

THE POTENTIAL OF SUSTAINABLE COHOUSING TO SUPPORT SOCIAL INTERACTION FOR ACTIVE AGEING NEIGHBORHOOD: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

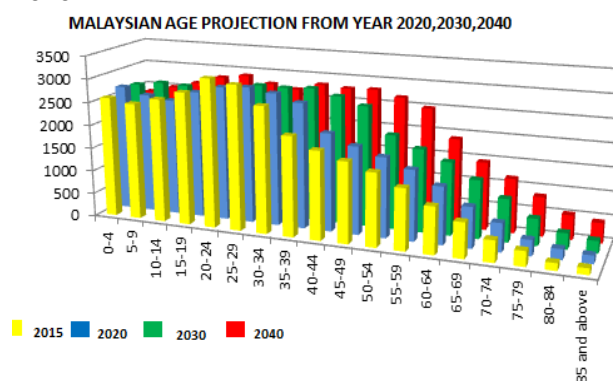
Malaysia is expected to reach the ageing population status by 2030, and this drive different sector to prepare for their needs, including housing. Cohousing is an alternative for intentional living community to resolve the problems of isolation and loneliness within an ageing neighborhood. Numbers of scholars have deliberated on this model and it is believed to be a sustainable medium in enhancing social interaction. This research gained data from existing literature on cohousing and social interaction, through contents analysis and the data were assessed from various dimensions. Results showed that all of the 6 elements have contributed to social sustainability and strongly support social interaction through community involvement from the initial stage, design input, recruitment, as well as their daily management. The findings are illustrated in the form of conceptual framework and will be useful for all property practitioners in helping them to enhance their understanding of the cohousing approach.

Key words: Cohousing, sustainable cohousing, active ageing, senior cohousing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The recorded number of Malaysia citizens aged of 60 has reached nearly 15% and in 2050, it is projected up to 23%. The increasing proportion for senior or older people may affect their social and health well-beings; hence, their needs should become a priority. The data in Figure 1 show the increase in the population of 40 to 50 year olds who will enter the elderly category. In turn, the preparation for their accommodation is needed to elucidate, at least for the next 10 years. The need of other alternative to make this group more independent and less dependent to health support and care system will be the priority. Furthermore, the increasing numbers of delayed and non-married people contribute to the falling fertility rate, and this group of people will search for accommodation options that are free from dependency since they are alone and no adult child will be around to take care of them.

Figure 1. Malaysian age distribution 2015-2040



The practical idea of cohousing for senior citizens has been agreed by most of the older people in cohousing, as it can improve their well-being and quality of life [1]. Moreover, it may benefit to the increases of mutual support, acceptance of ageing, feelings of safety as well as lessening social isolation [2]. Hence, cohousing is also seen as the modern accommodation option for single households as the number of older people living alone starts to increase [3].

The objective of this paper is to identify the sustainable cohousing concept for accommodating the active ageing community and to propose a conceptual framework for better understanding of this approach to improve social interaction. This paper presents, literally, the cohousing concept and how it can accommodate sustainability from the viewpoint of the Malaysian active ageing population. The initial review of Cohousing and the active ageing group were investigated to seek its potential and suitability to be adopted in the Malaysian context. This is supplemented with a discussion from different scholars regarding the advantages of Cohousing in terms of social interaction to the ageing

community. Finally, some conclusions were drawn on the possible outcome of the adaptation of Sustainable Cohousing framework for active ageing community in Malaysia.

2. HOUSING FOR AGEING

Basically, housing for the elderly in Malaysia is provided by three main parties; government, where the provision of homes and service care facilities responsible under the Department of Social Welfare (DSW); private sector, which are more profit oriented for those who are able to pay the service and non-government organization (NGOs), based on the needs of elderly with the encouragement and initiative given by government [5,6]. In this regard, according to [7], more than two thirds of Malaysians aged 60 and over will co-reside with adult child, due to need from physical needs and financial support, especially for married parents and their adult children. Yet for unmarried, healthy elderly with a stable income, they less prefers to stay with adult child since they are able to pay for their privacy and to having separate living. In fact, according to [6], ageing, financially stable Malaysians in urban area will create the demand for separate housing during their

retirement. Thus, retirement home would be ideal as the elderly could live independently and they are surrounded by people from the same age groups which will provide more social and emotional support [8]. Moreover, DSW together with Ministry Of Health are planning to establish a project of senior living and encourage the development of senior's community with active ageing and ageing in place [9]. This presents a great opportunity for cohousing development in Malaysia which will offer more sustainability and encourage independent living for the active ageing community.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

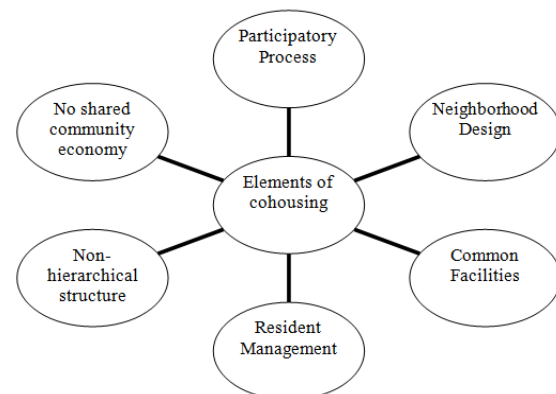
This research was conducted by reviewing all of the available literature from previous researches to identify the existing cohousing development for active ageing community practices. It included all the six basic elements of cohousing together with sustainable neighbourhood criteria, namely physical, social, environment and economic sustainability. Moreover, the advantages of cohousing were also deliberated to seek the significance of cohousing and sustainable elements towards active ageing community neighbourhood. All the reviewed data is then analysed through contents

analysis to develop a preliminary framework based on its sustainable impacts.

4. COHOUSING, SUSTAINABILITY, ACTIVE AGEING COMMUNITY

Cohousing is known as neighborhoods or developments which are typically formed by a group of people who are "consciously committed to living as a community" [10]. The communities comprise private units and communal facilities and they are planned based on the social contract design principles that are reportedly encourage more social interaction, helping to build more cohesive communities [11]. Cohousing is also known as a housing comprising of individual apartments or homes with shared spaces and facilities designed to create a community; it is oriented towards collaboration among residents and collective organization of services [12].

Figure 2. The 6th elements of cohousing widely used adapted from Mccamant et. Al (2011)



The universal fundamental characteristics of cohousing are based on these 6 criteria (Figure 2): The first one is participatory process where the community manages to get involved in the development process by help in form the expertise [13]. This will give extra advantage for them to design their neighborhood based on community needs. Secondly, intentional neighborhood design which consist of designing sustainable physical forms such as the paths, green zone, parking and etc. Next, the extensive common facilities, which are seen to be a center of community to meet, share and do multiple activities. The fourth one is that cohousing community must set up their own resident management to take decision for any issues [14]. Next, the fifth criteria of cohousing relate the absence of hierarchy where no one person has authority over others and the existence of leaders is acknowledged among others. Lastly, the sixth criteria is focused on the economic factors where a cohousing community is not a commune and in that sense every cohouser has to find a way to earn his or her own money. Meanwhile, the idea of cohousing is rapidly adopted due to its benefit to the sustainable value. According to [15] cohousing is a high

quality and highly sustainable alternative to traditional housing options. Indeed, it does appear to fulfill some sustainability objectives, including building strong social networks and social cohesion, encouraging pro-environmental behavior and a greater sense of well-being [16]. Consequently, cohousing can be a medium to translate sustainable development in community living, whilst the elements itself can offer support and a sense of unity to people [10]. Moreover, cohousing also can create more sustainable housing, reflecting and embracing nature that can bring inspiration between livelihoods [18]. On the other hand [19] had concluded that cohousing is a model that is able to address both social and environmental values in a highly effective fashion. (Table 1 summarizes the sustainable elements in cohousing development).

Furthermore, cohousing concept can be one of the options for active ageing community who are searching for different and active lifestyle. Basically, senior cohousing supports this group of people to age well by providing physical, social, and emotional supports. The planning and design arrangements are intentionally supported in terms of physical accessibility, environmental and social

sustainability to encourage independent living. There are various scholars who elucidate the significance of cohousing towards ageing community and how it can benefits to these group of people, as revealed in Table 2. Most of them

agreed that senior cohousing may assist the existence of mutual support within community, increase safety and security feeling; eliminate social isolation through a numbers of activities which required community participation and contributions.

Table 1: Sustainable Elements towards Cohousing

Elements	Findings	Scholars	
Social	Vitality and security	Strong sense of safety and security due to every cohouser taking care of each other and together assisting to make a better, safer environment	[20]
	Social bonding from the start	The initiation process from the residents will help them to built their bonding	[21]
	Accessibility	Strong social and civic fabric, including volunteering and informal network accessibility	[22]
	Community unity and eliminate isolation	Strong social networks and social cohesion amongst the community exist due to variety of activities	[11, 16, 17]
	Balance community life and privacy	The common areas being the integral part of the community and the private living is supplemented	[21]
	Sharing responsibilities	Residents will responsible to contribute for day to day management	[11, 17, 21]
Economical	Generate a lower cost-of-living	Encourage sharing of items like tools, gardens, transportation, laundry facilities, meals, etc	[18, 23, 24]
Environmental	Pro environmental idea	Enable the community to share resources -result in lower levels of resource consumption including energy, land, goods and waste production	[10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 25]
	Community initiative towards green building	Incorporate and utilize green building materials and techniques and minimize the impact to the natural environment	[10, 18]
Physical	Intentionally social bonding design	The design is carefully planned to fulfill community criteria	[17, 18]
	Land use efficiency	Use the material and land sources efficiently, less space consumption, preservation of open space and remaining land prepared for other community activities	[26, 27]
	Communal place and Social centre	Social centre is the main place where all the cohousers will be meeting and do all their activities	[10, 28]

Author's search, 2015

Table 2. The significant of cohousing to active ageing community

Author / The significant of cohousing to Active ageing community	[2]	[3]	[29]	[30, 31]	[1]	[32]	[33]
Help the existence of mutual support	X	X		X			X
Increased acceptance of ageing	X						
Feelings of safety/less worry	X				X		X
Lessening of social isolation	X		X			X	X
Live as an active participant in a group of people of similar age		X		X			
Additional option for the informal care		X					
Offers opportunities for learning and skill-exchange					X		
Keeps older people active, healthy and engaged		X				X	X
Reduces demand for health and social care services			X				X
More efficient use of resources where the community share tasks				X			

Author’s search, 2016

5. DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

To sum up, this paper has illustrated cohousing as an alternative to conventional housing, this novel concept which is more sustainable to an active ageing community. As the population of ageing community keeps growing, the problems of social isolation and help support for this group of people will grow. Therefore, Cohousing is perhaps one of the most sustainable models to be applied since the characteristics themselves fulfill the sustainable value for the ageing community (Figure 3). A conceptual framework below was introduced as an alternative to support their social interaction among active ageing. Nevertheless, all the 6 elements have contributed to social sustainability where main objective of social interaction in neighborhood concept

can be achieved. Cohousing model provides community involvement from the initial development through participatory process, design input, community recruitment, and daily management. The residents themselves are keen to build a sense of community and have very positive attitude towards social interaction to each other [16]. Moreover, the cohousing is designed by placing communal place as a center of community activities will encourage more social cohesion and networks for a better interaction [2, 3, 11, 15, 18, and 21].

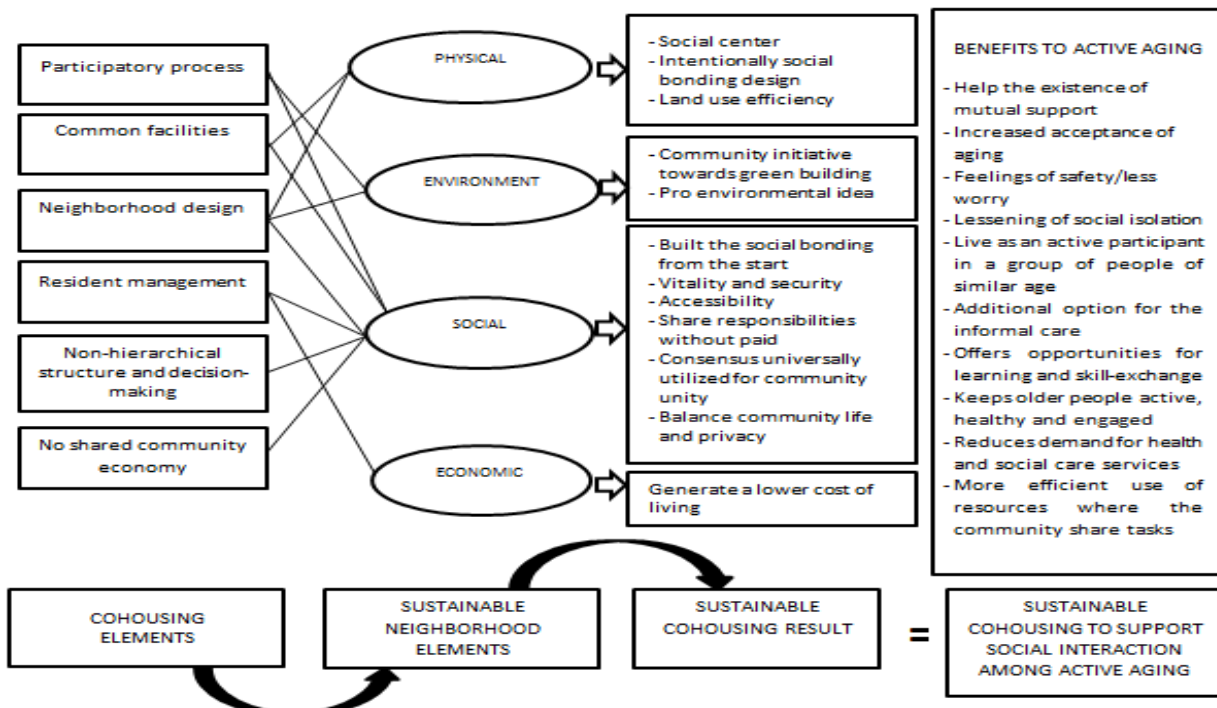
Meanwhile, the adaptation of non-hierarchal structure may let the community to be less formal and increase the sense of wellbeing. Every cohousers will contribute their opinion for the best interest of the community

interests and reduces interaction barriers. Apart from that, the community recruitment process will let the community authority to select or reject their potential neighbourhood (*self-selection*), who is known to be committed to stay in the community [34]. This may ensure the continuity of achieving cohousing objectives. Inherently, this study believes that cohousing is modern housing concept that supports stronger social relations within communities, rather than conventional housing areas [15-17].

Cohousing for older people is initiated and managed by older

people themselves [29], and provide living spaces divided into individual dwellings and common spaces. This concept aims for both privacy and community engagement. Thus, this concept is suitable for community which still supports interhousehold relations and activities to maintain social interaction existence. Most of cohousers in senior cohousing feel safe, less worry, as there are mutual support in terms of physical and emotional and make them feel accepted when they mingle with people in the similar age.

Figure 3. A conceptual framework of sustainable cohousing to support social interaction among active ageing community



6. CONCLUSION

As Malaysia is committed to set a future direction in ensuring the sustainability of the housing sector (National Housing Policy, Thrust 5) and intentionally keen to provide a sustainable living among active ageing community for senior citizens (Chapter 16 of ETP handbook on healthcare), this study urges the deliberation of this proposal of sustainable cohousing framework for Malaysian. Moreover, the Local Agenda 21 Programme (LA21), which emphasises the sustainable development to be implemented at the local level, will bring a great opportunity to the Cohousing concept. As cohousing is referred to as sustainable medium by many scholars, it will assist Malaysia in achieving its sustainable agenda in housing development.

The findings from this study can be adapted into future sustainable housing concept and can be assumed as the basis for recommendations to improve social cohesion amongst active ageing community in Malaysia. Further research, such as using the case study approach can be done in order to explore and provide in-depth discussion of cohousing approach from the Malaysian perspective.

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