinctive (Searle, 2002). Sports facilities construction boom have started in the 1990s in America. These facilities developed by local states to attract professional sports teams and franchises from other cities and devote considerable public funds from local taxpayers’ money to these projects (Thornley, 2002). While in the US, cities compete with each other for inward investment and the sports industry, stadia in the UK are funded largely by national public funding or public-private partnership (Suzuki, 2007).

On the other hand, increased pressure on cities to adopt an entrepreneurial stance to attract mobile global capital, cities and localities are actively involved in initiative to refurbish and refine national and local identities. Entrepreneurial approach in cities leads to changes in the nature of planning and urban development in a series of large-scale urban redevelopment projects (Frieden and Sagalyn, 1989). However, one of the hallmarks of entrepreneurial city has been the construction of highly visible and very expensive special activity generators or flagship projects. Cultural sports and entertainment facilities are considered as catalytic facilities which receive public support in order to spur development in the immediate surrounding area (Sternberg, 2002). The industrial city which was the quintessential production city, based on an economy of making something, whereas the new postmodern 'fantasy city' (Hannigan, 1998) is a consumption city, based on an economy of leisure and dreams, marketing fantasy and commercial developments.

A widening number of developed and developing cities are promoting the cultural dimension -the arts, entertainment, festivals, leisure, tourism- and remaking cities as 'places to play' (Eisinger, 2000). However, the rises of so-called 'entrepreneurial cities' enhance the competitiveness of cities within the framework of a globalising economy. Sport has transcended the boundary from being considered as an active leisure pastime to being recognised as having considerable social and economic influence in contemporary society (Davies, 2005). Asian cities are re-imaging competitive in the global marketplace. The range of strategies often seems to mirror developments in Western cities (Yuen, 2008). The major cities of Asia-including Shanghai, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur- have in the past decade actively expanded their 'culture industries': heritage conservation, cultural precincts, festival marketplace, iconic cultural centers and more recently, sports infrastructure to promote city regeneration (Silk, 2002; Kim et al., 2006).

On the other hand, through reviewing the literature it obtains that the ability of sports facilities to stimulate urban development depends on several considerations. The empirical studies globally reveals that the extent to which sports facilities development contribute to their urban surrounding development depends on a wide range of factors including the location, context and usage of the facilities as well as the culture of sports among people (Barghchi et al, 2009).

3. Methodology:

The research attempts to examine the relationship between sports facilities and urban development in Malaysia. The expert opinion of town planners working in the government's agencies, either in Kuala Lumpur or all 13 States of Malaysia considered providing information for this research. The postal questionnaire sent
out to the Head of 13 states Town and Country Planning Departments, Head Quarters of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and Master Planning Department in the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (KLCH). The questionnaire was pre tested in a pilot study and sent out by mail to the official addresses together with a cover letter signed by the Dean of the faculty and also a self addressed envelope of the writer by July 17th 2009. It was exploratory survey consists of close-ended questions with an option of specification, which needed further elaboration from the respondents. However, in the Malaysian context planning matters are related to the above government's agencies.

The research covered the planning offices throughout the country therefore the mailing approach is the best way to reach the selected samples. Although the major problems with this method is the low response rate (Kumar, 2005) but it followed by reminder later and phone calls as mentioned by Creswell in 2009 for following up to ensure a high response rate. Finally, 11 filled questionnaires came back which obtain a 73 per cent response rate. However, this response rate is considered as a very high and lucky in this method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents results and discussions from the survey. It uses quantitative data which were analysed using SPSS 16.0. The questionnaire which sent out to the head of the government's agencies consisted of three main sections: sports facilities development, urban development and the relationship between sports facilities and urban development.

4.1 Sports Facilities Development:

In the first section of the questionnaire town planners were asked to state the factors thought might be important for selecting the location of the sports complex. Of the most important factor, land availability is cited by 90.9 per cent of the town planners. On the other hand, client based is given as 18.2 per cent the least important factor. Other factors are land use regulation, being given by 63.6 per cent respondents, visibility for the city and land cost both quoted by 36.4 per cent.

In this section of the questionnaire respondents also were asked about the optimal site for sports complexes in two different questions. The first question requested the respondents to state brown-field sites or green-field sites and in the other one to state optimal site within city areas. City centre, edge or out of city, deprived neighbourhood/ dilapidated buildings/ infill site, comprehensive development area (CDA), urban regeneration areas, international zone areas are provided to select for the second question. However, respondents were allowed selecting one or more answers. Figure 1 shows the results of the two questions on the optimal site for sports complexes. As can be seen from the figure, more than 80 per cent of the respondents choose green-field sites as an optimal site for sports complexes. However, the survey data shows that the majority of respondents, 72 per cent, agreed on edge or out of city location for optimal sports complex site. Comprehensive development area comes next at 36.4 per cent. Deprived neighbourhood mentioned by 27.3 per cent, at the same level with urban regeneration areas. International zone areas gained the least choice of the respondents. It is clear that green-field sites and edge or out of city location are considered by majority of the sample population as optimal site for sports complexes. However, none of the respondents agreed on city center location for sports complexes which underline the contrast with the international trend.

Fig. 1: Optimal Site for Sports Complex.
In another question respondents were asked about the rationales to support sport complex development in Malaysia. The factors provided based on the trends of sports facilities development worldwide. Figure 2 reveals the result of the question. The factors were divided into three main groups. There are local benefits, impacts to the city and both local and city impacts which the latter being the larger of the two. In the first group, benefits to the local community, local economic development, local physical development, and local permeability were mentioned by 81.8 per cent, 45.5 per cent, 54.5 per cent and 0 per cent, respectively. Necessary for the city was cited by 54.5 per cent. Other factors that make up the last group are sporting events selected by 81.8 per cent of respondents as the most important factor. Cultural identification was not selected by any respondents and this showed it has no influence for sports facilities development. Social development and economic outcome are important as mentioned by 63.6 per cent and 27.3 per cent of the respondents. Local or city's legibility, local or city's landmark and new image for the local or city being given attention by 27.3 per cent, 54.5 per cent and 27.3 per cent of the respondents respectively.

Fig. 2: Rationales to support Sports Complex development in Malaysia

4.2 Urban Development:

In the second section of the questionnaire town planners were asked about urban development strategy in Malaysia. In addition, whether the role of sports facilities to be part of the urban development. Residential based is selected by 90.9 per cent of the respondents as the most effective development strategy, which is followed by commercial based at 81.8. Industrial based and most modern, high rises buildings based are cited by 54.5 and 27.3 percent, respectively. However, none of the respondents agreed on entertainment. This is while, 63.6 per cent of the respondents were agreed that sports complexes to be part of urban development strategy. The question on the role of government on urban development reveals tendency to facilitator of development rather than active driving development. In addition, 63.6 per cent believe to use entrepreneurial approach for urban development in Malaysia.

4.3 The Relationship between Sports Facilities and Urban Development:

The questions on the relationship between sports facilities and urban development in Malaysia were provided in the third section. Table 1 shows the town planners perceptions on sports-centre urban development in Malaysia. As can be seen from Table 1, only 9.1 per cent of the town planners strongly agree, more than 36 per cent moderately agree, 27 per cent slightly agree however, none of them strongly disagree to the idea. As a result, majority of the town planners thought positively on the sport-centre urban development in Malaysia.

Table 1: Sports-centre urban development in Malaysia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 11 100
The results from the survey provide information on the type of development stimulated by sports complex construction. The research found that infrastructure development is the most significant as mentioned by 90.9 per cent of respondents, followed by commercial at 63.6 percent. Residential and informal sector were given by 54.5 per cent and 45.5 per cent, respectively. However, entertainment is cited only by 27.3 per cent of respondents which is the least after industrial development which was not selected by any of the respondents.

In the next question of the survey of town planners, they were asked to state which factors they thought to improve for sustaining and enhancing sports complex impact which provided the dramatic result. The findings revealed that all of the respondents, 100 per cent agreed upon the accessibility of the sports complex. This is followed by public transportation and activities which are stated by 90.9 per cent of the respondents. In addition, location is cited by 81.8 per cent. Other factors including fund, design and other development were selected at 36.4 per cent, 27.3 per cent and 9.1 per cent of the respondents respectively.

5. Conclusion:

The increasingly importance of sports and sports facilities development in Malaysia is obvious. This study was based on exploratory postal survey and quantitative data on the role of sports facilities. It uses the expert opinion of town planners, as key players in decision making in the Malaysian context. The result shows that town planners' perception is in contrast of the recent trend of sports facilities development which has its roots on culture of sport in Malaysia and nature of the existing sports facilities. The findings from this research revealed that although, in Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010) emphasis is placed on creating a sports culture among Malaysian, sports facilities have not gained new role as the global trends, yet. There is still a need for a new perspective and a new approach to improve the existing sports facilities and for future development. Further investigation on the impacts of sports facilities might help to improve the effectiveness and contribution of sports facilities to urban development.

REFERENCES


