
FITTINGS MALAYSIAN ACTIVE AGEING TO SENIOR COHOUSING: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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Abstract

National Policy for elderly had encouraged the elderly to remain active, productive and create opportunities for them to live independently as Malaysia will reach ageing population status by year 2030. Senior Cohousing can be considered as a part of retirement home concept that can improve quality of life and encourages independent living. The objective of this study is to isolate the basic concept of Cohousing and to identify how Malaysian ageing can be fit with cohousing. A preliminary study was conducted among people that are in the age of 50 and over to seek their opinion regarding to current neighbourhood, cohousing potentialities and the acceptable of 6th cohousing elements to their neighbourhood. Data analysed through cross tabulation, likert scale and frequency analyses. The finding showed that the respondent had great potentialities to live in cohousing as they suit with the criterion. Hence, the elements of Neighbourhood Design which are safety and security; privacy; and the layout of the neighbourhood is the most important acceptable elements in developing cohousing. Overall this finding will be useful to identify senior cohousing mechanism especially in determining the suitable activities and to propose the other core elements of cohousing development suit with Malaysian active ageing community.

Keywords: *Cohousing; Malaysian ageing; active ageing; senior cohousing*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The increasing number of ageing population is inevitable. As recorded Malaysia will be expected to reach ageing population status in 2030 where the numbers of citizen age of 60 and over will record at 15% and in year 2050 this group of people will be projected up to 23%. The increasing of proportion of older people may effect to the social and health care (Mohd et al., 2015), consequently it's requiring more challenge to providing thus service since elderlies is less health than the younger (Mafauzy, 2000). Nevertheless the elderly are still so much valuable as the younger to the nation. They are actually deserved to have special attention on how their ageing taken place within the context of their society, friends and neighbors or towards their family members. 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 (Aini, Aziz, & Hanif, 2015; Sulaiman et al., 2005).

According to DSW the number homes for the elderly and the elderly sent to the center are on the rise. In fact with the issue of declining fertility, downsizing family size and the growing number of delayed and non-marriage people had contribute to the increasing demand of housing care for elderly (Sulaiman et al., 2005). Besides, there will be no more new old folk's home run by government to be built from now on rather than

what existed on the country today as stated by Women, Family and Community Development Minister (Malay Mail Online, 2016). The reason is wanting their adult child be more responsible to taking care of their own parents and not to abandoned them.

However, not all of the children are intentionally abandoning their parents by sending them to homes care or hospitals, it's probably because they are lack of the skills to care for the elderly parents (Kamini, 2014). Furthermore, the other reason for elderly sent home care is due to the main factors of fewer children to share the responsibility caused by the decreasing in birth rate, geographical mobility of family members and increasing numbers of women working due to economic pressure had lead them to less time for carrying out care duties (Sally Herne, 1994). Accordingly there were more elderly and ailing parents nowadays prefer to spend their ageing in nursing or old folk's home instead of burdening their children (Bernama, 2016).

Besides, the number of cases of depression among the elderly is growing, but many are undiagnosed or not reported (Olivia Miwil, 2016). The main reasons for elderly feel depression is due to the fear of death, loss of a spouse/friend and loneliness. Elderly who is at home alone tending to experience anxiety, insecure and isolated. Lack of attention or activity reduces mental stimulation and this too can contribute to anxiety and depression. Thus may influence the elderly go to nursing home where they can do more activities, get socializing, share the same interest and enjoy their twilight year without burdening their children. However with limited number of nursery provided by the government and unskilled or less private nursing that can give better quality service to elderly will make them lack of option especially nowadays the elderly are educated and financially stable.

A part of that, active ageing and young elderly nowadays require a settlement that can keep them in active and healthy lifestyle since they are physically and financially stable as compare to eldest elderly. However most of the literature was more concern on how to deal with elder elderly and ail elderly living rather than active ageing and young elderly (currently understudied) and our national policy also not specially address on housing needs for elderly

and denying the needs of active urban elderly in housing programmed (Elsawahli, Ahmad, & Ali, 2016). Furthermore, the social interaction showed correlation between active lifestyle and social activities contributed to more active to young elderly but it greatly understudy as compare to physical needs, facilities and environment. It's requiring multi-disciplinary of national strategies that direct to health, education and housing for ageing. Again, more than two thirds of elderly in Malaysia will decide for co-reside with their adult child due to the needs of physical and financial supporting (Aini et al., 2015). Oppositely for unmarried, healthy and active elderly with a stable income, they are less preferred to stay with adult child since they are able to pay for their privacy and having separate living.

Therefore the needs of improving those schemes as well as promoting better accommodation by preparing them with healthy lifestyle and socially bound can be the option on making places more livable within neighborhood. Retirement home then, would be ideal as the elderly could live independently as they are surrounded by people from the same age of groups which will provide more social and emotional support (Mafauzy, 2000). One of retirement home is through cohousing concept. The practical idea of cohousing is to improved well-being and quality of life for senior citizen (Forbes, 2002). Moreover senior cohousing for ageing community may benefit from the mutual support, increased acceptance of ageing, feelings of safety as well as lessening of social isolation (Glass & Vander Platts, 2013). It is an attractive idea due to there is people around to keep an eye on and taking care to each other with emotionally supported. Therefore this study isolated the basic concept of cohousing and to identify how Malaysian active ageing can be fit with senior cohousing. A preliminary study was conducted in selected Skudai area among people that are in the age of 50 and over to seek their opinion regarding to their current neighborhood and potentialities towards cohousing concept. Data analysed through cross tabulation, frequency analyses and Likert scale.

2.0 ACTIVE AGEING AND SENIOR COHOUSING ELEMENTARY

According to World Health Organization active ageing is the ‘process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age’. It applies to both individuals and population groups (WHO, 2002). Meanwhile, under International Council on Active Ageing, the terms of active ageing is synonym to “engaged in life”. The engagement is towards wellness, emotional, environmental, physical, social, and spiritual and so on regardless of age, socioeconomic status or health (International Council on Active Aging, 2015). As in Malaysia active ageing is known as an optimizing opportunity for physical, social, mental wellbeing throughout life, in order to extend healthy life expectancy, productivity and good quality of life as people age (Ambigga et al., 2011). In sum, active aging is kind of process to make ageing people engage with social, environmental and physical towards healthy lifestyle. The engagement on active ageing is so much important to the community especially with the rise number of ageing population of Malaysia. If active ageing people can be group of one community, a better understanding and appreciation of healthy lifestyle can be achieved.

Cohousing seen as a way of modern neighbourhoods which offers an additional option on the informal care and housing needs of people and keeps older people to be more active, healthy and reduces demand for health and social care services. It’s also yet to be believed as one of the initiatives of modern housing concept that may improve social cohesion among community through their element, social beneficial, affordability and many more. The planning and design arrangements of this neighbourhood are intentionally supporting in terms of physical accessibility as well as environmental and social sustainability to encourage independent living.

Basically cohousing is known as neighbourhoods or developments are typically formed by a group of people who are “consciously committed to living as a community”(Belk, 2006). It is actually originated in Denmark in the mid-1970s, and swiftly became established to the other European countries such as German, US, UK and many more. Basically

the communities comprise private units (in which households reside) and communal facilities and they are planned based on social contract design principles that reportedly encourage more social interaction, helping to build more cohesive communities (Williams, 2005). It represents an active community in planned, owned and managed by their own residents, groups of people that preferred more interactions with their neighbours.

Elements of cohousing may vary depends on the needs of the community. Universally, the elements are based on 6 criteria namely participatory process, where the community manages to get involved in the development process with help from the experts (Lietaert, 2010); physical design fosters social interaction; common facilities, which is the centre of community; resident management where the community set up to take community duty and decision for any issue (Christian, 2009); absence of hierarchy where no one person (or persons) has authority over others and the existence of leaders is acknowledged among others; Lastly is 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.

Cohousing for older people is a kind of housing initiated and managed by older people themselves, with divided by individual dwellings and common spaces, aiming for privacy and community. However, the community still supports inter-household relations and activities to remain social interaction existence. Accordingly there are various scholars elucidate the significant of cohousing towards ageing community and how it can benefits to these group of people. As such, it may help the existence of mutual support (Choi, 2008;Forbes, 2002), lessening of social isolation (Bamford, 2005), offers opportunities for learning and skill-exchange (Forbes, 2002) and reduces demand for health and social care services. Most of cohousers in senior cohousing feel safety, less worry, mutually support in terms of physical and emotional and make them feel acceptance. They can share their feeling, experience or do the activities together and the feel of loneliness or isolation can be eliminated. This concept is significant for elderly who want to stay

independently or for those who are single and no adult's child around to take care of them.

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research was conducted by reviewing all the available literature from previous research to identify the existing cohousing development for active ageing community practices and a survey to the ageing respondent within selected Skudai, Johor, Malaysia area. This preliminary study was conducted among 38 of respondent in the age of 50-76 years old to seek ageing community general opinions. Although the accepted definition of elderly age is at 60 years old and above (World Assembly on Ageing in 1982 in Vienna), however for the purpose of this study the ages are taken from 50 years old and over. People who are in the age of 50 will enter elderly age for another 5-10 years, thus their opinions on the topic are really demanded since they will be the targeted market for cohousing. Respondents are also taken from different group of gender, racial and religious in order to seek their opinions of idea in living together as cohousing needed. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 for windows was used to analyze the collected data. Cross tabulation, Likert scale and frequency analysis were done in order to tap their opinion base on different level of age group.

4.0 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The sample consists of 45 % male (n = 17), 55% female (n = 21), the range of age was between 50 years and below 34% (n=13), 51-55 at 21% (n=8), 56-60 at 13% (n= 5), 61-65 noted at 18% (n=7), and for 66-70 and 71-75 years old recorded at 5% (n=2) each. Most of the respondents were married 82% (n=31) with children, married without children 11% (n=4) and single 8% (n=3). Most of the respondents are stayed in urban area consist of 68.4% (n=26) and had academic qualification at least degree level 37% (n= 14). Majority of the respondents were Malay 81% (n=31) and most of the respondents previously or currently worked in the public sector 47% (n= 18), while 5% (n=2) were in private sector, 8 %

(n=3) were self-employed, and another 40 % (n=15) were unemployed or already retired. In terms of their planning of living arrangement at the retired age, majority of respondent were chosen to stay with their children or partner. However the patterns of their option were different if looked to the level of age as show in Table 1. It's tabulated that respondent who were not entering to the elderly age yet (60 and below) would prefer to co-reside with their children as their children currently living with them and were not working or married. However for those who are in the age of 60 and above decided to stay with their spouse rather than their adult's child as they were married or move due to job mobility. Indeed, there are only small percentage of respondent were decided to stay alone 5% (n=2) as they were single and no other choice to stay with. Respondent preferred to stay with partner or their own child due to eliminating the feeling of loneliness and insecure plus some of them need a physical support because of their health circumstances.

4.2 Current Neighborhood

In the second part, respondents were asked about their feeling regarding to their current neighborhood. Results show that majority of respondents were happy and satisfied to stay in their current neighborhood (90%, n=35). They also agree that they were know almost of resident in their community (60%, n=23) and feel comfortable to interact with each other without bias (89%, n=34). However for the question if their current neighborhood will eliminate social isolation, results shown differently base of the age as in Table 2. For the age of 55 and below, they were disagreeing to that statement where the older one shows oppositely. Most of these younger still working and their relations take place outside of neighborhood rather than their own community. Some of them only know side by side neighbor and not interested to know the entire community member. Hence least of them had interested to participate in community meeting or activity. Meanwhile the older respondent fell more social due to they are not working and have more time to spend on the neighborhood by involved actively in community activity. However, only a few of the older

respondent disagreed to this statement as they were not actively involved in community because of their health and physical conditions.

Table 1: Living arrangement in retired age of respondent

		Living Arrangement in retired Age of respondent			
		Alone	Couple Only	Spouse with children	Children without spouse
AGE	50 below	1 <i>f = (8%)</i>	2 <i>f = (15%)</i>	7 <i>f = (54%)</i>	3 <i>f = (23%)</i>
	51-55	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>	3 <i>f = (37.5%)</i>	4 <i>f = (50%)</i>	1 <i>f = (12.5%)</i>
	56-60	1 <i>f = (20%)</i>	2 <i>f = (40%)</i>	2 <i>f = (40%)</i>	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>
	61-65	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>	5 <i>f = (71%)</i>	2 <i>f = (29%)</i>	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>
	66-70	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>	1 <i>f = (50%)</i>	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>	1 <i>f = (50%)</i>
	71-75	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>	1 <i>f = (50%)</i>	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>	1 <i>f = (50%)</i>
	76 +	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>	1 <i>f = (100%)</i>	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>
	Total (38)	2 <i>f = (5%)</i>	14 <i>f = (37%)</i>	16 <i>f = (42%)</i>	6 <i>f = (16%)</i>

Source: Author Search

*f= % of frequency

Table 2: Respondents stand of opinions towards current neighborhood can eliminated isolation

		I Believed The Concept Of My Current Neighborhood Can Eliminated Social Isolation			
		*1	*2	*3	*4
AGE	50 below	2 <i>f = (15%)</i>	5 <i>f = (38%)</i>	4 <i>f = (32%)</i>	2 <i>f = (15%)</i>
	51-55	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>	6 <i>f = (75%)</i>	1 <i>f = (12.5%)</i>	1 <i>f = (12.5%)</i>
	56-60	1 <i>f = (20%)</i>	1 <i>f = (20%)</i>	1 <i>f = (20%)</i>	2 <i>f = (40%)</i>
	61-65	1 <i>f = (14%)</i>	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>	4 <i>f = (57%)</i>	2 <i>f = (29%)</i>
	66-70	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>	1 <i>f = (50%)</i>	1 <i>f = (50%)</i>	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>
	71-75	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>	2 <i>f = (100%)</i>	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>
	76 +	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>	1 <i>f = (100%)</i>	0 <i>f = (0%)</i>
	Total (38)	4 <i>f = (11%)</i>	13 <i>f = (34%)</i>	14 <i>f = (37%)</i>	7 <i>f = (18%)</i>

Source: Author Search

* 1= totally disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, 4= totally agree, *f= % of frequency

4.3 Ageing and Cohousing Character

In the next part respondents were asked about their stands of opinions about ageing character based on combination of questionnaire entry to cohousing potentialities as in Figure 1. There were 9 of Yes and No questions consist of respondent’s personality such as are they independent or social person, their feeling if there were no people around to stay with, and their opinions regarding to the idea of neighborhood concept which emphasizes on social interaction and living together with similar age and interest. Most of the respondents were agreed to those statements, and according to those cohousing settlement if the answer was Yes over to the No answer its shows the respondent had potentialities to become cohousing members. This will make the senior cohousing project tend to be successful is high and the purpose of plan, design and implementation towards Malaysian need to be study.

4.4 The 6th Elements of Cohousing

Next, the respondents were asked about their opinion on 6th cohousing elements for independent, active and healthy living within neighbourhood (Table 3). Their perception was divided by Participatory process (E1), Neighbourhood design (E2), Common

facilities (E3), Resident management (E4), Non-hierarchical structure decision (E5) and lastly No shared economy (E6). Among the 6th elements, most of the respondent was accepting the application of E2 in assisting them to be more independent by having safety and security features such as the house are close together in order to protect community and increase public surveillance. Hence Malaysian elderly were particular about their own privacy and agree to have private space even they are social person. However there are least mean score of E5 where they are not so comfortable to attend meeting regularly though they were no problem to involve in other community activities. On the other hand, respondent also not so comfortable to share and maintaining community space as they prefer to hired outsider to eliminate any conflicts. Thus will show even the respondents have a great potentialities to be cohousers member and agree towards the 6th cohousing elements for independent and active neighbourhoods, however, detail understanding of senior cohousing required more attention to deliberate since the concept is new and Malaysian acceptance towards this concept are still far as comparing to the other European country.

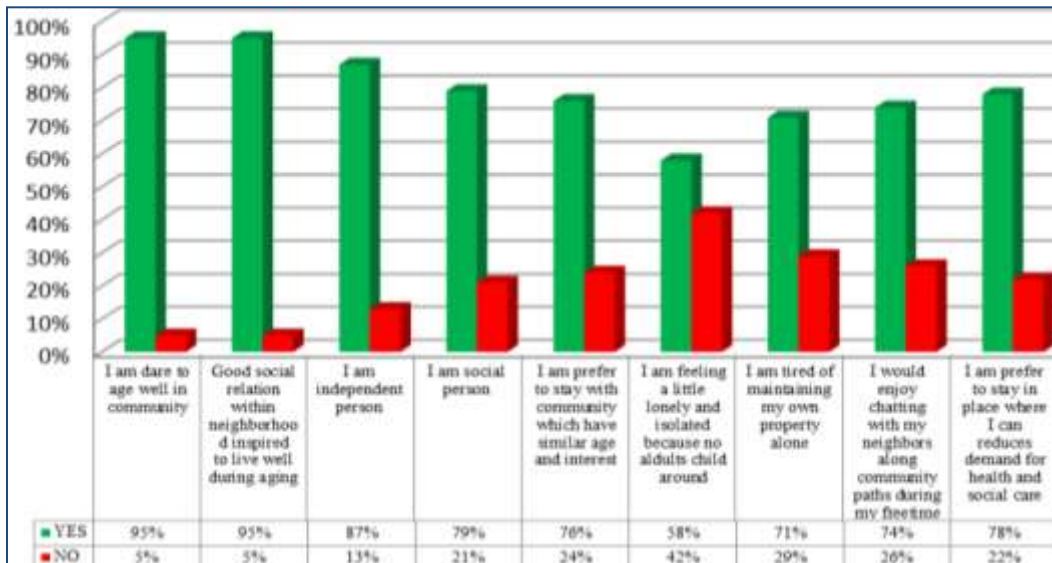


Figure 1: Summary findings of respondents ageing and cohousing character (Author Search)

Table 3: Perception on the 6th Cohousing Elements

Elements		Mean score
E1	a. Participation in development process	3.1579
	b. Contribution to the governance of neighborhood	3.1842
E2	a. Layout design community oriented	3.3158
	b. Security and safety	3.5789
	c. Privacy and private space	3.5526
E3	a. Common house - center of community	3.1053
	b. Potlucks and dine together	3.1579
	c. Shared community space and willing to take care of it	2.9211
E4	a. Active and serve the community	3.2632
	b. Maintain community neighborhood	3.2632
E5	a. Committed attending meeting	2.8684
	b. Decision maker for community aids	3.2632
E6	a. Share community task	3.1842
	b. Efficient use of resources	3.1842

Source: Author Search

5.0 DISCUSSION

The priority over elderly well-being was highlighted Under Economic Transformation Plan (Chapter 16 of ETP handbook on healthcare) and as one of the National Key Result Areas (NKEAs) together with the support from Eleventh Malaysia Plan (RMK-11) which encouraged elderly to be active and productive by providing a sustainable living for them. Hence, under National Policy For Elderly (2011) had string the elderly to remain active and productive to the family, society and nation and create opportunities for them to continue to live independently (objective 2) and offer elderly alternative homes equipped with continuous services such as retirement villages, mobile homecare, modern hut (pondok) system and granny flat (Strategy 3, Programme 3). Consequently it will give new perspective of housing for ageing people especially for those who are independent and looking for an active lifestyle.

Result had proven the elderly were interested to have a better living in their retired age within their community as it may support them through their ageing physically and emotionally. Even though the respondent was happy to stay in their current neighbourhood, however factors of social support and community activity need to be elucidate to increase community interaction and eliminate isolation. The community should consider the needs, obstacles and circumstances of all community members within neighbourhood in order to reduce feeling of loneliness and isolated. Senior cohousing then will be the best option since this concept will ponder the needs of all cohousers in order to gain their support and participation from the initial stage (participatory process) until the community successfully set up (resident management). In fact respondent ageing character had positively to support the cohousing criterion with a great potentiality. Furthermore the core elements for Malaysian senior cohousing also need to address to the factors of security, safety and privacy as the main concern of elderly living in Malaysia. Thus the senior cohousing development requires more time to develop as all the participants need to really understand the knowledge, commitment, and how the process of cohousing will be implemented.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Active ageing among Malaysian should not only focus on their engagement to the physical needs and surrounding, yet the determinations also need to highlight in social interaction towards societies especially within their neighbourhood. Their engagement is so much important to the community hence better understanding of their social needs will assist them to get healthy lifestyle and emotional support. The presence of senior cohousing which offered a better living option for elderly would probably a best way to eliminated the problem of social isolation, depression and loneliness among Malaysian elderly. In fact, cohousing will also encourage them to be more independent, healthy and active living. As number of ageing are on rise with limited number of public and private old folk's

provided, more option of elderly living need to verify. The introduction to senior cohousing as an alternative living for active ageing in Malaysia will be a great opportunity to be implemented in the current market outlook. However, result from this research was only a preliminary study towards respondent's perception of their current neighbourhood and cohousing character of small scale of limited number of respondents. Extended studies might be possible to deliberate on how it will fit to the Malaysian active ageing as a whole with a great number of respondents's to give a better view and acceptance of this concept.

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