

RESEARCH PROGRESS

Two Hundreds Years of Neighbourhood Expansion in Seremban Municipality Area, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia has been experiencing rapid neighborhood expansion since the 1970s in the Seremban Municipal area. Due to the rapid urbanization process, more than two thirds of the people now live in urban areas, and the number is expected to increase further in the years towards 2020. A major land area in the urban area is set for housing development; that land was converted from agriculture and forest land. Foreign direct investment, the availability of human capital, the availability of suitable land; and the availability of current technology are the major driving forces for escalating housing construction to meet demand. Nevertheless, the construction of housing estates has resulted in positive and negative impacts especially on the physical environment and social well-being. This article discusses the neighborhood expansion in the Seremban municipal area for the past two hundreds years. The expansion of the housing schemes especially in the 1970s under the New Economic Policy (NEP) was to match the economic vibrancy and increase of the social well-being in the municipality. The key argument here is how livable are the current housing estates in the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia? The Malaysian society comprises the Malays, Chinese, Indians and others, who have their own values and preferences, and above all differing affordabilities that will be the major challenge in Malaysian housing expansion. The article presents some findings on the study of socio-spatial dimension, structures and patterns of housing expansion in Seremban Municipality area.

ABSTRAK

Malaysia sedang mengalami perluasan kawasan kejiranan yang pantas semenjak tahun 1970an di kawasan perbandaran Seremban. Proses pembandaran yang pesat menyebabkan lebih daripada dua pertiga daripada penduduk tinggal di bandar dan jumlah ini dijangka meningkat pada tahun-tahun mendatang menjelang tahun 2020. Kawasan utama di bandar telah bertukar menjadi kawasan perumahan yang pada asalnya merupakan kawasan pertanian dan hutan. Pelaburan luar langsung, kesediaan modal insan, ketersediaan tanah yang sesuai, dan teknologi terkini merupakan gerakusa utama yang membawa kepada perluasan kawasan perumahan. Walau bagaimanapun, pembangunan pesat kawasan perumahan ini membawa kepada kesan positif dan negatif terutamanya kepada persekitaran fizikal dan kesejahteraan hidup rakyat. Artikel ini membincangkan berkenaan perluasan kawasan kejiranan di kawasan majlis perbandaran Seremban dalam tempoh lebih kurang dua ratus tahun lampau. Perluasan kawasan kejiranan ini terutamanya dalam tahun 1970an di bawah payung Dasar Ekonomi Baru (DEB) melonjakkan pertumbuhan ekonomi dan kesejahteraan kehidupan masyarakat. Hujah yang dikemukakan di sini adakah perluasan kawasan kejiranan ini membawa kepada peningkatan dayahuni bandar itu sendiri dalam keadaan kepelbagaian etnik masyarakat di Malaysia. Masyarakat Malaysia dengan pelbagai etnik yang mempunyai nilai, agama dan budaya yang berbeza merupakan cabaran paling besar di dalam perluasan kawasan kejiranan ini. Beberapa dapatan kajian dari segi dimensi sosio-spatial, struktur dan bentuk perluasan kejiranan ini dibentangkan.

INTRODUCTION

“Sometime in 2008, the world will cross an invisible but momentous milestone: the point at which more than half the people on the planet - roughly 3.2 billion human beings - live in cities’ (State of the World 2007).

About 50 million people are moving to the cities and suburbs each year. More than at any time in history, the future of humanity, our economy and the planet that supports us will be determined in the world cities. These arguments were later emphasized by Mc Gee (2009) when he said that statistically for the first time in global history the world will have the majority of its population living in urban places.

The crux of livability can be argued to be centred around the home, where everyday life activities revolve. While people can shift workplaces and shop almost anywhere, the decision to stay and make a home is a significant signal for the livability of a place. Established housing areas represent stable places for generations, made possible through the neighborhoods high livability. New housing areas have yet to prove themselves, some will become transit hubs for impermanent workers, with ever changing tenants, while others will attract families to turn the housing areas into homes or '*kampung halaman*' the Malay term for a village that families and individuals identify with. The research on Seremban's housing is part of the effort to understand local livability and sustainability. Specifically, what makes the residents choose one housing location instead of another, and how has the spatial housing area pattern evolves over the years. The assumption, of course, is that areas with a large percentage of well kept, established (long lasting) housing areas are the most livable, while areas with a large percentage of run-down houses are considered less livable. The study would then zero in representative housing areas to determine the probable causes for these. However, the first step is to overview the general pattern of housing distribution in Seremban with data gleaned from as early as two hundred years ago. The paper presents the historical and political economic contexts of housing growth in Seremban and the overarching residential spatial patterns.

The article illustrates housing development in the Seremban Municipality area. The housing development scheme is divided into three eras. During the Colonial Era (around 1800 – 1956); The Independence Era (1957-1970); and The New Economic Plan (NEP) Era (1970-1990) and beyond.

Housing Sprawls in Malaysia

Rapid urban housing development in Malaysia started after since Independence in 1957 but recorded faster growth after the 1970s. The series of five years Malaysian Plans (MP) have summarised the increasing number of houses planned and completed by the developers, both government and private sectors. Figure 1 below summarizes the development of housing in Malaysia for the past 50 years. The number of houses completed by the Eight Malaysia Plan Years (1996-2000) had been the highest compared to these completed in other Malaysian Plan periods. In the First Malaysian Plan, the total numbers of houses completed were the lowest. This was in

the immediate years after Independence. Overall, the trend in the number of houses completed is continually increasing for the past five decades to fulfilling the demand from the increasing population especially in the urban areas (Malaysia 1971, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006)

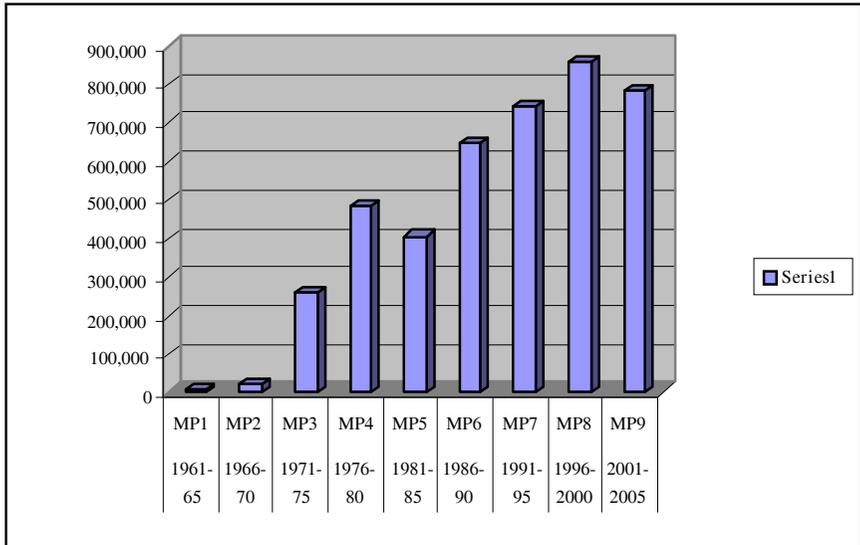


Figure 1: Housing Completed in Malaysian Plan Program

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN SEREMBAN MUNICIPALITY AREA

The Seremban Municipality is located in the State of Negeri Sembilan in Peninsula Malaysia, and currently experiencing vibrant economic, social and physical developments. All contribute to the modification of the local urbanites' lifestyle that began from pre-industrial urban Malaysia. Like other state capitals in Malaysia, Seremban has grown out of its 'sleepy hollow' image of yesteryears and the original municipal boundaries have changed to accommodate these developments.

Seremban is an intermediate city with an estimated current population (2008) around 397,000 (Seremban Municipal Council website 2009). The population of Seremban has increased steadily over the last hundred and ten years. In 1891, the total population was less than 3,000 people but increased to 383,530 by the year 2000. The Malays and other local indigenous groups (Bumiputeras) were the majority with 46 percent of the total population followed by the Chinese about 30.6 percent and the

Indians 18.5 percent. The multi-racial nature of the Seremban District and Municipality included is clear. The total population is expected to increase to about 594,000 by the year 2020 (Malaysia 2000).

The Seremban town was founded by the British colonial administration in the closing years of the 19th century and served as the capital of Negeri Sembilan State within the Federated Malay States over the 1895-1947 periods. For over a century Seremban, like any other town with bustling economic activities, grew in area following adjustments to its administrative boundary that took place in the decades after Independence in the year 1957 to accommodate the demand of jurisdiction over the growing urbanized areas taking place on the urban fringes. Seremban is located about 70 kilometers south of the Malaysian conurbation hub, Kuala Lumpur. For decades the municipality has been a commanding southernmost commuting boundary of workers to the Klang Valley.

Placing the recent urban development in Malaysia in the space-time of the Malaysian development initiatives, we have come to witness the varying speeds of those individual urban growth and its subsequent expansion. In this section we will illustrate housing development scheme in the Seremban Municipality areas based on three broad eras; The Colonial Era, The Independence Era, and The New Economic Policy (NEP) Era and Beyond.

The Colonial Era (1800-1956)

The variant in the speed of change can be traced back from as early as the founding of the city. For most Malaysian major cities, their beginnings were linked to the British colonial government administration in the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States and much later to the Federation of Malaya, the Brooks family in Sarawak and the East India Company earlier in Sabah (Lim Heng Kow 1978; Abdul Samad Hadi & Sulong Mohamad, 1990). Cities were founded to administer law and order that in turn allowed for the prospering of British investment (foreign and local owned) in tin exploitation and rubber growing in both estates. The administrative functions were instrumental in influencing the arrangement of the internal urban structure; colonial complex - comprising, for example, the Resident's house and British officials' housing area, the administrative center, the court house, churches and green areas. All were built in close proximity to each other for ease of mobility and also for security. The police head quarters were close by to oversee social order and the general safety of the city.

Over the 1895-1948 years housing development was confined within areas close to the town centre (Figure 2).

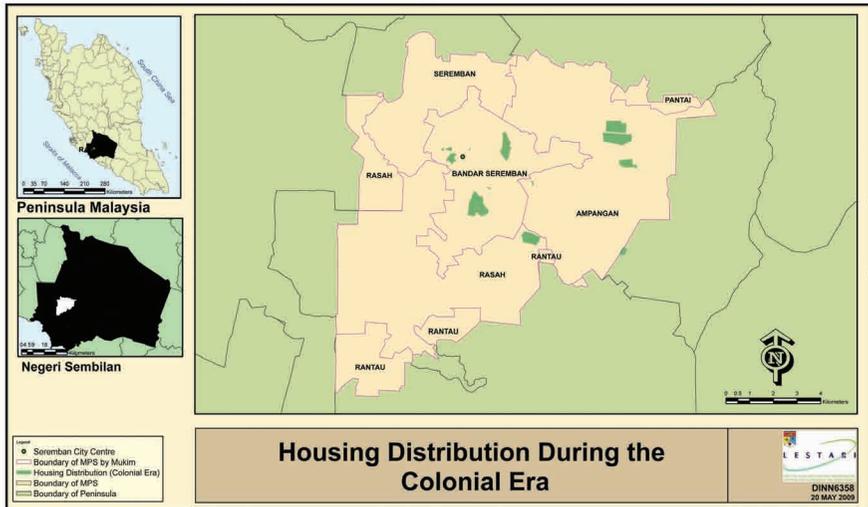


Figure 2: Housing Distribution During The Colonial Era in The Seremban Municipality Area

The Independence Era (1957-1970)

Housing development during The Independence Era was still mostly confined to the town centre which housed all economic activities such as retailing, restaurants, legal services and health clinics. Shop houses were mainly two storeys. Ground level is for the businesses and the families lived on the upper floor. The areas around the Seremban Lake Garden where the administrators (British colonials) and government officers lives. Malaysian urbanists have reported that these early urban settlements largely offered goods and services in sundry shops mode in the early times with little specialization in addition to their earlier functions of providing security, law and order for the urbanites as well as the people in the rural hinterland (Hamzah Sendut 1962, 1965; Jackson 1974). The massive rural – urban migrations since 1970’s claims the higher demand on housing. The government can’t afford to provide the basic infrastructure such as housing that lead to growth of the squatter’s areas for the survivals of the migrants.

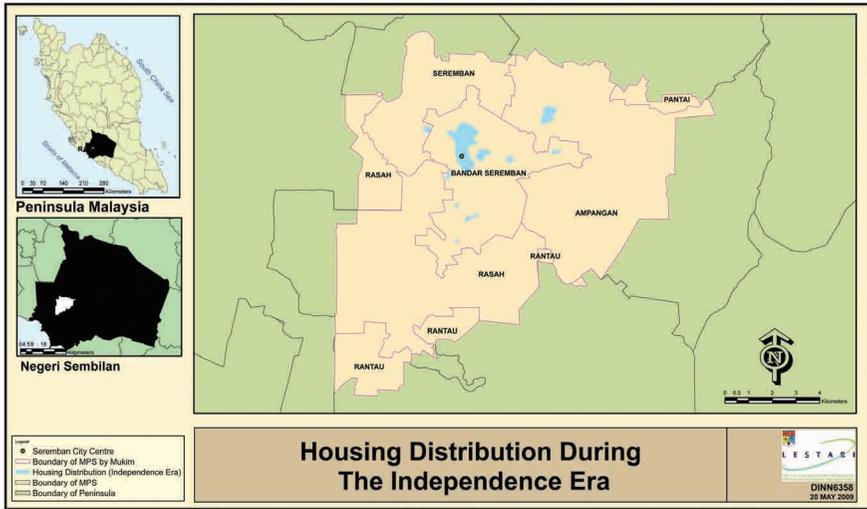


Figure 3: Housing Distribution During The Independence Era in The Seremban Municipality Area

The New Economic Policy (NEP) Era (1970-1990) and Beyond

The New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced in 1970 aimed basically at eradicating poverty among all races and to restructure the Malaysian society such that not any one group would in the end be identified with any economic label (Malaysia 1971). Numerous strategies, programmes and activities had been undertaken to meet the broad socio-economic goals and targets. The impacts of the policy on the urban areas are far reaching. The original time frame for the implementation of the new economic policy was between the 1970 until 1990. Parallel to that, the housing development in the Seremban Municipality area was seen as one of the implementation instruments of the policy. In the early 1970s not many housing schemes were developed but in the late 1970s and early 1980s there was the inflection point in the housing properties' market boosting-up the economic growth of Seremban.

Since the 1980s, about 42,900 houses had been built covering many new neighbourhoods; in 1991, about 69,700 units of houses were completed, and about 114,000 units in 2000 giving about 63.6% increase for 20 years. In terms of living unit distribution, about 96,205 units were located in the urban area meanwhile 17,763 units were built in the rural

areas in 2000 (Malaya 1956, 1961; Malaysia 1971, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006). Figure 2 above shows population increase in the municipality area over hundred years. The ethnic composition in the study area was as follows, Bumiputera (Malay) 183,749, Chinese 119,768, Indian 73,059, Others 2,182 and non-Malaysian 18,427 in the year 2000 (Seremban Structure Plan). About 30% of the houses were allocated for Bumiputera's while about 70% for non-Bumiputera's.

From the information gathered at the planning section of the municipality, we can assert that the Seremban municipality has been growing outwards from the commercial centre to the periphery in a more complex manner. Until the 1970-s the outward growth had been slow since much of the economic activities in the municipality were medium level retailing and support services despite the availability of good physical and social infrastructures. The Seremban people commuted to Kuala Lumpur, about 80 kilometers for high end shopping. Efficient public transport helped commuters. But since the 1970s the municipality had attracted more outside people to come and live in the municipality with the opening of the State to foreign direct investments in line with the opening of Malaysia to international investments. With the establishment of branch foot loose industries by international companies from the West and later on from Taiwan and Korea the municipality began to expand outwards faster. With the establishment of industrial areas in the 1970-s, hyper-markets, more supporting services and recreational facilities moved in along with new housing estates to cater for the new expanding demands. New housing neighborhoods spring up in all directions outwards to the periphery. Expanding with it are new state of the art infrastructures.

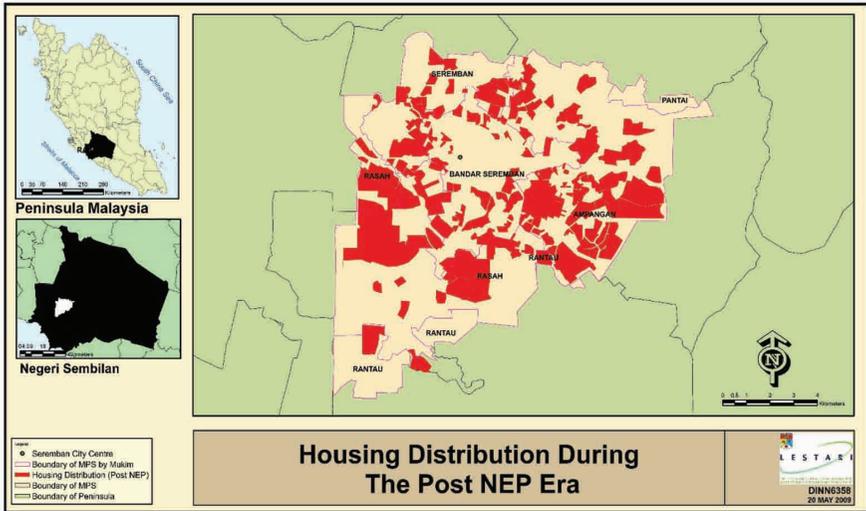


Figure 4: Housing Distribution During The Post New Economic Plan Era in The Seremban Municipality Area

Figure 4 shows the expansion of housing development outwards of the city centre. The expansion to the east (Ampangan dan Pantai) area are limited to the hill towards Kuala Pilah. Meanwhile the area to the north were extended, yet limited by the Gala Forest Reserved area. Further expansion is expected to be to the south around Rantau area due to its flat and lowland area characteristics. Accessibility, especially road, is a major force for the housing expansion. Figure 5 shows the interconnection of the major roads and the housing schemes.

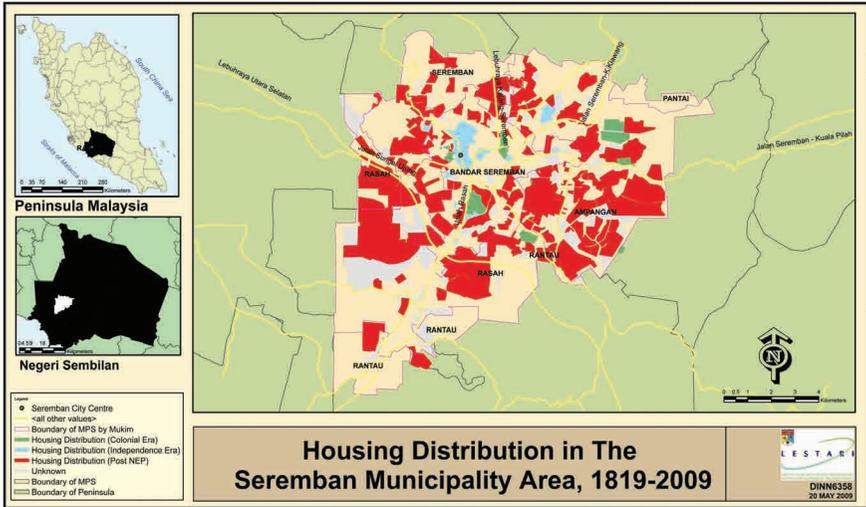


Figure 5: Housing Distribution During in The Seremban Municipality Area, 1819-2009

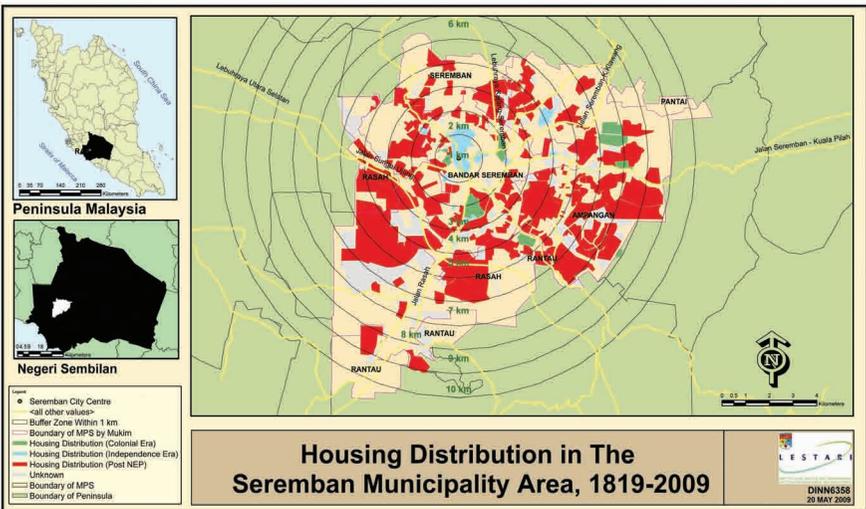


Figure 6: Housing Distribution During in The Seremban Municipality Area, 1819-2009 with 1km Buffer Zone

Figure 6 shows the overall expansion of housing area within a 10 km buffer in the Seremban Municipality area in almost two hundred years.

The account of housing development and expansion in Seremban presented indicated that new houses in the Seremban Municipality were built in new housing neighbourhood, new housing estates and new towns associated with manufacturing industrial areas. New economic opportunities created under the umbrella of the New Economic Policy (1970-1990) and the decades beyond (1990 - current year) had brought about multiple overlapping inputs towards social, infrastructural development and spatial development in the Seremban Municipality. The manufacturing industries in new industrial areas of the municipality attracted people to come in work in the municipality. Housing needs of the growing number of people in the municipality were slowly met when the state government developed the public and private partnership in which private housing developers, financial institutions and the public authority to offer the consumers affordable housing to all. The poorer households were offered low cost houses or even the special low price flats for them as shown in Paroi areas.

AT THE WAYSIDE

Housing expansion is a major phenomenon of urbanization in Seremban. The pattern shows an outwardly move over the years with infilling occurring in between. Rapid housing growth coincided with economic growth and changing government policies, yet on specific areas were favoured for housing development, rather than others.

The government has to intervene in order to provide the people sufficient houses irrespective of ethnic groups. The practice of housing development today is that in any new housing area, 30% of the total houses built are for the Malays, while the rest for the Indians and the Chinese. But over the period of time the ratio may no longer be true because of selling or defaults in payment among the groups. More importantly, more Bumiputera now make the municipality as their homes; the 30% may no longer sufficient for those in the group.

While the number of housing stock has increased, the newer houses in the new housing areas maybe inaccessible to some sections of the population due to inappropriate pricing incommensurate with the mean income level. The research is expected to analyse the income level of the people, housing needs, the available stock and hence prices to make better sense of the patterns.

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