

Sustainability of Urban Affordable Housing in Malaysia

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Abstract : This paper examines the current strategic and planning issues in the provision of affordable housing in urban centres in Malaysia from the perspective of sustainability. Sustainability here refers to social sustainability such as the need to address urban poverty and ensure better quality of life; economic sustainability in ensuring that the financial mechanisms are healthy and stable in the long-run, and to a lesser extent, environmental sustainability in reducing pollution related problems and building footprint. The Malaysian affordable housing sector has undergone tremendous transformations since the sixties, transcending from the earlier social housing catering to the poorer strata of the society, to the current state of housing woes plaguing the young urban middle class. The increase in urban land prices and construction costs, coupled with rampant property speculative and manipulative activities have resulted in situations of housing that are largely unaffordable even to the middle income sector of the urban populations. To overcome such scenario, the public as well as private sectors in the recent years, have come up with various intermediate, as well as medium-term policies aimed to curb the burning housing needs of the urban populations. Key strategies include financial intervention in regulating the interests rates, imposing property gain taxes; loosening the requirement for density and other planning requirements, faster approval of projects, compulsory contribution from developers, etc. Some of the policies are commendable, while others are ad-hoc by nature, and are not able to resolve the long-term socio-economic challenges. This paper discusses and examines the issues from the 'sustainability' perspective, focusing on key fiscal, land use and planning policies, as well as the more subtle (but important) political and institutional factors shaping the provision of mass housing for the urban populations in Malaysia.

Keywords : affordable housing, urban housing, sustainable housing, planning for urban housing

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