ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Human and Sustainability in Malaysia

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Introduction

Human and sustainability is a common theme that is attracted researchers and scholars from various academic background all over the world. Since Our Common Future (WCED, 1987) or the ‘Brundtland Report’ defined sustainable development as development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, more interested parties in studying sustainable quoted this as the ‘sustainable development’ definition. However, the definition was extended further detail during the Earth Summit in 1992 (UN, 1992) and produced 40 chapters for Agenda 21. During the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 (UN, 2002) the definition of sustainable development was completed with the notion of the three pillars that is social, environmental and economic. However, according to Olewiler (2006) the concept of sustainability will not be completed if it does not include politic (or governance) to make four major pillars. Since then many researches have been carried out researches in order to study one or the combination of a few of these pillars in relation to various regional or local issues. For instance, Karunanithi et al., (2011) have studied the characterization of socio-political instability, development and sustainability meanwhile, Olewiler (2006) had looked into the concept of environmental sustainability for urban areas.

In Malaysia, this theme has been studied by various scholars of different background. They viewed sustainability issues from their own percepts and opinions in relation to their respective academic background. Their outcomes of the studies have be presented at various local or international seminars, conferences or workshops. Basically, the recommendations put foward by these conference papers should be very useful for the authorised bodies to adopt them as their regulation or acts of various sustainable development issues. Therefore, it is important to gather and documented some of these important issues of sustainable development as a special issues of international journal.

In relation to this objective, therefore, many thanks to the Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences for giving us the opportunity to publish articles on the special theme that is ‘Human and Environmental Sustainability in Malaysia’. This special issue consists of 12 articles of various approaches and evaluations on the theme in which the papers are classified into three sub-themes that is the issues of environment, sustainable ecotourism and socio-economic environmental issues. These articles are mainly contributed by scholars from the School of Social, Development and Environmental Studies, Faculty of Social and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

The issues of environment:

The issues of environment has been the main focus of six articles from various academic disciplines. In the first article, Shaharuddin et al., address the issue of urban thermal environment at the coastal town of Kuantan, Pahang. They attempt to establish the important impact of sea breeze on the reduction of high temperature distribution in Kuantan. At the same time, they manage to establish the relationship between ambient air temperature and relative humidity. The significant impact of sea breeze on air temperature can be traced as far as 10 – 15 km from the coastline of Teluk Cempedak towards interior part of Kuantan Town. Therefore, these findings are deemed important input for the future urban planning of Kuantan, especially the urban infrastructure to provide a comfortable and a conducive thermal environment for Kuantan dwellers, thus create a sustainable environment.

The second article on this sub-theme is contributed by Mohd Fuad et al., on the issue of pesticides in a modern agricultural environment. In particular, they focus on the impact of pesticides on the quality of water, soil, living things and farmers. Basically, data of their study was collected from laboratory analysis as well as questionnaire survey. They found that the use of pesticides was harmful to the environment, plant, fishes, livestock and farmers in the study area of Sungai Burung and Sawah Sempadan, Selangor. In conclusion, they suggested that more Integrated Pest Management (IPM) should be introduced in order to mitigate the pesticide problems before it is ecologically and socially getting worst in the future.

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Community participation and opinion in certain environmental hazard such as flash flood was studied by Sulong et al., at Sg. Lembing, Pahang. Based on hydrological data, they found that the flash flood occurrences were increased significantly at the study area recently. The nature of flood has also changed from monsoonal type to flash flood. The community of Sg. Lembing believed that the frequent occurrences of flash flood are due to rapid changes of land uses in the area. According to respondents’ estimation, the tangible loss due to flash flood was in the region of RM105,000. Even though, individual economic loss was relatively small (RM1166), but looking at the low income level of the people in the study area, it may be very high. In conclusion, they found that about one fifth of the respondents made only slight adaptation to their house structures in an effort to mitigate the impacts of flash flood.

Mohd Ekhwan et al., in their article explore the possibility of determining the institutional challenges and to understand the complexity as well as interrelated factors that affecting policy processes and outcome of Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) in the Langat River Basin (LRB). In order to achieve their objective, the Social Learning Approach was used and the result showed that more respondents were not aware of the objectives and activities of the river basin organisation in LRB. Nevertheless, more of the respondents have shown their interest in joining the social learning programmes as collective choice opportunity. Hence, this approach was proposed by the authors to be included in studying an environmental sensitive society.

The next two papers by Hasnah et al., were exploring the solid waste management in relation to sustainable environment and living. The first paper is trying to explore the Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) reduction at source, specially the Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) in relation to overcome the increasing trend of solid waste generation. This technique is recognised as the most common approach to reduce environmental impact associated with the practices of municipal solid waste management. Hasnah et al., believed that LCA can assist the planning and policy development of municipal solid waste management of Malaysia especially that pertaining to classification and evaluation of waste material flow. Besides, they said that the technique is also useful to quantify and assess product impacts to the environment, to identify opportunities to minimise the impacts and to identify cost savings by making more effective use of resources. Therefore, they believed that the LCA method can be used effectively in solid waste reduction in order to achieve towards a more sustainable living, hence towards a better quality of life.

In the second paper, Hasnah et al., were trying to relate two things about how to improve Solid Waste Management (SWM) in Malaysia. Firstly, they tried to analyse the people’s behaviour in SWM and estimate the relationship between this behaviour and income. Secondly, they attempted to identify the factors which influence their ability to pay for service improvement. By using staffs working at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia as their respondents, they found that high percentage of them were Willing To Pay (WTP) for improved SWM. Furthermore, they identified that factors such as income and age were significantly correlated with WTP for improved SWM. However, other factors, especially the level of education was not significant at the required confidence level. In conclusion, they believed that public education is essential when waste minimisation programmes are developed and implemented, and campaign about the awareness of WTP needs to be conducted more frequent. In order to achieve sustainable living, they believed that the cross subsidiary study should be carried out between the high and low income people, thus determine the actual amount to be charged to the public.

Sustainable ecotourism:

The next theme is ecotourism which was discussed by four articles. Er et al., in their article attempt to relate between ecotourism and environmental conservation by the ethnic of Tagal in Sabah. The modern precept of Tagal started off by focusing on river cum fish conservation. Later, when fish population grew significantly, they eventually turn to fish masaging industry. They believed that this is the starting point of ecotourism industry among the Tagal people. The ecotourism industry was then extended to jungle trekking and homestay programmes with the latest activity was Tagal fish competition. They found that many of the Tagal’s precepts can be benefitted in implementing environmental conservation in Sabah. Moreover, they found that the Tagal system, which involves a strategic partnership between the local community and the Fisheries Department of Sabah has given birth to co-management. This co-management in the development of ecotourism has a symbiotic effect, as both the local community and environmental conservation will eventually be in sync.

In the next article, Habibah et al., discussed how to assess the natural capitals of the Tasik Chini Biosphere Reserves in achieving sustainable ecotourism. However, they believed that in order to achieve the goal, ecotourism sustainability does not only lie on the locals’ responsibility, but also by all stakeholders who rely on the natural capitals in offering the ecotourism experiences and businesses. They found that every stakeholder has their own positive and negative opinions on the important resources through some assert on the decline of the natural capital due to the encroachment of new development forces.

Another topic on ecotourism was explored by Hamzah’s et al. They were focusing on the impacts of flood disaster on the tourism providers’ responses, especially in Kota Tinggi, Johor. They use both secondary and
primary data in analysing and discussing their research objectives. They showed that the catastrophic flood had
effected the tourism industry, especially in terms of tourist’s influx, loss of hotel revenue and occupancy, drop
in retails of city economy, and destroy the nature, cultural and heritage attractions in the study area significantly.
At the end of the article, they suggested to develop a tourism contingency plan to ensure alternatives of adaptive
measure are available during the post and recovery period of the flood event.

The last article on the tourism theme was written by Azima and Suhana. They have discussed the prospect of
highland ecotourism in Malaysia by choosing Freser’s Hill as their study area. Freser’s Hill was chosen
because of the richness of flora and fauna in the area that attract tourists from abroad as well as from local
people. Besides, they also discussed on the re-branding Fraser’s Hill as a step to further develop ecotourism
sector to maintain the existing features. This is important in an effort to create a niche for Freser’s Hill as a
distinct identity of ecotourism area as compared to other highland tourism areas in Malaysia. In order to fulfill
this objective, therefore, the authors believed that public and private agencies should involve in total in the
development of ecotourism in Freser’s Hill. However, effort must be taken in order to ensure that the
environment of Freser’s Hill is always being preserved and sustained.

Socio-economic environmental issues:

The last two articles were exploring and discussing about the socio-economic environmental issues in
Malaysia. The first article was written by Mohd Yusof et al. They analysed and discussed on the housing prices
in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. They used the terms ‘housing bubbles assessment’ to show the housing prices
diviation from its fundamental value. They believed that housing bubble stemmed directly from the housing
price and the expected housing price in the study area. As a result they found that the expected price creates a
very high positive bond towards the market price thus making it the main contributor to the increasing prices of
sale and rental within the property market. Therefore, they concluded that the existence of housing bubbles in
the Klang Valley residential property market is getting bigger and stronger. This phenomenon will not create a
sustainable economic environment to residents of the Klang Valley as a whole due to high price of houses which
is relatively unaffordable by many urban dwellers.

The second and last article for this special issue was discussing about understanding the concepts of
participation and empowerment of the Bidayuh community in community development, according to the world-
view of the community itself based on their own construction of reality, and direction with regards to
conceptualising and giving meaning to their social world. Novel et al., used the interpretative approach that is
abductive logic based on idealist ontology and constructionist epistemology. They showed that the participation
perceived by the Bidayuh community is not limited to the implementation level, but also involves other levels of
strategies such as planning, evaluation and monitoring. Furthermore, they found that Bidayuh community
perception of empowerment referred to a process whereby individuals or groups are at the stage where they are
capable of using their own ability, capability and self-capacity.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, articles in this special issue of the Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences, with the theme
‘Human and Environmental Sustainability in Malaysia’ have given readers the opportunity to evaluate how
serious are the people of Malaysia about sustainable development programme through three sub-themes that is
the issues of environment, sustainable ecotourism and socio-economic environmental issues. Articles were
discussed on various aspects of sustainable environment from different perspective of the authors’ disciplines
such as from human development, geography, economy, anthropology and sociology. Generally, the authors
agreed that sustainable environment should be put in place in order to have sustainable living and a good quality
of life in future.

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