



**PLANNING MALAYSIA:**

*Journal of the Malaysian Institute of Planners*

**VOLUME 20 ISSUE 4 (2022), Page 222 – 239**

## **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE URBAN PLANNING DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AMONG THE LOW-INCOME SEGMENT IN ISKANDAR MALAYSIA**

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### **Abstract**

Community participation in urban planning in Peninsular Malaysia is framed by the Town and Country Planning Act 1976. Iskandar Malaysia is facing rapid urbanisation, which sees development intensification, especially in Johor Bahru. As a result, it has inflicted challenges on local planning authorities in Iskandar Malaysia to plan and provide genuine participation to the community, especially the low-income segment. The question in this study is, "to what extent does the current participatory platform in Iskandar Malaysia offer a genuine opportunity to the low-income segment to participate in the planning and operational decision-making?". This study examines the current state of the low-income segment's participation in the development plan-making and planning permission processes. This study used document gathering and document analysis to collect and analyse the secondary data from selected local plans and planning permission applications of Johor Bahru and Kulai districts. A series of focus group discussions involving the residents' committees of the selected low-cost apartments around Johor Bahru and Kulai districts is also conducted; hence, thematically analysed to substantiate the document analysis' findings. The findings suggested limited opportunities for the low-income segment to participate in development plan-making and planning permission in Iskandar Malaysia.

**Keywords:** community participation, low-income, planning decision, operational decision, local planning authorities, Iskandar Malaysia

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Community participation provides a clear picture to decision-makers of public preferences, leading to better decisions by incorporating the community's experiential knowledge into the process (Marzukhi, 2021; Boon et al, 2020; Innes & Booher, 2004). Community participation in urban planning in Peninsular Malaysia (except Kuala Lumpur) is governed by the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172) (TCPA 1976). Urbanisation has led to the rapid population growth and development in urban areas, including in Iskandar Malaysia (IM), leaving the local planning authorities (LPAs) with challenges in running their operations. It is understood that LPAs are struggling to govern urban development and provide effective community participation in decision-making (Ahmad et al., 2013). Low-income segment, which in this study, focuses on low-cost apartments' residents around IM, appears to lack capabilities to participate effectively in urban planning, hence exerting their interest in decision-making.

This study anticipates answering the question: "to what extent do the current participatory platforms in Iskandar Malaysia, like exhibition, offer a genuine opportunity to the community, especially the low-income segment, to participate in both the planning and operational decision-making?"

The purpose of this study is to examine the current state of the community, especially the low-income segment's participation in both the development plan-making and planning permission processes in Iskandar Malaysia. This study employed document gathering and document analysis as the methods for data collection and analysis. The data was retrieved from three Reports of Public Inquiry and Hearing Committee for respective local plans of Johor Bahru and Kulai and 12 mixed development applications shared by the LPAs in Johor Bahru and Kulai. Moreover, nine (9) focus group discussions (FGDs) involving the residents' committee of the selected low-cost apartments in Johor Bahru and Kulai districts managed to be conducted. The data are then analysed using thematic analysis to gather insight into the current state of participation in the planning process among the low-income segment, thus affirming the findings from the document analysis.

The study begins by explaining the notion of community participation in urban planning in Peninsular Malaysia based on what has been delineated in TCPA 1976. The data retrieved from the planning documents and FGDs were then analysed and triangulated. The paper concluded that the current community participation in the development plan-making and planning permission in Iskandar Malaysia has pointed to the ineffectiveness of the process, thus limiting the low-income segment's capability to participate in both the planning and operational decision-making.

## **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING AND OPERATIONAL DECISION-MAKING IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA**

In the context of local planning authorities in Peninsular Malaysia, local communities are able to participate in both the development plan-making and planning permission processes, where both are defined as planning decision and operational decision, respectively (Faludi, 1987).

### **Community Participation in Development Plan-making**

Community participation in the development plan-making has been underlined in several sections of TCPA 1976. The primary platform for the community to participate in the process is through public publicity, which has been stated under Section 9 and Section 12A, with the former concerning the State Structure Plan (SSP) while the latter is on the Local Plan (LP).

Under Section 9, two phases of publicities are involved, namely after the assessment report is prepared and after the SSP has been drafted. During the first phase, all stakeholders, including the community, will be informed of the findings of the assessment report. Meanwhile, in the second phase, the State Planning Committee (SPC) will invite the public and publicise the drafted SSP, which comprises the proposed development's direction and strategy (Town and Country Planning Act 1976).

Likewise, the community can submit their objection or opinion on the drafted LP during the publicity program as stated under Section 12A. The public, including the community, is informed and invited through conventional methods like local newspapers, banners, and radio broadcasts.

Apart from participating during the publicity stage, the community is also eligible to participate in decision-making. It is highlighted under Section 10(3)(a) and Section 13, where the former is related to the objection made during the publicity of the drafted SSP, while the latter is during the drafted LP. Both sections have indicated that the objectors can justify their concerns in front of the Public Inquiry and Hearing Committee.

A Public Inquiry and Hearing Committee has been established under Section 14(1). The committee's function is to conduct an inquiry and hearing session following the publicity programs of both SSP and LP. Nonetheless, according to Section 15(1), in considering each objection, the SPC must ensure that it is relevant and conforming to the development strategy at the national and state levels (Town and Country Planning Act 1976).

### **Community Participation in Planning Permission**

In addition to development plan-making, communities are eligible to participate in the planning permission, which is the operational dimension of a decision made

by the LPA. According to Section 21(6), in the absence of a local plan, the LPA must inform the adjacent landowner regarding an application for planning approval. Following the notification by the LPA, the adjacent landowner has the right to make an objection pertaining to the application. The applicant and objector are invited to justify their stand in a hearing session (Town and Country Planning Act 1976). In other words, this opportunity is only accessible to the community when the LP is not available. Notwithstanding, the majority of LPA today have their LP (PLANMalaysia, 2018).

In relation to the incorporation of community interest in the operational decision, Section 22 and subsection 22(2A) have comprehended that in making a decision - granting planning permission, the LPA will consider any objection that is received by the adjacent landowner (Town and Country Planning Act 1976). However, with the availability of LP, it is ambiguous whether there is still an available platform for the community to participate in the planning permission process. After a decision is made, the community is entitled to appeal against the permission granted through the appeal board, as underlined in Section 23(1). However, only objectors, as stated in Section 21(6), have access to this avenue (Town and Country Planning Act 1976).

### **ISKANDAR MALAYSIA**

Iskandar Malaysia (IM) is one of the development corridors that has been established as the catalyst for future economic development in the country. IM was established in correspondence to the need for a focused and developmental approach to the economic and spatial development in South Johor based on its strategic location neighbouring Singapore (Razak *et al.*, 2016; Rizzo & Glasson, 2012).

IM comprises the entire districts of Johor Bahru and Kulai and a small portion of Pontian. In this study, only Johor Bahru and Kulai districts and their respective LPAs are focused on, as both districts cover a large portion of the metropolitan region. Besides, the urbanisation rate is higher in both districts compared to Pontian.

Meanwhile, residents' committees of nine (9) low-cost apartments around IM are purposely invited as participants for FGDs. The selection of these committees is based on several criteria - the category and location of apartments which are clustered by LPAs in Johor Bahru and Kulai, and registered as Management Committee (MC) or Joint-Management Board (JMB) (**Figure 1**). The low-cost apartments involved in the FGDs are Flat Taman Desa Rakyat Perdana, Flat Taman Plentong Utama, Rumah Pangsa Kulai, Pangsapuri Taman Impian Emas, Flat Tasek 64, Pangsapuri Ledang, Flat Stulang Laut, Pangsapuri Taman Pelangi Indah, and Pangsapuri Rakyat Jalan Cengal.

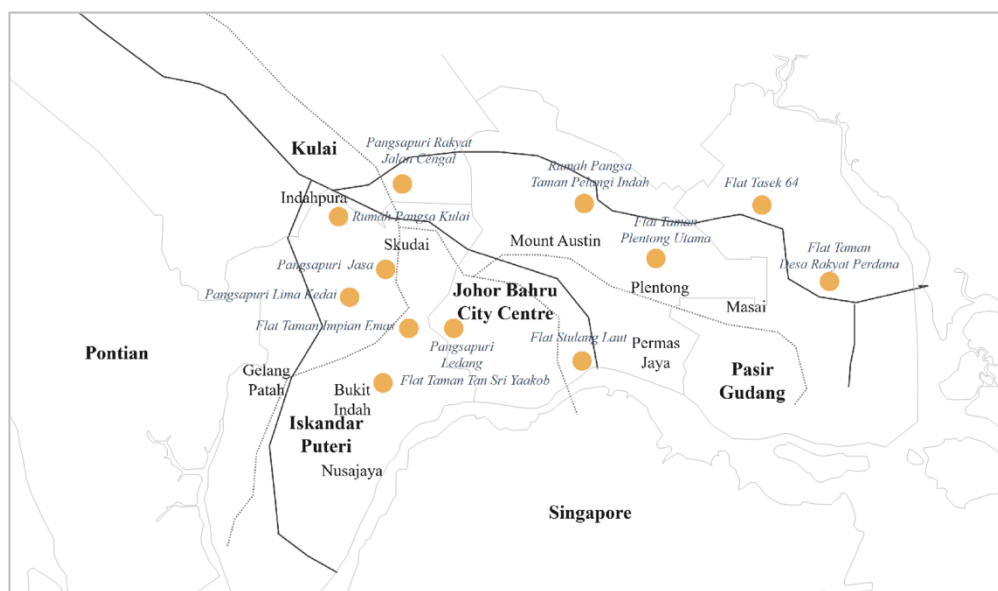


Figure 1: Selected Low-cost Apartments Around Johor Bahru and Kulai

## RESEARCH APPROACH

In this study, three LPs, namely the LP Johor Bahru 2020, LP Johor Bahru 2020 (Alteration) and LP Johor Bahru and Kulai 2025, covering the districts of Johor Bahru and Kulai were selected. The justification behind the selection of all three LPs is based on the fact that these plans are prepared in parallel to the timeline of Iskandar Malaysia, as this metropolitan region was established in 2006. The content of individual reports for the Public Inquiry and Hearing Committee is analysed to explicate the scope of community participation in making the selected LPs.

Meanwhile, the scope of community participation in planning permission in Iskandar Malaysia is examined by analysing the content of the mixed-development application. Applications for planning permission were granted from all four LPAs in Johor Bahru and Kulai based on the criteria listed, which include that the application must be a mixed development application; it involves the interest of the community, and it must be dated within 2008-2018. A total of 12 mixed development applications are willingly shared by the local public planners.

The justification for selecting the mixed development applications is based on the current trend of urban planning in IM. Mixed development is popular among private developers as it is considered high value and is often located in a limited urban land area. The analysis mainly focuses on incorporating the low-

income segment's interest in operational decision-making, including providing affordable and low-cost housing and commercial units.

In this research, document analysis was employed to review and evaluate the state of the low-income segment's participation in the gazetted LPs of Johor Bahru and Kulai and the approved planning permission. It is based on the reports of the Public Inquiry and Hearing Committee and the mixed development applications.

To gain further understanding of the low-income segment's participation in the planning process in IM, a series of FGDs were held where residents' committees of selected low-cost apartments around IM participated. The purpose of FGDs is to gain further understanding of the low-income segment's participation in the planning process in IM by thematically analysing the primary data. A total of 67 participants were recorded in the nine FGDs, with an average of seven participants in each FGD (**Table 1**).

**Table 1:** Profile of Participants of Focus Group Discussion

<b>Profile of Participant of Focus Group Discussion (PA)</b>		
<b>Position</b>	<i>N</i>	<b>%</b>
Chairman	9	13.4
Secretary	9	13.4
Committee's Member	49	40.2
<b>Reside</b>	<i>N</i>	<b>%</b>
More than 20 years	20	29.8
10 to 20 years	41	61.1
Less than 10 years	6	9.1
<b>Profession</b>	<i>N</i>	<b>%</b>
Public Sector	3	4.5
Private Sector	47	70.1
Retiree/ Not Working	17	25.4
<b>Attend Publicity Program</b>	<i>N</i>	<b>%</b>
Has Attended	24	36.0
Never Attend	43	64.0

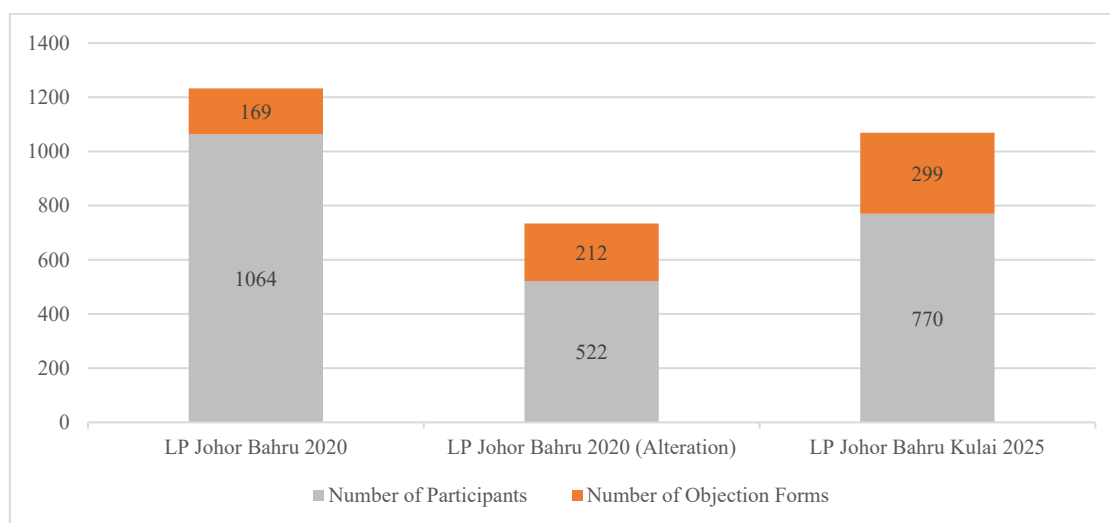
*Source: Zanudin (2020)*

## **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

### **Scope of Community Participation in Local Plan of Johor Bahru and Kulai**

Following the analysis of three Reports of Public Inquiry and Hearing Committee for respective LPs of Johor Bahru and Kulai, the LP Johor Bahru 2020 (Alteration) recorded the lowest number of participants compared to the LP Johor

Bahru 2020 and LP Johor Bahru and Kulai 2025 (**Figure 2**). LPAs in both districts depend on newspapers and banners as the method of communication during the LP Johor Bahru 2020 (Alteration). However, other methods such as official website and notices to community leaders were utilised during the LP Johor Bahru and Kulai 2025 to ensure that more communities had access to the information (**Table 2**).



**Figure 2:** Number of Participants and Objection Forms Received  
 Source: Zanudin (2020)

The number of participants is also influenced by the method of engagement used by the LPAs. Exhibitions held at the authorities building appear to have failed to attract larger participants than exhibitions in public areas such as in shopping malls. The high turnout in LP Johor Bahru 2020 and LP Johor Bahru and Kulai 2025 was potentially contributed by the numerous and close-to-community participatory platforms offered (**Table 2**). Participatory platforms closer to the low-income household like those held in Kampung Pok, Skudai, and Rumah Pangsa Cendana help the LPAs gain their opinion, hence improving their knowledge and awareness. These methods will subsequently promote inclusive participation (Bryson *et al.*, 2012; Michels & De Graaf, 2010; Mustapha *et al.*, 2013; Zanudin *et al.*, 2019).

**Table 2: Method of Communication and Engagement**

	<b>LP Johor Bahru 2020</b>	<b>LP Johor Bahru 2020 (Alteration)</b>	<b>LP Johor Bahru Kulai 2025</b>
Method of Communication	(a.) National Newspaper (b.) Banner (c.) Radio Station	(a.) National Newspaper (b.) Banner	(a.) National Newspaper (b.) Banner (c.) Official Website (d.) Invitation to community leader
Method of Engagement	<b>Exhibition</b> (a.) Danga Bay (b.) JPBD Johor building (c.) LPAs' building <b>Briefing</b> (a.) Minister (b.) State government (c.) Political party (UMNO)	<b>Exhibition</b> (a.) Hotel Puteri Pacific (b.) JPBD Johor building (c.) LPAs' building	<b>Exhibition</b> (a.) Persada International Convention Centre (b.) JPBD Johor building (c.) LPAs' building (d.) Sutera Mall (e.) Faculty of Built Environment, UTM (f.) Rumah Pangsa Cendana (g.) Hutan Bandar Putri Kulai (h.) Bus Terminal Gelang Patah <b>Townhall</b> (a.) Jotic Auditorium (b.) Skudai community <b>Discussion</b> (a.) Skudai community (b.) Kampung Pok community <b>Walkabout</b> (a.) Taman Rinting

*Source: Zanudin (2020)*

The gap in the participation between the low-income segment and other urban stakeholders was large with the number of objections among business operators, private developers, and property agencies being the highest in all three LPs (average of 43.3% of total objectors). It was followed by the high and middle-income households as the second-highest objectors in the LPs (average 40% of total objectors) (**Table 3**). The involvement of low-income households in the LPs was still low compared to other community segments.

**Table 3: Profile of Objectors**

<b>LP Johor Bahru 2020</b>		<b>LP Johor Bahru 2020 (Alteration)</b>		<b>LP Johor Bahru Kulai 2025</b>	
Profile of Objector	Number	Profile of Objector	Number	Profile of Objector	Number



Community (T20/M40)	52	Community (T20/M40)	79	Community (T20/M40)	78
Community (B40)	5	Community (B40)	1	Community (B40)	15
Business Operator	55	Business Operator	81	Business Operator	91
Developer/Property Agency		Developer/Property Agency			
Private consultant	1	Private consultant	11	Private consultant	17
Political party	5	Political party	0	Political party	1
Civil society	7	Civil society	1	Civil society	11
Academician	3	Academician	2	Academician	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>216</b>

Source: Zanudin (2020)

Substantially, the participants in the eight FGDs believed the LPA did not provide sufficient access to the residents to participate in the planning process. No planning programs were ever held near the low-cost apartments [FGD1; FGD2; FGD3; FGD4; FGD6; FGD7; FGD8; FGD9]. The LPAs instead invited the residents' committees to attend the publicity program, which was often held at the council's building [FGD1; FGD2]. Participants in FGD5, meanwhile, agreed that there was a publicity program organised by the LPA at their place.

*“There is a publicity program for the LP organised here. The previous Chief Minister of Johor also attended the program.”*

Participant No.38, FGD5

Furthermore, they believed the local authority is selective in communicating with the community, especially the low-income segment [FGD1; FGD2; FGD3; FGD4; FGD5; FGD7; FGD8; FGD9].

*“I do believe that the government or local authority feels that it is unnecessary to gather the opinion of common people like us. They only need to discuss the matter between them. They did not even involve the residents’ committee.”*

Participant No.51, FGD7

Following the FGDs, it appears that most of the low-income segments are technically inept regarding the planning procedure, thus marginalising them

from participating in the planning process [FGD1; FGD2; FGD3; FGD4; FGD7; FGD8; FGD9].

*"Sometimes we assume the banner invitation is for certain people. Thus, normal people will not understand. The way the information is shared is important."*

Participant No.62, FGD9

*"Most of the time, the program held by the authority is technical and according to protocol. When it is protocol-centric, laypersons will less likely come. It is more inviting if done informally; thus, the gap between authority and people is closer."*

Participant No.58, FGD8

Nonetheless, participants from all FGDs concurred on the need for the method of engagement to be exciting and frequent to encourage the community, particularly the low-income segment, to participate actively.

*"...interactive programmes are more attractive to the community than a forum or exhibition. meaning, if any question needs to be asked, the community can directly ask and discuss with the public officer."*

Participant No.4, FGD

Notably, the public hearing committee was membered by state-level officials (**Table 4**). Local-level officials or representatives were absent, thus influencing the committee's judgement and decision. It was ambiguous to the public on how an objection was evaluated and considered, hence, the public believed that the committees lacked local knowledge. The efficacy of the decision made by the committee on the objections was questionable.

**Table 4: Public Hearing Committee Membership**

<b>LP Johor Bahru 2020</b>		<b>LP Johor Bahru 2020 (Alteration)</b>		<b>LP Johor Bahru Kulai 2025</b>	
Director of Johor Economy Planning Unit	Chairman	Chairman of Local Government and Housing Committee of Johor	Chairman	Chairman of Local Government and Housing Committee of Johor	Chairman

Director of State Development	Member	Director of Johor Economy Planning Unit	Member	Director of Johor Economy Planning Unit	Member
Land and District Administrator	Member	Director of Land and Mineral of Johor	Member	Director of Land and Mineral of Johor	Member
n/a	n/a	Director of Urban and Rural Planning of Johor	Secretary	Director of Urban and Rural Planning of Johor	Secretary

Source: Zanudin (2020)

### Scope of Community Participation in Planning Permission

Following the analysis of 12 mixed development applications retrieved from the LPAs in Johor Bahru and Kulai, it is comprehended that the LPAs in Johor Bahru and Kulai do consider the well-being of the low-income segment in granting planning permission. One of the main aspects considered is the provision of affordable and low-cost housing and commercial units in a new development guided by the *Dasar Perumahan Rakyat Johor* (DPRJ) (Table 5).

Table 5: Justification for Planning Permission

Housing & Commercial Provision Conform to <i>Dasar Perumahan Rakyat Johor</i>	Incidence
<i>Dasar Perumahan Rakyat Johor</i> 's unit is provided less or not conforms to <i>Dasar Perumahan Rakyat Johor</i> . The state government charges a penalty.	7
<i>Dasar Perumahan Rakyat Johor</i> 's unit are provided conform to <i>Dasar Perumahan Rakyat Johor</i>	5
Justification for Approval	Incidence
Adhere to the National Physical Plan	1
Adhere to the State Structure Plan	12
Adhere to the Local Development Plan	12
Adhere to planning guideline	12
Adhere to <i>Dasar Perumahan Rakyat Johor</i> 's requirement	5

Source: Zanudin (2020)

It is notable that the LPAs tend to consider the technical aspects in the decision of the planning permission. The development plans and guidelines hold significant weight in the LPAs, influencing the decision-making. In addition, DPRJ is implemented as part of the tools for planning permission in IM.

**Table 6:** Information & Process Accessibility to Community

<b>Availability of Information to Community</b>	<b>Incidence</b>
Information is accessible to the community during decision-making.	1
Information is accessible to the community after the decision is made.	11
<b>Medium for Information Sharing</b>	<b>Incidence</b>
Discussion with the community leader.	1
Signage is erected on site after approval.	11
<b>Type of Information Accessible to Community</b>	<b>Incidence</b>
Application background.	12
Type of development.	12
Decision made and its justification.	1

*Source: Zanudin (2020)*

**Table 6** demonstrates that the community has limited access to the information and planning permission process. Eleven of the 12 applications have stated that communities only learned of any new development around their area after signage was erected on-site, which was already late for the community to object or influenced the decision. Only one application involved informing the community during the decision-making process of a planning permission due to the large scale and impact of the proposed development that may affect the income of the fisherman community around the proposed area.

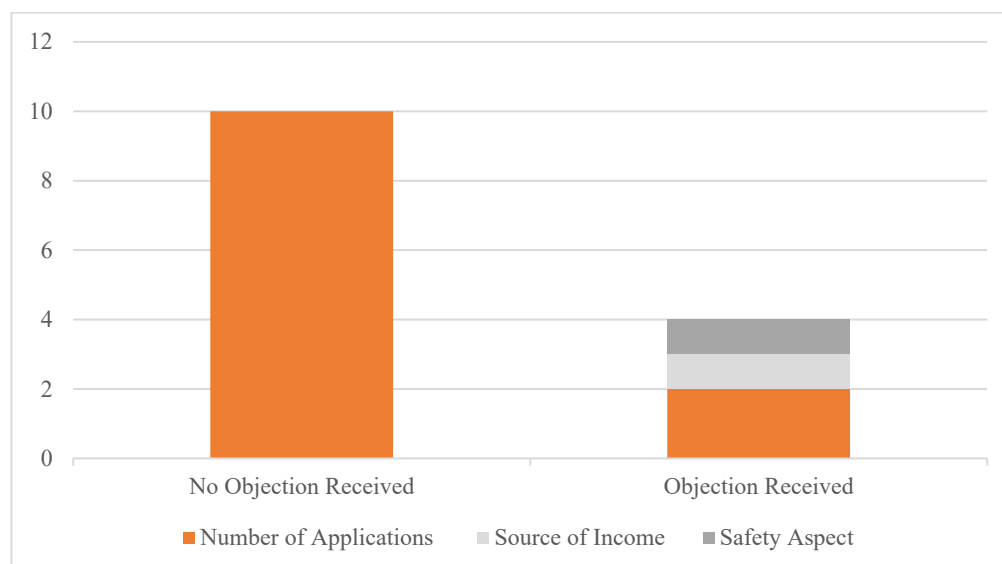
From the 12 applications gathered, only two applications involved community engagement, which were during the decision-making and after the decision was made. The absence of community engagement at the earlier stages of the process is associated with the degree of accessibility relished by the community (**Table 7**).

**Table 7:** Stage of Community Engagement in Planning Permission

<b>Stage of Community Engagement During Planning Permission</b>	<b>Incidence</b>
There is an absence of community engagement	10
Community engagement occurs during the decision-making	1
Community engagement occurs after a decision is made	1

*Source: Zanudin (2020)*

There are objections submitted following each community engagement (**Table 7**). Based on the secondary data, the objection concerns the source of income for the fishermen's community. Another objection received is related to the position of the proposed sewage treatment plant that is close to the existing residential area, which potentially affects their well-being (**Figure 3**).



**Figure 3:** Number and Type of Objections by Neighbouring Community  
 Source: Zanudin (2020)

The findings from document analysis indicated that the limitation of information had affected the capability of the neighbouring community to be involved in the planning permission to exert their concerns. A similar argument is highlighted in previous research (Brown & Chin, 2013; Bryson *et al.*, 2012; Mustapha *et al.*, 2013; Zanudin *et al.*, 2019).

Correspondingly, participants in eight FGDs emphasised the importance of collaboration between stakeholders to approve development applications [FGD1; FGD2; FGD3; FGD4; FGD5; FGD6; FGD7; FGD9]. They believed it is essential for the local authorities and private developers to utilise local experiential knowledge. Nevertheless, the current planning permission process appears to be a direct negotiation between the private developer and local authorities [FGD2; FGD4; FGD7].

*"It is important for the developer to have a good relationship with the community to ease the discussion and communication between both sides."*

Participant No.30, FGD4

*"It is not our intention to object to future development, but when a developer wants to propose a new development, they should involve the community representative, local authority representative. Initially, we should discuss and solve any*

*potential issues. When there is established community living in the area, there tend to be issues and disputes that will occur after new development."*

Participant No.52, FGD7

Meanwhile, all applications have consistently noted the same participants and actors involved in deciding on the applications (**Table 7**). Each decision-making stage is chaired by a Mayor or *Yang Dipertua Majlis*, whom local councillors will advise. Internal and external agencies are responsible for advising on the technical aspects of an application. In contrast, local councillors, as the representatives of the community, are responsible for representing the interests of their community in decision-making.

**Table 8:** Participants in the OSC Meeting

<b>Participants in Decision-Making</b>	<b>Incidence</b>
Mayor/ <i>Yang Dipertua Majlis</i>	12
Internal Agencies	12
External Agencies	12
Local Councillors	12

*Source: Zanudin (2020)*

Based on the analysis, participants in seven FGDs agreed that the community communicate with the local authority through their local councillor [FGD1; FGD2; FGD3; FGD4; FGD5; FGD7; FGD8;]. The community interest is brought forward to the local authority by the local councillor.

*"...local councillor is responsible for bringing up our concern to the local authority and sharing the information with us."*

Participant No.52, FGD7

*"Local councillors should be aware of the condition of their community as well as the local authority's plan for their area. They should frequently involve in programs that are held in their locality. Through this program, they can use it as a platform to share any information with the community."*

Participant No.52, FGD7

From the findings, it is indispensable for a local councillor to constantly engage with their community to gain the necessary local knowledge. This can

help the councillors to represent their locality (Marzukhi, 2020; Bryson *et al.*, 2012; Michels & De Graaf, 2010); Zanudin *et al.*, 2019).

Finally, the appeal board is another avenue for the public to challenge the operational decision made by the LPA. Based on all 12 mixed development applications gathered, it is apparent that this avenue is only accessible to the applicant. Data gathered displayed that none of the mixed development applications involved the appeal board (**Table 8**). It is unclear how useful the function of the appeal board is in deliberating the applicant's and community's interests.

**Table 9:** Involvement of the appeal board

<b>Appeal Board</b>	<b>Incidence</b>
Not Applicable	12
Applicable	0

*Source: Zanudin (2020)*

## DISCUSSION

The results indicate that currently, the participation of the community in development plan-making and planning permission in IM, especially among the low-income segment, is minimal compared to the other actors. These results address the research question, "to what extent does the current participatory platform in Iskandar Malaysia offer a genuine opportunity to the low-income segment to participate in the planning and operational decision-making?". Planning and operational decisions appear to be made based on technical factors and top-down approaches.

Following the analyses of data collected from planning documents and FGDs, several issues concerning the current practices of community participation in the planning process in IM have been identified. It seems that the LPAs, specifically in the Johor Bahru and Kulai districts, still depend on conventional methods for communication and engagement (**Table 2**). It is indicated that the usage of newspapers and banners for information sharing has not reached the community, especially the low-income segment. The technical incompetence of the layperson, particularly the low-income segment, has influenced their understanding of the information shared. The concentration of publicity programs at the authorities' buildings and a few other less-accessible locations has failed to generate high and inclusive participation.

**Table 3** indicates that publicity programs only attracted specific stakeholders and community segments. An average of 43.3% of the total objectors were among the private sector, followed by high and middle-income households with an average of 40% in the respective LPs. The data is validated by the findings of FGDs, where participants in the eight FGDs agreed the LPA

did not provide sufficient access to the low-cost apartments' residents to participate in the planning process [FGD1; FGD2; FGD3; FGD4; FGD6; FGD7; FGD8; FGD9]. Therefore, the LPA needs to conduct exciting and frequent engagements with the community segment to improve their participation.

The willingness of the public planner to go the "extra mile" in engaging with the low-income segment can enhance their participation. In LP Johor Bahru Kulai 2025, the public planners have directly engaged the community in Kampung Pok, Skudai and Rumah Pangsa Cendana (**Table 2**). Thus, a slight increase in the number of objectors among the low-income segment has been witnessed (**Table 3**).

**Table 7** indicates the absence of community engagement in operational decision-making. The community's lack of access to information on planning permission is due to what has been underlined in TCPA 1976. Since most of the local areas in IM are gazetted with LP, it has limited the possibility for the neighbouring community to be informed of new development around their area. It is up to the public planner's judgement to inform the neighbouring community (**Table 7**). Engaging the neighbouring community during the decision-making will allow the community to incorporate their local experiential knowledge, hence solving potential conflicts [FGD1; FGD2; FGD3; FGD4; FGD5; FGD6; FGD7; FGD9].

Based on **Table 4** and **Table 7**, it can be comprehended that both planning and operational decision-making are dictated by the technical perspective of the public sector. From the perspective of development plan-making, although the community participated in the publicity programs, their involvement can be categorised as tokenism. Even though the objectors were invited to the inquiry and hearing session, the session is dominated by state officials. Their judgement thus is questionable due to the lack of local knowledge. There is a possibility that the assessment causes the committee to lean towards the state's interests.

In addition, the planning permission process appears to be a direct engagement between the LPA and the applicant. Community involvement in planning permission depends on the public planner's judgement. The opportunity for the community to exert influence in operational decision-making depends on the representation of the local councillors (**Table 8**). It depends on the technical competence and knowledge of the local councillor to ensure that the decision is deliberated based on collective interest. There is a great chance that a decision is made purely based on the rational thinking of the technical agencies.

## CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to the continuous debate on the effectiveness of the community participatory process in urban planning as a vehicle for incorporating



the community's interest into planning and operational decisions, hence producing a greater living environment for the community, predominantly the low-income segment. Thus, this study examines the current state of the low-income segment's participation in the development plan-making and planning permission processes in IM.

The researcher evaluated the state of the low-income segment's participation in the gazetted LPs of Johor Bahru and Kulai and the approved planning permission by employing document gathering and document analysis. In addition, FGDs and thematic analysis were selected to analyse the primary data, hence substantiating the document analysis findings. The results indicated that currently, the participation of the low-income segment in development plan-making and planning permission in IM is very limited compared to the other actors.

The limitation of knowledge and awareness among the low-income segment in IM is associated with the employment of conventional methods for communication and engagement. The concentration of publicity programs at authorities' buildings and a few other locations also contributed to the state of participation among the low-income segment. In addition, it is related to the attitude of the public planner in treating the participatory process. The willingness of public planners to go the "extra mile" to communicate and engage with the segment can contribute to improving their knowledge and awareness.

Regarding collaboration, the participatory platforms provided in development plan-making appear to be tokenism. Although objectors are invited during the inquiry and hearing session, the dominance of the state government in the committee has resulted in their judgement being questioned. The Public Inquiry and Hearing Committee seemed to lack local knowledge due to the absence of local officials in the committee. Likewise, no collaboration is formed in the planning permission process as the process is a direct engagement between LPA and the applicant. Therefore, chances for the community, especially the low-income segment, to exert their influence are through their local councillor.

It is anticipated that the study's findings will help policy-makers and decision-makers address the shortcomings of the current practice, hence promoting genuine participation by the community, especially the low-income segment. Subsequently, a few areas can be addressed in the future, including replicating the study using the quantitative research method as it may result in different outcomes due to its statistical attributes.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This research is funded by the Academic Training Scheme for Bumiputera (SLAB) from the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia and the Young Lecturer Scheme from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM).

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Received: 15<sup>th</sup> September 2022. Accepted: 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2022