

A Review of the “Urban Village” Concept: An Operational Definition in Malaysia

Tinjauan Konsep “Kampung Bandar”: Satu Definisi Operasi di Malaysia

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Abstract

The urban village is an area occupied by the urban community that lives and resides in the urban environment as a group or in certain group which was formed or naturally due to urbanization. The formation of the urban village concept is based on two circumstances, which is due to the effects of urbanization and the result of the urban village formation concept brought about by the planning and strategy of re-developing the urban area. Hence, the urban village formation concept must take into consideration the basic characteristics of the urban village environment, which consist of its geography, background of the village, type of village, the position or status of the village, traditional practices and culture, local organizations, certified status of the land title and the land, distance from the city centre and the community's intrarelationship. Consideration to define squatter areas and settlement on government land or government reserve land were not included in the definition of the urban village concept because this type of settlement does not have certified characteristics of a land title. The operational definition is important as it determines the scope and study sample that can be used in future.

Keywords urban village concept, urban communities, inhabitant, operational definition

Abstrak

Kawasan “kampung bandar” merupakan kawasan yang didiami oleh komuniti masyarakat bandar yang tinggal dan menetap dalam persekitaran bandar secara berkumpulan atau dalam kelompok tertentu sama ada ia dibentuk atau terbentuk sendiri kesan daripada pembangunan pambandaran. Konsep pembentukan kawasan “kampung bandar” terbahagi kepada dua keadaan iaitu kesan daripada proses pambandaran dan hasil daripada konsep pembangunan “kampung bandar” menerusi perancangan dan strategi pembangunan semula kawasan bandar. Namun begitu, konsep pembentukan kawasan “kampung bandar” memerlukan pemahaman berkenaan dengan ciri asas persekitaran kampung bandar iaitu kedudukan geografi, latar belakang kampung, jenis kampung, kedudukan kampung, amalan tradisi dan budaya kawasan kampung, organisasi tempatan, status hak milik tanah yang sah, jarak dengan pusat bandar, status tanah, hubungan serta pertalian masyarakat di kawasan kampung berkenaan. Pertimbangan untuk mendefinisikan kawasan setinggan, petempatan di kawasan tanah kerajaan atau rizab kerajaan adalah tidak termasuk dalam definisi konsep “kampung bandar” kerana petempatan ini tidak mempunyai ciri hak milik tanah yang sah. Definisi operasi ini penting dalam menentukan skop dan sampel kajian yang bakal digunakan nanti.

Kata kunci konsep kampung bandar, komuniti bandar, penduduk, definisi operasi

INTRODUCTION

From an ecological perspective, the “urban village” population is part of the urban population. Hence, there is a significant interaction between the “urban village” population's quality of life and the urban

environment. Both these elements also mutually influence each other. The expansion of urban development has a direct effect on the "urban village" population (Xie, 2005; Yan & Yves, 2011). However, the urban population's quality of life is frequently portrayed based on various infrastructure facilities and urban services offered (Azahan et al., 2008; Haryati, 2010 & Yazid et al., 2015). Thus, the urban development context should be viewed based on planning and strategies that have been developed to ensure that the urban population's quality of life is comprehensively enhanced.

The strong features of a city depend on how much of the forecasted quality of life would be realised. This includes the best facilities and services offered such as employment and business opportunities as well as security and health guaranties (Azahan et al., 2008; Mansor, 2010; Tammy, 1999; Wim et al., 2009 & Yazid et al., 2015). This is because quality of life is intrinsic to societal well-being and its feeling of satisfaction towards the city. Moreover, different cities differ in their position in the urban development cycle, which includes differences in culture, environment and the economy. All these are needs that should be understood, although these are also found within the confines of the same national environment (Tammy, 1999). Therefore, this study would discuss the definition of "urban village" as an operational definition that should be highlighted when considering the influence of urban development pressure that occurs around the "urban village" area in Malaysia. Until now there have no specific definition of urban village is identified by local authority or government. Actually, specific study on urban village environments in Malaysia is very few conducted and it is necessary as well as very important toward sustainable urban environment development. The formation of the urban village area is unique, so this study looked that the uniqueness of these urban village area must have a special research to ensure the strengths and capabilities of the residents and the urban village areas can be identified with clear definition concepts.

METHODOLOGY AND DEFINITION OF THE "URBAN VILLAGE" CONCEPT

This study has been conducted a literature review in identifying and determining the characteristics of the formation of urban village areas which are very few discussed in specific practice of local government especially in Malaysia. Although Mc Gee (1991) in most of his articles talks about the concepts of the village-town (*Desa-Kota*) that are very related to the facilities and infrastructure in determining the both connection, but in characteristic this study seem that no specific meaning in defining the urban village concept clearly. The "urban village" concept was formed by combining the basic characteristics of the physical, social and economic environments in the village and the urban area. From an ecological perspective, the "urban village" area came into existence due a city's economic development and rapid urbanization (Yan & Yves, 2011; Yuting et al., 2010; Li & Li., 2011 & Pu et al., 2011). The following is a concept that combines basic characteristics of the village and urban environments, which then forms the basic characteristics of the "urban village" environment (see Figure 1).

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE VILLAGE ENVIRONMENT

The basic characteristics of the village environment could be viewed through the three types of environments, namely the physical, social and economic environments. Firstly, the basic characteristics of the physical environment of villages in Malaysia could be viewed from its geographical position, settlement structure and construction. The village area is frequently portrayed as a settlement that dominates the interior as well as fringes of the city (Katiman et al., 2006). In other words, the settlement is located in the suburban areas. The existence of these settlements is based on the prevailing facilities as well as economic activities that exist in its surroundings such as agriculture, livestock breeding, fisheries, mining and business (Katiman et al., 2006; Xie, 2005). These developments had influenced the population's settlement structure. The settlement of village populations in Malaysia was created in a traditional fashion, since the time of the colonialist (Lee & Rozali, 2007). Hence, due to security reasons, the colonialists and administrators had played a role in determining the location of these traditional villages by re-settling or instructing the inhabitants to shift from their original location (Katiman, 2001). This situation had created villages in this country with a different structure and type, such as centralised, organised or scattered. Besides that, it had also influenced the structure of houses in the village based on the influence of local culture (Abdul Hadi, 2004; Mansor et al., 2010).

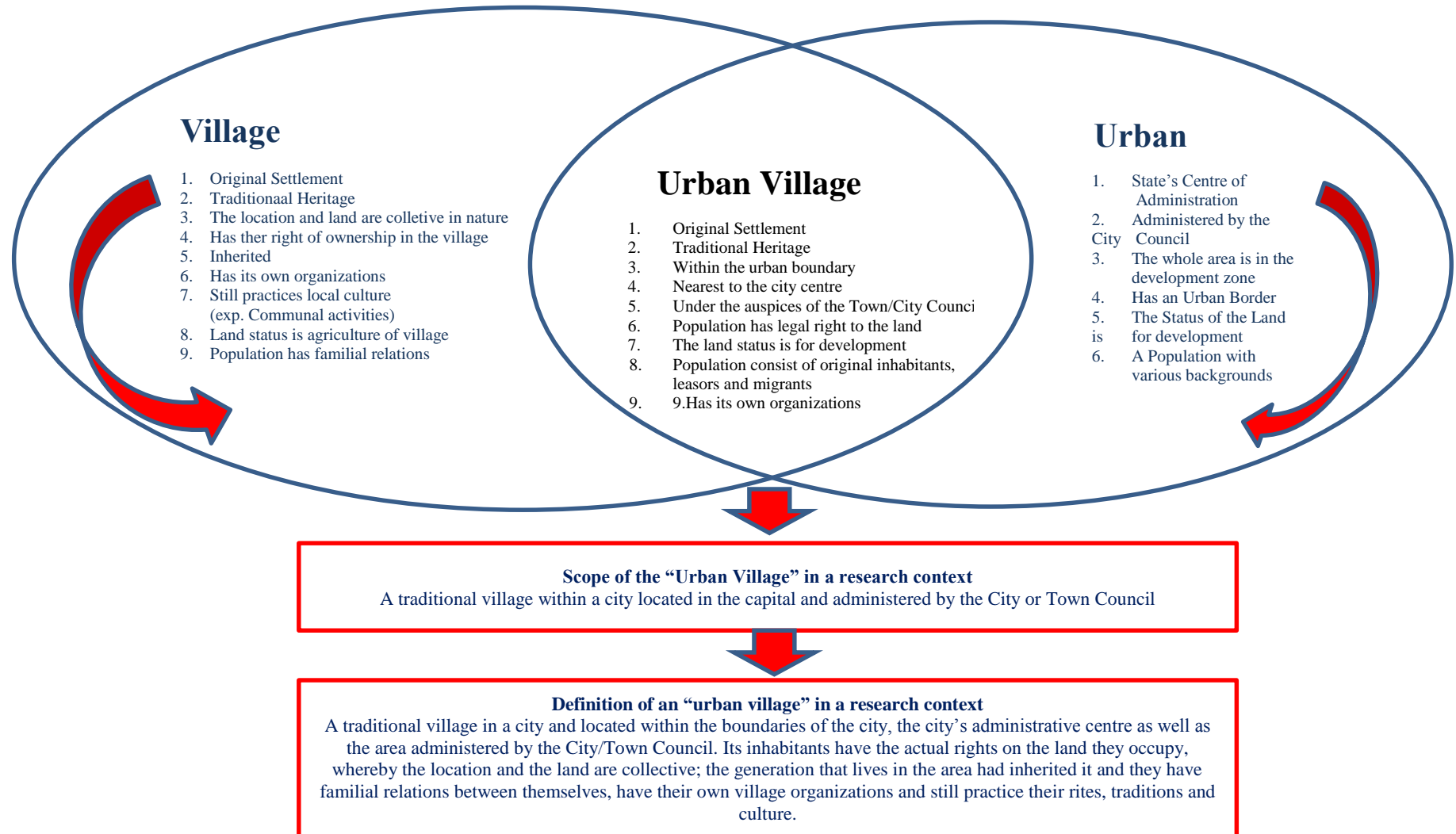


Figure 1 A combination of the villages' basic characteristics and urban environments in order to form the "urban village" area in Malaysia

Second, the basic characteristics of a village's social environment in Malaysia is frequently influenced by social relationships, culture and local traditions as well as organizational structures that eventually consolidate the population's collective social involvement (Mohd Yusof et al., 2011). Most of the population that resides in the village area have close familial relations and this helps to form a separate community. Cooperative practices amongst the community involving activities such as community service, communal work during festivities, attending religious classes as well as reciprocal visitations are common in the villages (Mohd Yusof et al., 2011). All these practices are traditional in nature and have become a cultural heritage, especially in reference to social involvement. The role of the *imam* (head of the mosque) and the Village Security Working Committee (VCWC) are two organizations found in most villages currently. The *imam* is usually a place of reference for issues pertaining to religion and family matters, while the VCWC deals with matters pertaining to administration such as certifying documents and general assistance. Hence, both these organizations mutually interact in matters involving the well-being of the village (Mohd Yusof et al., 2011).

Third, the basic characteristics of the villages' economic environment in Malaysia are based on their geographic position. The coming of colonialist to this country had influenced the geographical position of the population based on its economic significance at that time. This situation has stayed on until today whereby most of the population lives and resides in the urban centre dominated by the Chinese, while the Indians dominated the plantation sector and the Malays were in the interior involved in agriculture and livestock breeding (Lee & Wan Rozali, 2007; Katiman, 2001 & Katiman et al., 2006). However, most of the economic activities in the village area are related to agriculture, craftsmanship and business. The land's 'agriculture' and 'development' status had also influenced the population's activities in the village area (Katiman, 2001).

THE BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT

The basic characteristics of the urban environment are based on three types of the environment, namely the physical, social and economic environments. Firstly, the urban area's physical environment is viewed through the geography, urban development structure and population density. All these elements are frequently used as predictors when determining the status of a city (Jeremy, 1996; Katiman, 2001; Lee & Rozali, 2007). Besides being in a strategic position and the centre of administration, desirable infrastructure facilities such as utilities, transportation, telecommunication, education and business opportunities have made the city a location of choice for investors. This situation has encouraged them to develop certain industries in order to expand their business markets. These developments have made the city a preferred migratory destination due to its employment opportunities and increased wages for immigrants (Katiman, 2001; Yan & Yves, 2011). Thus, this opens the floodgates for inhabitants from outside the city borders to test the opportunities available in the city. This would directly influence urban development, which would then become an important element that defines the level of a city (Katiman, 2001; Lee & Rozali, 2007)

Secondly, the city's social environment is usually based on the population's demographic structure. Urban development has encouraged migration activities, which directly affect the formation of different social structures. The housing project development structure in cities differs according to the high, medium and low cost categories (Azahan et al., 2008 & Siti Aminah et al., 2016) and this has created groups with an elite, medium and low-level status (Jeremy, 1996). Hence, besides the various social demographic backgrounds of the inhabitants, an inhabitant's personalised living area in the city helps form a specific landscape (Katiman, 2001).

Thirdly, the urban economic environment is the main factor that influences a city's development. The city serves as an administrative, business and service centre. Urban development is frequently associated with economic development, both in the industrial manufacturing and services sectors (Katiman, 2001). This has become the main factor that necessitates a special urban administrative body to enhance urban facilities and services. The urban boundary has become an important element in determining the direction of a city's development. Therefore, most urban areas in Malaysia have widened their development zone in order to create a balanced development in all areas that share a common border with the city and its surroundings (Malaysia, 2010). Innumerable agriculture and settlement areas that are in the city or share a common border with the city have changed the category

of land use to land meant for development. This situation has allowed the authorities, developers and investors to be involved in zones that are suitable for them such as the housing, industrial, commercial and business zones (Malaysia, 2010).

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE “URBAN VILLAGE” ENVIRONMENT

The basic characteristics of the “urban village” environment are formed by combining the basic characteristics of the village and urban environments, as discussed above. Thus, by identifying and understanding the result of the combination between the basic village and urban environments would contribute towards defining the “urban village” area according to the context of the area or location of study. The formation of the “urban village” area could be measured according to its physical (geographical position, land use, its settlement and construction), social (social relations, culture and local traditions as well as organizational structure) and economic (land title, status of the land and current social economic activities) environments.

Physical Environment

The “urban village’s” physical environment could be viewed according to its geographical position, land use, its settlement and construction. The geographical position of the “urban village” lies in an urban environment, which is the administrative, business and service centres that exist due to rapid urban development. Hence, the “urban village” area is a village area surrounded by the urban environment and is placed at the fringes of the urban boundary (Li & Li, 2011; Yan & Yves, 2011). The “urban village” is also surrounded by various urban infrastructure facilities such as major roads, hyper-malls, commercial centres, industrial centres, business centres, housing areas and condominiums as well as urban facilities.

The “land use” status in most of the “urban villages” in Malaysia has been categorised as a development zone, comprising industrial, business and commercial as well as housing zones. All these three zones were designed to form a well-planned, focused and modern urban landscape. This has had a direct effect on the “urban village” population’s “land-use” status, which was earlier gazetted for ‘agriculture’ and ‘settlement’ use and now the whole “urban village” area has had its status changed to “development”. The strategy and planning involved in changing the “land-use” status is important in ensuring a smooth and continuous urban development process (Malaysia, 2010).

In China, the “urban village” was once inhabited by farmers, livestock breeders and small businessmen. Urban development had caused the agriculture area to be repossessed by the government in order to develop the industrial, manufacturing and urban facility sectors. This situation had caused the change of land-use in major cities such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen and turned these cities into big, modern and sophisticated cities. Urban development had expanded rapidly due to the formation of development zones such as industrial, business and housing zones. Following this expansion, land-use in the “urban village” was changed. The current “urban village” population in China had built multi-story dwellings of two to seven stories high (Li & Li, 2011; Yuting et al., 2010; Pu et al., 2011; Yan & Yves, 2011)

Urban development in Malaysia has formed “urban village” settlement areas such as traditional villages, new villages, planned villages and re-settlement areas. The population is the legitimate population that has its land ownership rights, regardless of whether it is freehold, 99-year leasehold or temporary ownership. It has formed its own community through groups in their locality. Most of the foundation structures in the “urban village” area have their own structure and are seldom influenced by surrounding cultures and traditions (Abdul Hadi, 2004; Katiman, 2001).

Social Environment

Urban development has a direct effect on the “urban village” population’s social environment. It has caused population migration from suburban areas to explore the opportunities in the city. This then causes the urban social structure to be combined and saturated (Abdul Hadi, 2004; Katiman, 2001). Urban development in China had caused the “urban village” area to be inhabited by migrants to lease homes from the original “urban village” population since the lease rates are cheaper there compared to

the urban areas. This inevitably had caused other issues such as prostitution and security (Li & Li, 2011; Siti Aminah et al., 2016; Yan & Yves, 2011).

Local culture and tradition has a significant influence in moulding social identity. It also consolidates a community to continue to withstand and form the capability to confront environmental changes (Abdul Hadi, 2004). A study by Mohd Yusof et al. (2011) in an “urban village” in Alor Setar, Kedah had found that reciprocal visitations, communal work during special occasions as well as attending religious classes were important factors that determined the well-being of the “urban village” population. This shows that although the “urban village” is located within a constantly changing urban environment, elements such as culture and tradition still play a major role in determining the well-being of the “urban village” population. Hence, these elements are important characteristics that define the “urban village” population.

In Malaysia, there are two lower level organizational structures, namely the Village Security Working Committee (VCWC) and the Mosque Parish System (MPS). The Chairperson appointed by the state authorities or federal government heads the VCWC. Meanwhile, the *imam* (head of the mosque) in the parish appointed by the district religious office heads the parish system. Both these institutions play an important role in ensuring the stability and well-being of the village. Nevertheless, the VCWC’s role is more dominating in the “urban village” areas, which is then followed by the role of the *imam* or *sura* chairperson.

In China, the landowner heads the organizational structure of the “urban village” area. He has the right to decide on all aspects related to the welfare of the “urban village” inhabitants, who mainly consisted of migrants. Meanwhile, the local authorities are responsible over the landowner in the “urban village” area by introducing legislation that protects the interests of the landowner in that area. The landowner has collective power together with the authorities and other landowners (Li & Li, 2011; Pu et al., 2011; Yuting et al., 2010; Yan & Yves, 2011).

Economic Environment

The “urban village’s” economic environment plays an important role in highlighting the conceptual definition of an “urban village”. Land ownership, land status and the “urban village” population’s socio economic activities are three important aspects regularly discussed in order to help the researcher understand the “urban village” concept (Yan & Yves, 2011). The “urban village” population has a legitimate title on the land or dwelling in which they live. The former government policy was to give ownership to the population in the “urban village” area. There are three forms of land ownership or titles that have been identified in the “urban village” area, namely permanent titles, 99-year lease as well as temporary titles. This is given based on the position, purpose and location of the settlement. As for the Malay Reserve areas, many had received permanent titles, while those in the new villages had received a 99-year lease or temporary titles and those in the re-settlement areas received permanent titles (Katiman, 2001).

The status of the land in most “urban village” areas in Malaysia has been changed to ‘development’ because of the zone widening policy introduced by the local authorities and state governments. This meant that the property in the “urban village” was solely for development projects (Malaysia, 2010). This development had attracted the interest of investors and developers to buy several “urban village” areas for development projects that were thought to give good returns to the “urban village” population. Thus, this had caused some “urban village” inhabitants, either forcibly or voluntarily, to sell their property to interested parties in order to reap huge profits due to escalating property prices (Syivero & Ubong, 2016; Mohd Yusof et al., 2011;).

This situation had caused the “urban village” population to abandon agriculture and livestock rearing activities and instead to work arduously to adapt themselves to the urban environment. The effect of urban development had forced some of them, either voluntarily or involuntarily, to open up businesses, find other employment, move out, rent rooms etc. (Li & Li, 2011; Syivero & Ubong, 2016; Yan & Yves, 2011).

FORMATION OF THE “URBAN VILLAGE”

The “urban village” exists under two conditions, namely due to urban development or the concept of re-development (Pu et al., 2011; Yan & Yves, 2011). Hence, from a conceptual aspect, the “urban village” is an area inhabited by the urban community that lives as a group or a specific mass, formed either purposefully or naturally due to urban development (Li & Li, 2011; Pu et al., 2011; Yuting et al., 2010; Yan & Yves, 2011).

Effects of Urban Development

According to Song et al. (2011), villages within a city in China is known as “*Cheng Zhong Cun*” or “urban villages”. The village area earlier inhabited by farmers in China is now located in the centre of the city. Yuting et al. (2010) portrayed the “urban village” as a village surrounded by the city. According to him, the “urban village” is an area inhabited by the “urban village” community, besides the immigrants who rent at rates much lower than the locals who live in the “urban village”. Li & Li (2011) concluded that the “urban village” area consisted of villages located in the middle of the city. Whereas, Pu et al. (2011) viewed the “urban village” as villages located within the auspices of the city centre administration. These were villages that existed before the urban development and were inhabited by farmers and livestock breeders.

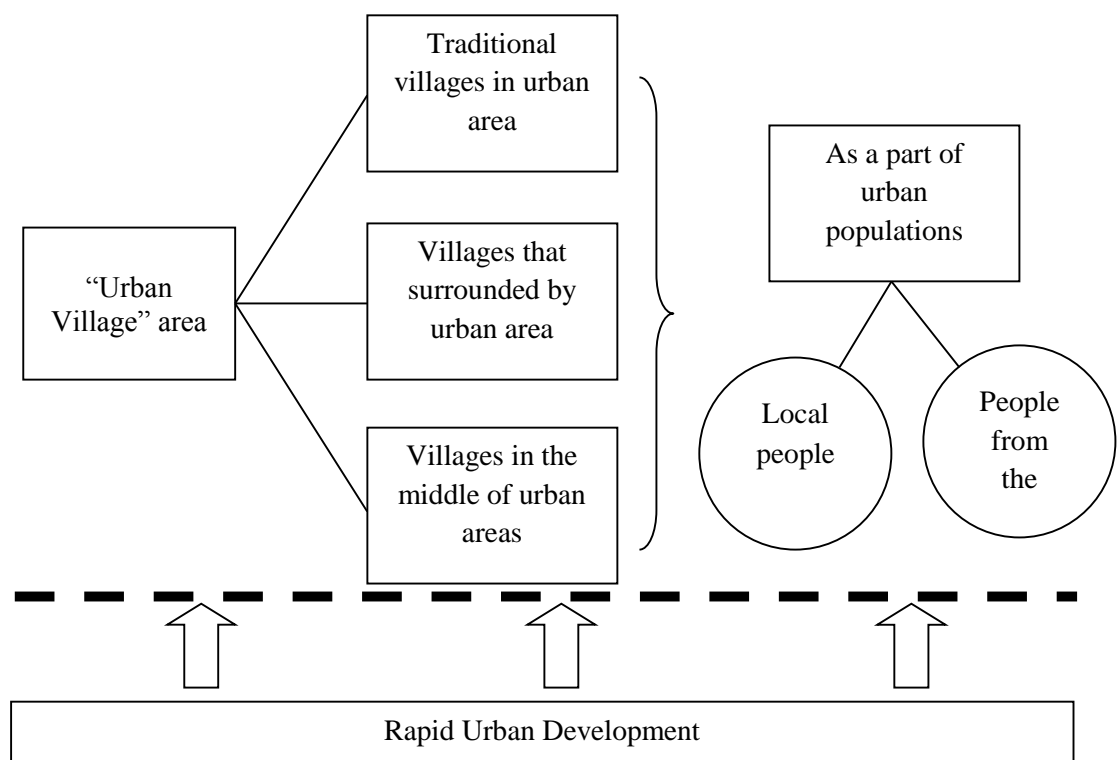


Figure 2 Basis of forming the “urban village” due to urban development

Source: Adopted from Yuting et al. (2010), Yan & Yves (2011) and Li & Li (2011)

The existence of the “urban village” was brought about by the rapid urbanization process that occurred in several cities in China, which eventually caused the traditional villages to be surrounded by the city. The rapid urbanization process and widening of the development zone had caused the agriculture land to be reclaimed and bought over by the government and private entities for development purposes. This situation had surrounded and cordoned off the villages by buildings erected in a planned fashion by the local authorities. (see Figure 2). It had also caused the “urban village” population to

abandon activities such as farming and livestock breeding and instead carry out small-scale businesses and rent out dwellings to people who are working around the city (Li & Li, 2011; Pu et al., 2011; Yuting et al., 2010; Yan & Yves, 2011).

Introduction to the Development Concept

Therefore, Western researchers described the “urban village” area as a planned development concept in a certain city. Brindley (2003) tried to elaborate on the “urban village” development concept as an urban population concept, in which the population resides in the surrounding areas that fulfil and provide the basic needs and wants of the population. According to Tait (2003), the “urban village” concept is a new form of development in the city centre that could develop the community’s interest to live, work, play and carry out recreational activities around their place of residence. This would lead to a cordial and meaningful interaction amongst the community members. This concept would assist in daily affairs and facilitate the community to obtain all the facilities in a concerted manner with the other communities around them.

In the West, an “urban village” is a planned development concept related to the development of an area in an optimum fashion (Brindley, 2003). The “urban village” concept would enhance and improve the societal structure that would eventually live inside it through good neighbourly relations, a secure environment, effective facilities, reduced traffic congestions and daily affairs that could be pursued within the “urban village” area (Tait, 2003; Brindley, 2003; Pu et al., 2011). Moreover, the potential inhabitants are given the opportunity to offer suggestions on the development design of the “urban village” area (Brindley, 2003). Murray (2004) was of the opinion that the “urban village” development concept actually depended on the community’s level of acceptance because this involves the community’s quality of life of the people living in the location. Besides that, he also emphasised that the “urban village” development concept involves several important aspects such as relations between the wants and needs of the population, environmental impact and governing a city.

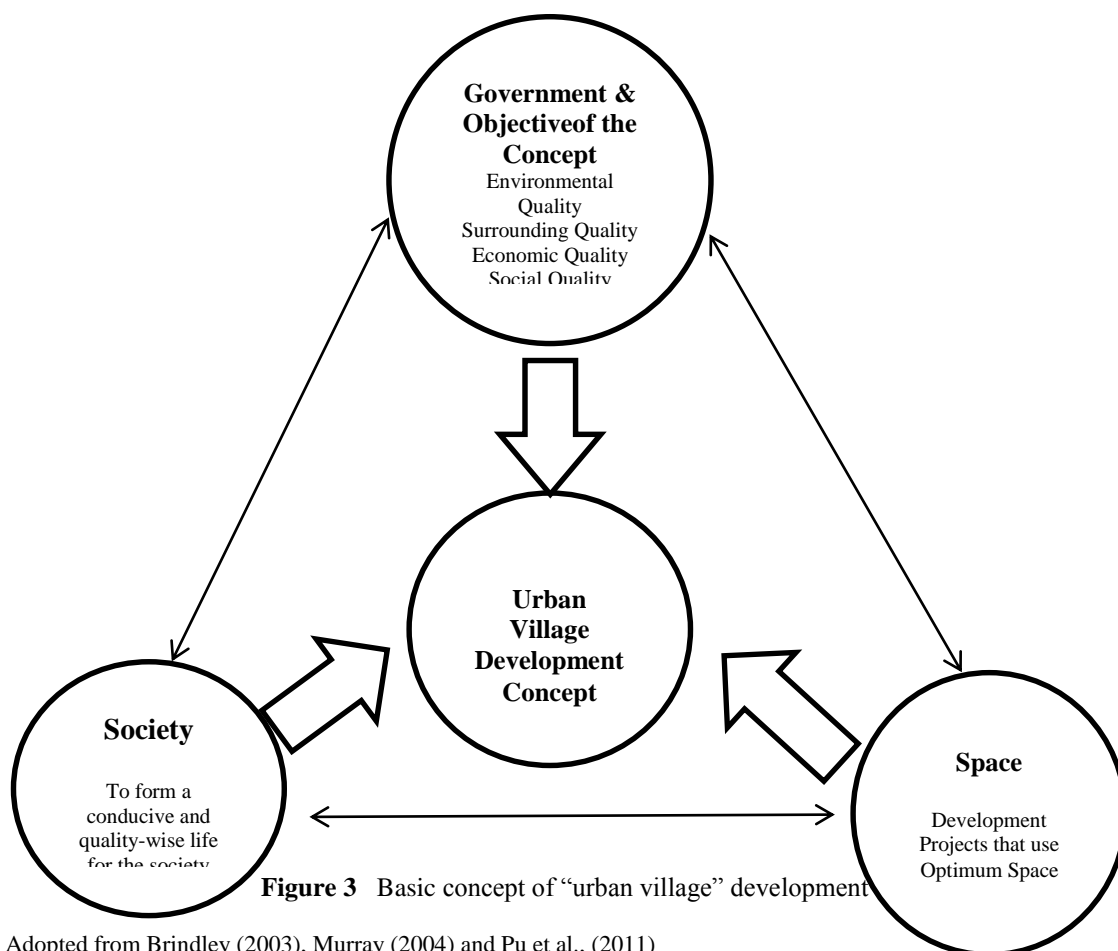


Figure 3 Basic concept of “urban village” development

Source: Adopted from Brindley (2003), Murray (2004) and Pu et al., (2011)

CONCLUSION

Therefore, it is concluded that the “urban village” area could be separated into two scenarios. The first scenario is an “urban village” inhabited by an urban society that lives and resides in a village within a city due to the rapid urbanization process. In the second scenario, the “urban village” is used as a well-planned development concept. The development concept is said to be able to enhance and improve the structure of the society through a more cordial neighbourly atmosphere, a more secure environment, effective facilities, reduced traffic congestion as well as all the daily affairs that could be implemented within the “urban village” area.

The existence of the “urban village” in this country is due to the direct effects of the urbanization process. Although Malaysia practices a balanced urban development in all its states, it is still unable to create a standard quality of life that is balanced and comprehensive, for the urban population. Malaysia’s urban population currently consists of various backgrounds and demographics. This is due to the strategies and urban development planning implemented through zonal development introduced in the urban surroundings such as housings zones, industrial zones, commercial zones and business zones.

Urban development has brought about a multitude of changes to the “urban village” environment, which has eventually made them a part of the urban population. Hence, how far do they fit in as part of the urban population based on urbanization facilities received, good infrastructure and communication facilities, employment opportunities available, the ability to grab economic opportunities, level of education and health as well as security guaranties? All these are contained in aspects such as self-readiness, urban environment and urban access, which act as a catalyst in determining the “urban village” population’s quality of life.

Different cities are at different stages of the urban development cycle, which includes differences in culture, economy and social elements although these differences might be found in the same national environment. This has influenced the rate of migration, presence of immigrants, coordinated activities and setting up local associations. This is one of the capability factors and attracts the “urban village” population to permanently reside in the ever-challenging urban environment. This development could be an interesting topic of discussion when examining the “urban village” population’s quality of life in this country.

Therefore, when discussing the definition of the “urban village” concept, several basic characteristics of the “urban village” should be considered such as the geographical position, background of the village, type of village, location of the village, traditional and cultural practices in the village, local organizations, status of the land and its title, distance from the city centre and the societal relations in the village. In the context of the “urban village” in Malaysia, there are innumerable villages in the city that fulfil the criteria of an “urban village” such as the traditional village, new village and organized village. Definitions of a squatter area, settlements on state land or state reserve land is not included in the definition of the “urban village” concept because it does not have the characteristics of a legitimate land title. Hence, efforts to define the “urban village” concept in the context of this research depend on the basic characteristics of the “urban village”.

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