

THE URBAN MIGRANT FUTURE DESIRE: A STUDY OF REVERSE MIGRATION IN MALAYSIA

Nur Huzeima Mohd Hussain¹, Hugh Byrd², Nur Azfahani Ahmad¹

¹Faculty of Architecture, Building & Surveying,
UiTM Perak Branch, Seri Iskandar Campus, Malaysia

²Lincoln School of Architecture,
University of Lincoln, Lincoln,
United Kingdom
Affiliation

lnurhu154@perak.uitm.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

Globalisation combined with resources of oil and gas has led to an industrial society in Malaysia. For the past 30 years, rapid urban growth has shifted from 73% rural to 73% urban population. However, the peak oil crisis and economic issues are threatening the growth of urbanisation and influencing the trends of population mobility. This paper documents the beginnings of a reverse migration (urban-to-rural) in Malaysia. The method adopted case study that involves questionnaires with the urban migrants to establish the desires, definite intentions and reasons for future migration. Based on this data, it predicts a trend and rate of reverse migration in Malaysia.

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INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has resulted in industrialisation during the 1970s in Malaysia, which subsequently affected the directions of population movement and subsequent regional and national urbanisation trends. Ariffin J. (1994) highlighted the industrial growth and population movements which became the catalyst for rural-to-urban migration that changed the demography of the population from 73% rural to 73% urban between 1970 and 2000.

Prior to racial riots in 1969, the Malaysian Government introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP 1971-90) to overcome the economic disparities of ethnicity. The NEP allowed Malaysia to pursue Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) aggressively and resulted in the rapid industrialisation and economic growth in the country.

From being a predominantly rural and agrarian economy, the country diversified and became one of the world's leading manufacturers of electrical and electronics products. Moreover, the abundance of oil and natural gas in the South China Sea fuelled the Malaysian economy to grow rapidly for almost 30 years. With this rise in prosperity, urbanisation increased, and the lives and livelihoods of most Malaysians improved.

However, over time, emerging issues of peak oil and FDI, makes the industrialisation process lose its vital components of cheap labour, cheap energy and foreign investors. The pull factors for rural-to-urban migration are gone, and there is evidence of greater economic prosperity from the rural areas rather than the industry attached to urban areas. Byrd (2006) emphasised, without industries and resources, the city cannot sustain a large population to the same standards of living that have been achieved during a time of prosperity.

Past experience from developing countries showed evidence of failures in cities which resulted in a migration reversal and return to primary (agricultural) economies (Tacoli, 2001 & De Bruijn et al., 2001). This is based on the potential of available land in developing counties that allows the migrants to return to rural areas.

While all developed and developing countries differ in the driving forces behind the push and pull factors of rural-to-urban migration (Munya et al, 2014; Drakakis-Smith, 1996), Malaysia is unique in its legislation concerning land ownership: the Malay society is not permitted to sell their land (Hussain & Byrd, 2016; Leete, 2007). The urban migrants still own their land and houses in the rural areas even if they have migrated to the city. They have the opportunity to return once again to their villages or kampongs and subsistence living.

Therefore, this paper investigates the evidence of reverse migration trends in Malaysia. The aim is to address the reasons that make people move and, subsequently return. This research surveyed on the urban migrants in cities to investigate their desire or definite intention to return. Data collected were analysed statistically using SPSS and documented graphs.

EMERGING TRENDS OF REVERSE MIGRATION

The process of industrialisation and rapid urbanisation brought with it both; opportunities and challenges. Although the cities and lifestyle are technologically well-equipped, the people are becoming more dependent on the jobs, imported products, vehicle and machinery. Without oil, cities will lose its vital role as an economic engine. Issues such as urban poverty, food security and crime will increase and result in a rapid decline of rural-to-urban migration.

Based on statistics produced by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, Talha et al. (2007) indicated a reduction in the rate of rural-to-urban migration from 35% in 1995 to 26% in 2005. Elias and Ramli (2009) predicted that this rate would decline further to 14% by 2015.

McGee (2011) and Hadi et al. (2010) have shown that population movement has resulted in new areas of settlement or re-settlement. From the compact cities, people have begun to relocalise into new town developments, a form of decentralization of the cities. However, this is not an indication of urban-to-rural migration but indicates a trend towards counter-urbanisation (Hadi, Idrus, Shah, & Mohamed, 2010; Idrus, Hadi, Shah, & Rainis, 2010; T. McGee, 2011). This movement has resulted in people living closer to rural

areas. These scholars claimed that the reverse movement of going out from the city is part of the 'circular movement' that has and will continuously happen and subsequently depopulate the urban areas.

Besides the thought of migration as the 'circular' movement which usually involved the older or retired migrant, this study discusses a reverse migration on a larger scale because of; (i) the 'push factor' of challenges in cities and supported by (ii) the 'pull factor' from the land given prosperities in rural areas. The concerns are to investigate the trends of reverse migration in the Malaysian context and to demonstrate the projected trends in demography.

Decision to Migrate

Human migration involves a movement of people from one place to another with the intention of settling in the new location. It may be an individual or a family, but it is motivated by a 'desire'; preferences, place attachments or hopes on a person, object, or outcome. The 'desire' may be imaginary (the dream to achieve a better quality of life) or real (the hope to live out of poverty) (Hussain, 2015).

According to Hobbes (1651), the philosopher, asserted that 'human desire' is the fundamental motivation of all human action and is related to the ability to satisfy needs of economic, personal interest, family and cultural background. 'Desire' was also defined by Stampe (1986), Lascaris (1987) and Perugini (2004) as a voluntary wish, intention or personal motivation that aligned with personal needs in order to perform an action or achieve a goal.

Furthermore, studies from other scholars have also shown that the 'desire' and 'intention', together with actions and goals, are significant components to explain individuals' decision making (Hussain, 2015; Perugini & Conner, 2000; Taylor et al., 2001). Perugini (2004) added;

'[S]uch motivation is based on an integration of different sources of appraisals (e.g. emotional, evaluative, and social) and represents the first step towards a decision to act, typically followed by an intention to do so.' (Perugini, 2004 in Hussain, 2015)

Although ‘desire’ and ‘intention’ have a major influence on decision making, they both are not a push or pull factor within itself, but they are an overall indicator showing, in balance; that there is a trend towards rural life rather than urban. This study explores how human ‘desire’ has been involved in previous migration movements and why they will continue to influence people to migrate in the future.

There are many theories being used to examine the decision to migrate, such as (i) ‘human capital model’ (Da Vanzo, 1979, Speare, 1971) that are related to economical needs; (ii) ‘behavioural model’ (Wolpert, 1965); (iii) ‘theory of reasoned action’ (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980) and the closely related (iv) ‘theory of planned behaviour’ (Ajzen 1991) in which are pivotal in understanding intentions and subsequent behaviour. These theories ‘stated preferences’ that are closely linked to the social psychology of decision making and that ‘revealed action’ stresses the importance of attitudes and social norms in making decisions.

Therefore, by exploring these approaches, this paper defines ‘desire’ as a stated preference in making decisions, while ‘definite intentions’ represents migrants who revealed actions into their decision making and has/will subsequently return.

A CASE STUDY: KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

This case study aims to investigate the motivation of possible returnees from city to kampong or village. The study adopted questionnaires through the story-telling approach in exploring the urban dweller’s desires; definite intention and reasons that makes them migrate to cities and subsequently return.

The focused areas are the urban settlements in Kuala Lumpur, the national capital of Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur was chosen based on the high level of urbanisation and population density and because it is one of the cities that had received the highest influx of Malay rural-urban migrants in the 1970s (Leete, 2007). Following that, two sites namely Sentul and Pantai Dalam were chosen as they were located in high-density areas with the most populated migrants.

This study used the principle of ‘purposive sampling’ that draws upon specific criteria of the participants. The criteria are based on the participants being Malay rural-urban migrants who have migrated to urban areas since the 1970s and have been living in the urban areas for at least two years. The selection of participants continues through the ‘snow-balling’ technique until it reaches a sufficient number of participants. According to Patton (1990, 2002) and Kuzel (1999) purposive sampling focuses on a particular characteristic of a study area and is based on an interest to answer the research questions without representing a population. The sample size of each case study can only be clarified after the survey ends. Therefore, the sample size of this study is dictated mainly on the consistency of responses and partially assisted by the limitation of time. In this case, the total number of participants reached 107 participants that ranged from 1st to 3rd generation, working or staying home parents, male and female to any Malaysian Ethnic as long as they are migrants to cities.

Measuring the Urban Migrant ‘Desire’ and ‘Definite Intention’

The survey session began with a single question that raises the topic of living experiences in the city with the participants: Do you plan to settle down permanently in the city or are you thinking of going back to kampong or village for good? The participants are subsequently asked to explain the reasons for their choice.

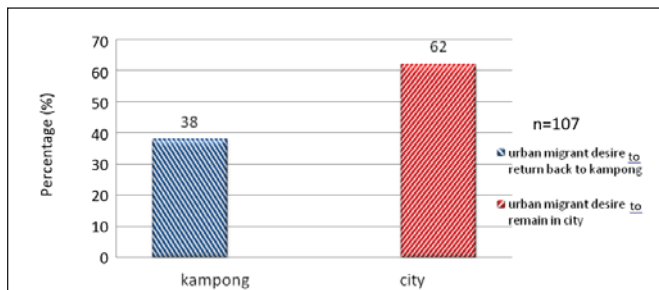


Figure 3(a): Urban Migrant Desires

(Source: Authors' Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2015)

The survey data indicated that 62% of the participants would choose to remain in cities while the other 38% have a desire to return to kampong (refer to Figure3 (a)). They showed an interest and the intensity of returning

through; (i) sharing stories of their plan to return, (ii) showing their contract of the remaining years in cities before returning, (iii) intending to return after children finish school and, (iv) intending to return upon retirement.

Besides, there are the relevant situations or event that would trigger the urban migrant back to kampong permanently. The survey revealed that 16% of the participants that have ‘definite intention’ to return to kampong consists of (refer Figure 3 (b)) without any reasons (7%), upon retirement (5%) and prior completion of children’s schooling (4%). While others assumed that they would go back when they were needed to take over the family’s inheritance (family’s will, 10%), responsibilities (looking after parents 8%) and upon making enough for living in cities (4%).

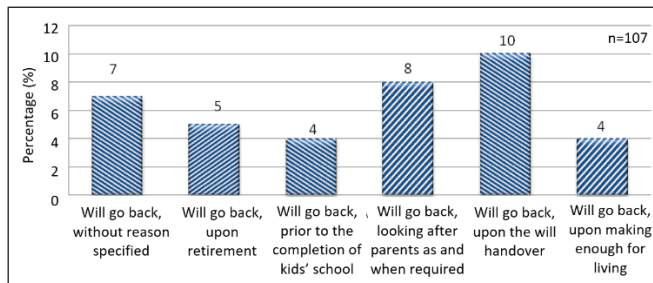


Figure 3 (b): Urban Migrant’s ‘Definite Intention’ of Returning to Kampong

(Source: Authors’ Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2015)

Apart from personal ‘desires’ and ‘definite intention’, this study measured the socio-economic factors to see whether these factors can influence the participants’ decisions. The general reasons for the return can also be referred to in Figure (c).

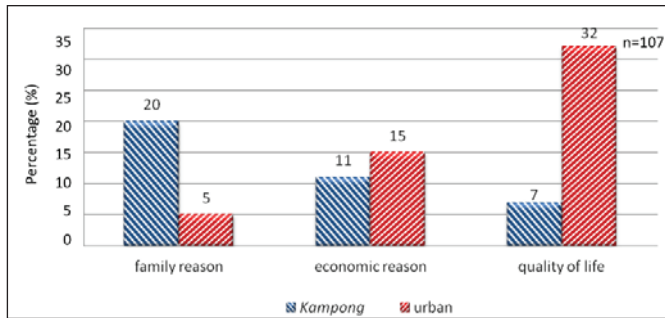


Figure 3(c): Reasons that Influence the Participant's Choice for Staying in Cities or Returning to Kampong

(Source: Authors' Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2015)

Figure 3(c) indicated the main factors that influence the choice of either staying in urban areas or returning to kampong. The findings showed that 20% of the participants who intends to go back to kampong consider family as the main reason. The economic opportunity offered by owning or inheriting assets in kampong was also a reason for another 11% of the participants to return.

There were several descriptions defined by the participants about their perception of 'quality of life'. The majority of the participants 32% chose to remain in the city because they claimed the cities had everything to offer and fulfil their lifestyle requirements. They also described the 'quality of life' in the city as allowing them to connect with people and have more exposure to updated technologies. However, the other 7% of the participants who chose to return to kampong saw the opportunity and life in kampong differently. In contrast, these participants described country living as more peaceful, clean and safe.

Therefore, based on the findings, this paper revealed that the majority of the participants who chose to return to the kampong did so for family-related reasons. This 'family reason' implies that the desire of returning is because of the responsibility factor, which is part of the culture that holds connections between urban migrants and their kampong. This supported Hadi's (1981) description on 'merantau' (temporary travel to gain experience) as one of the population mobility types in Malaysia. According to Hadi, 'merantau' is a phase when the migrants from rural

areas move to the city for jobs, education or lifestyle for a certain duration of time and will then return to rural areas. He demonstrated that ‘merantau’ is a circular population movement that carries a strong cultural-tradition to be continuously attached with kampong; not only for seasonal demands but also permanently.

These findings of participants’ desires to move are aligned with Maliki’s (2010) findings which have shown that 5 out of 10 urban migrants have ‘an intention’ to return and 1 out of 6 urban migrants in cities have ‘confirmed to return’ to kampong. Their reasons were highlighted in Maliki’s (2010) research which also indicated cultural meaning and finance to be among the main reasons that influenced the decision to migrate.

EXTRAPOLATING FUTURE DESIRES

The case study results indicated that there is an emerging trend of a reverse migration from city-to-kampong (urban-to-rural). Therefore, based on the empirical findings through surveys carried out on the urban population (refer Section 3.0), this study extrapolated the results from the sample to predict a possible scale of migration across the whole country. The predictions were based on the general population statistic from the national population statistic by the Malaysia Government Statistics (Statistic Department (Census 1950-2030)). Figure 4 (a) illustrates the projections of population shift between urban and rural Malaysia from 1950 to 2030 based on the Malaysian Government Statistics.

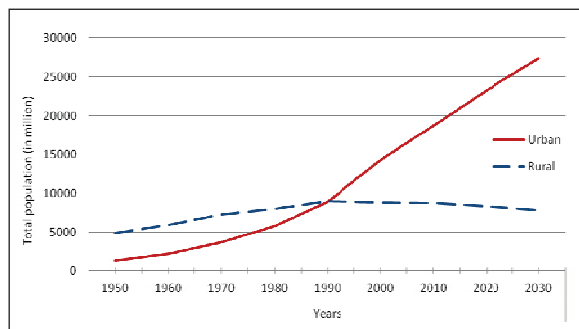


Figure 4(a): Projected Population in Urban and Rural Areas on the Assumption that the Country’s Population will Grow Continuously

Source: Statistic Department (Census 1950-2030)

Figure 4 (a) is the Government's prediction of the projected population in both rural and urban areas assuming that urbanisation continues in Malaysia as it has done in the past. It assumes that industrialisation will continue at the ordinary pace. The graph indicates that, in about 1990, the level of the rural population was similar to the urban areas. From then, the rural population remains reasonably level with a very slight decline while the urban population rapidly increases until in about 2030 when over 80% of the population will be urban.

The survey in this study indicated that 16% of the sample population had a 'definite intention' to return to kampong while 38% had a 'desire' to return. Based on those returning (refer 3.0 (Figure 3 (a) and 3(b)), it is possible to estimate the impact that this will have on both the projected rural and urban populations.

Assuming the overall population growth in the country remains the same (as predicted by the census) and that the definite intention to return commenced in 2010, then the rate of increase of the urban population level will begin to reduce, and the rural population grow. This is indicated in Figure 4(c) where it can be seen that, if the trend continues, the proportion of the rural and urban population will once again be equal by about 2028.

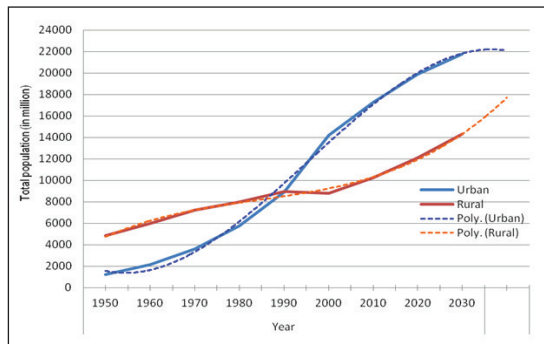


Figure 4(b): Projection of Population Changes in Urban and Rural ('definite intention')

This graph illustrates the projection of population changes using the percentage of urban dwellers that have a 'definite intention' to return to kampong
(Source: Authors' Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2015)

Figure 4(b) shows a conservative assumption that only half of those with a ‘definite intention’ will return. This may be more accurate as there will be differences in migration patterns between the ethnic groups in urban areas. The figure indicates that by the year 2028, the ratio of the urban-to-rural population could be 50:50 between rural: urban again.

Comparing Figures 4(a) and 4(b), there is a significant difference in the demographic prediction in Malaysia. On the one hand there is the ‘business as usual’ model that suggests an urban: rural population split of 80:20 by year 2030 (Figure 4(a)) while, on the other hand, a prediction based on de-urbanisation (figure 4(b) indicates a 60:40 split by the year 2030.

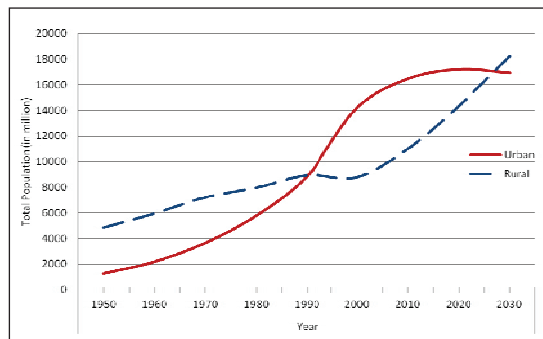


Figure 4(c): Projection of Population Changes in Urban and Rural Areas from the Percentage of Urban Dwellers who ‘Desire’ to Return to Kampong

(Source: Authors’ Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2015)

Figure 4(d) shows a composite projection of population growth and a comparison between Figure 4(a), Figure 4(b) and Figure 4(c). It illustrates the changing trends based on findings gained from the research surveys. The conclusion of this is that once again the ratio of the rural and urban population will be equal (as it was previously in 1990) due to a migration from cities to kampong.

Point ‘Z’, in Figure 9.2(d), is an intersection point around the year 2028, (about 38 years from the first intersection in 1990) illustrating that, once again, based on all who desire to return, the population in city and kampong will be equal. This situation also indicates that there will be a shifting period in which the urban areas begin to empty and the unattended land in rural areas will once more be re-utilized.

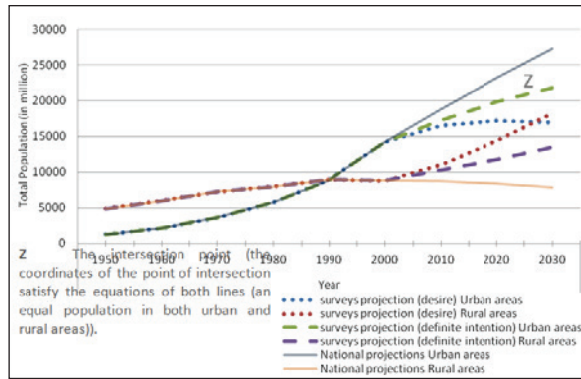


Figure 4(d): Composite Graph of the Projection of Population Changes by Assuming (a) a Continuous Growth of Urbanisation (b) by Adopting the Percentage of Urban Dwellers who have ‘Desire’ and ‘Definite Intention’ to Return to Kampong
(Source: Authors’ Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2015)

These findings describe the forms of de-urbanisation by Mulligan (2013) which indicated ‘an equal demographic between urban and rural’. In addition, the findings also align with the studies of de-industrialisation trends by Whittaker et al. (2010).

From this study, the reverse migrations from urban-to-rural are based on a combination of this push and pull factors (i)The relative affordability of commodities in rural and urban areas; disposable incomes being a similar order in both locations but the price of essential commodities being higher in cities; Increased job security in rural areas, (ii) The cultural traditions of matriarchal land ownership and the skills passed down the generations that are associated with the cultural tradition of ‘balik kampong’ (returning to one’s roots) associated with family ties (iii) The disappointment of an imagined lifestyle in a city and the desire for the lifestyle in the kampong.

CONCLUSION

This paper documented with the aid of questionnaires, a purposive sample of urban migrants to establish their desires and intentions of either remaining in the city or returning to their kampongs. The findings conclude that from

107 participants of urban migrants, 38% stated they had a 'desire' while 16% showed they had a 'definite intention' to actually return.

Based on these results, the extent of a possible migration back to the land was extrapolated to compare the prediction with those of the UN and Malaysia Statistics. It was found that, if migration occurs at the rate indicated by the sample, then urbanisation will peak in Malaysia about 2028 and then begin to decline from approximately 73% to 50% urbanised by the year 2050. The prediction illustrates that it took Malaysia about 25 years to reach peak urbanisation and will take about another 25 years to reach the point where the rural and urban population are approximately equal once again.

This study demonstrates the emerging trends of the reverse migration. People have chosen to move out of urban areas where, although they are not living in poverty, life is becoming unaffordable. They have to return to the kampong to achieve self-resilience and make a living in the near future. As in the case of Malaysia, there is emerging evidence that for many the 'desire' to return to the land is greater than that of remaining in the cities. Therefore there is a need for further research on potential land capacity database through satellite mapping or LiDAR for not only the Malays but also for other ethnic groups including the Chinese and Indians, if they are to return to subsistence living in the future.

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