

Integrating Land Use Planning and Aged Care Services in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) Through Legal Reform

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ABSTRACT

Urbanization and population ageing are intersecting in Malaysia and what important is for us to understand that population ageing per se is not a problem, but ensuring the social, physical, economic, and policy environment meet the changing demographic needs. We need to strategize so that the benefit of urbanization is shared, plus solid planning and policies are needed at the national, state and town planning stages to ensure access and affordable infrastructures, social and health services that meet the needs of society for all ages. At the same time to address sustainable development goals of making cities and communities, inclusive, safe and sustainable. The National Physical Plan (NPP-4) was formulated to become a strategic document that outlines the country's spatial development policy in line with the Twelfth (12th) Malaysia Plan, which ensures that Malaysia can become a prosperous nation and resilient in terms of economy, environment and social balance for the well-being of the Malaysian Family as a whole.

Since the future trend involves older people living longer in the nation, then the specific plan and development activities on any land must consider the inclusion and integration of the elderly into the community and providing quality aged care services (i.e., housing and residential care facilities (care centres, nursing homes and old-folk homes) to them. Special economic zone was identified as the study region for this study due to the fact that special economic zones (SEZs) provide government with the tool to control land use for economic development and play substantial role in the regulation of urbanization. The objective of this study is thus to evaluate the current legal framework and identify the policy-implementation gaps on land use planning for aged care services in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) of Malaysia and to explore the perspective of the stakeholders on issues relating to aged care services, as well as to arrive at consensus among stakeholders on the feasibility of integrating land use in SEZs and aged care services.

Obviously, care services are closely related to land use and zoning, as care aspects can be viewed from the housing perspective and services in the housing location. In Malaysia, age in place is yet to fully develop as a policy approach in addressing population ageing issues. There are limited housing developments that addresses elderly housing and services. Age in place development will have to consider the life span perspective of long-term residence and anticipate services needed across the life span. Since there are rooms for the silver industry to develop by adopting the concept of ageing in place for new housing development, then the

development of businesses related to older population needs in the old residential communities or towns are crucial. Hence, a dynamic legal framework and good governance are expected to accommodate the purpose and should offer great assistance in realizing the desired approach.

The research is fully qualitative, involving document analysis, focus group discussion (FGD) and scope analyses on the literature review. Legal documents were analysed before the FGD sessions conducted, which involved detail analysis of the relevant documentations on policies and enforceable Acts and Regulations. Focus group ii discussions have gathered selected groups of individuals to deliberate on the specific issue as facilitated by the moderator. A total of six (6) FGD sessions were conducted with SEZ representatives, industry representatives, government agencies representatives, and Iskandar Malaysia representatives.

Currently, the allocation of land use for SEZs focuses on industries, whereas there is an urgent need to initiate a development programme towards a comprehensive elderly care that covers social, economic and health aspects. It is timely for specific use of land or zone to be allocated for the aged care services (housing and residential care facilities (care centres, nursing homes and old-folk homes), similar to the land-use zones provided for other classes for example, schools, community centres and religious places in any development. Hence, the main recommendation is to propose for the allocation of a specific zone in the classification of use of land, for aged care services development in any town planning and development within the country. This is to promote walkability, opportunity and liveability, stems from zoning and development decisions. This study recommends for a new specific zone between commercial and institutional that allows the development for elderly housing, accommodations and facilities nearby that are suitable for the elderly living, as well as able to integrate the age care services into any development in the land area.

In addition, the issues of land use for aged care services in SEZ need the development coordination between the federal and state governments. The cooperation among the federal and states and the respective agencies are vital in ensuring viable planning can be carried out smoothly. If successful coordination of the strategic direction and action plan can be achieved, SEZs region should able to lead and realise the development of the inclusive community with aged care services fully integrated into its city centre development. This is possible looking at the kind of investment incentives given to the region. Thus, another important recommendation is to set forth strategies for 'silver economy' in the National Economic Plan for the government, state and local authorities to implement in planning for the silver population. The rise of silver population would impact the labour market, the healthcare system and finance and these challenges provide opportunities for healthcare advancement and revenue generation for the country. With the foreign investors interest in Malaysia, as among the top countries for retiring, the government must ensure that the infrastructure, investment policies and regulations on facilities and services for the aged care are sufficiently robust and supportive.