

KAMPONG, LAND AND ITS CAPACITY TOWARDS SUBSISTENCE LIVING

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ABSTRACT

Kampong is a land that compound by conclusive territory and accommodating people's lives and well-being. As there is anecdotal evidence that people are returning to reoccupying houses and working with the land; this study investigates the land and its capacity for these returnees. The main intention is to identify apparent evidence that land in kampong is accessible and available to be reutilized again. The study presents descriptive information about the attended, productive, and unattended land through site observation and fieldwork measurements. The findings illustrate the capacity of the land to absorb the returnees and allow future subsistence that feeds the demand for food, goods and jobs.

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INTRODUCTION

Kampong is a Malay terminology that describes a village or rural settlement in Malaysia. According to Kustiwan et al (2015) kampong is a good alternative for sustainable living that supports the formation of the social organization of the residents and as driving factors towards land productivity and wealth. When a massive rural to urban migration took place in the 1970's, kampong has received a big impact where about 50% of its population moved out and left the land unattended. These rural migrants are detaching themselves from the traditional subsistence living into becoming the dependent manufacturing industry. While some studies have shown that these rural migrants have subsequently disconnected their rural background, there are some others who explore evidence of how they are able to carry a strong sense of belonging with their hometown or kampong. This attachment to kampong is one of the reasons that bring people back to the kampong.

Current issues of deindustrialisation, urban poverty, crimes and even the health pandemic have made a return to kampong a significant option for the migrants to survive. Therefore, there will be a need to re-examine the opportunity of land especially in kampong areas that are able to offer re-occupancy for the return migrants. Unlike other countries, Malaysia is fortunate in its legislation of the land ownership that declare the Malay society is not permitted to sell their land. Therefore, this declaration has made the migrants gain ownership of land and houses in rural areas which will remain in their possession although they have migrated to the city. The urban migrants will have the opportunity to return once again to their kampongs and subsistence living.

This paper presented the emerging evidence of the changing population mobility in Malaysia. This paper focuses on the capacity of the land in kampong which allows a traditional way of life to be rediscovered, albeit with the assistance of the updated modern technologies. In particular, this paper addresses the potential of productive land capacity in rural areas to absorb returnees through secondary statistical data analysis and fieldwork studies. This study will look into a case study of a rural community and investigate its capacity through observation and inventory on land resources with the population density in order to investigate the land carrying capacity for subsistence living.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Urban Returnees

Past experience from developing countries indicated that failures in cities have resulted in a reverse migration and a return to primary land (agricultural) and economies. According to Hussain (2017) in her journal entitled 'The Urban Migrant Future Desire', has extrapolated the possibility of reverse migration prediction within the United Nation and Malaysia Statistics which showed; 'if migration occurs at the rate indicated by the study sample, then urbanisation will peak in Malaysia about the year 2028 and then begin to decline from approximately 73% to 50% urbanised by the year 2050'. She added, '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' (Hussain, 2015, 2017).

This evidence demonstrates the emerging trends of reverse migration in Malaysia. The reverse migration or a movement of urban to rural migration was defined by Hussain (2015) as 'the movement of people from urban areas (cities) who choose to return to rural areas (kampong) generally under two conditions; (i) either after being successful in cities (they went back because they were satisfied with their achievements in cities) or (ii) because they were unable to adequately survive in a city (facing economic hardship)'. Therefore, this scenario shows that people have chosen to move out of the urban areas even though they are not living in poverty, but the cost of living in cities are becoming unaffordable. As mentioned earlier, this situation has led to choosing another option of surviving and these group of returning migrants are then described as the urban returnees.

However, industrialisation in Malaysia, has not only improved infrastructure in the cities, but has consequently improved life in rural areas including the electricity supply, better health services, and increased investment in the agricultural sector. Thus, the living standard in rural areas has increased and improved. Subsequently, the option of living with subsistence in rural areas is apparently possible for urban returnees.

Land Ownership: Malay Reserve Land and Customary Land

Prior to the rural-to-urban migration influenced by industrialisation in the 1970s, there had been a decline in agricultural development in Malaysia. The government policy in importing food has resulted in an over 800,000 hectares of agricultural land being abandoned or underutilized. However, Malaysia is fortunate in having laws and legislation that secured land ownership. The Malay reserve and customary land can only be owned by Malays and cannot be sold (Zaki, 2010).

This legislation has also been discussed by Zaki (2010) whereby the land tenure system in Peninsular Malaysia has undergone several changes since 1957, but the customary land tenure system still remains the same, especially among the rural Malay society. Therefore, although most of these reserve and customary lands have been abandoned due to rural-urban migration during the industrialisation period of the 1970s, the land ownership still belongs to the Malays (Hussain & Byrd, 2016, 2012). Therefore, this study focuses on the Malays; who inherit land from their ancestors and able to secure the ownership; which will remain accessible for the future. These land accessibilities and availabilities would not only beneficial for land use and settlements but also rich in ecological functions and resources (Ismail NA, 2010).

In addition, customary land is inherited through family members. In Negeri Sembilan, the custom is matrilineal and ancestral land is passed through the women's line (Hussain (2015)). This is to protect the honour and dignity of Adat Perpatih women. That means, however poor an Adat Perpatih woman maybe, she will never have to sell her dignity to earn a living. This is one of the reasons that brought the women of Negeri Sembilan to return to their hometown, which leads the family members to return as well.

Towards Subsistence Living

Government policy and incentives have made the idea of rediscovering and working on rural land again possible. Several programmes such as 'Industri Desa Wawasan', Supply Chain Management (SCM), Small Industrial Trading, Resources in Bio-technology and other incentives given by the Government have attracted and diversified subsistence farming. Thus

working with the land has become more appealing with the possibility of higher productivity with financial incentives. This could motivate a new generation to explore and be involved with farming and subsistence activities that could promote rural living.

The term ‘subsistence’ can be analysed in many ways. Previous researchers define subsistence’ in various context of economics, agriculture, self-resilience which relates to self-sustenance which happens to fulfil the individual’s needs. However, this study defines ‘subsistence’ as individual consumption to fulfil the needs and demands of not only as a means of survival but to make a better living.

Moreover, in the early 21st century, scholars have expanded this concept of ‘subsistence’ into a wider context (Byrd (2012), Omar et al (2013)). Omar (2013) also added, that subsistence farming has not only been conducted within the participants’ dwellings and the immediate surroundings but also has the potential to grow and expand beyond subsistence living. This expansion has subsequently contributed to the overall national agricultural economy that involved a dynamic interaction between subsistence agriculture with commercial agriculture that is able to alleviate poverty and improve rural development.

METHODOLOGY

The emerging evidence of de-urbanisation in Malaysia has led to further investigation on whether the rural areas have enough land carrying capacity to absorb the return migrants from city to rural areas (kampong). This study adopts a typical rural area as a model for subsistence living as de-urbanisation occurs. The selected case study is Kampong Gunong Pasir, Seri Menanti, Negeri Sembilan. The study areas were selected based on a statistical decrease in population growth in the 1970s and the special customary land legislation that is implemented in Negeri Sembilan.

This paper adopted both; mixed-method design using the techniques of site observations, land use mapping (from secondary data) and surveys. The study presents descriptive information about the capacity of land (productive land, attended land and unattended land) fieldwork measurements and land

surveys. It uses photos, sketches and videos that were taken during the site inventory work. The sampling information was then converted into digital drawings by using software including AutoCAD, Google Sketch-up and ADOBE Photoshop. The drawing documentation ranges from the 2D and 3D plans to sections and the site aerial views. An example of the drawing documentation is found in Figure 3(a) and 3(b). This section demonstrates two conditions that will significantly enable land re-utilization in the rural areas: (i) the potential of unattended/abandoned land (in residents' dwellings and agricultural land) and (ii) the land legislation of Malay reserve land and customary land which requires ownership of the land to be retained by the Malay community.

The Land-Use Activity

In order to investigate potential land capacity, this study analyses the changes in land activity by using the land-use mapping analysis through secondary data depicted from the District Council of Kuala Pilah. The original map was then transferred into digital 2D mapping which adopted the grid-based analysis technique to measure the land use areas. The changes in trends in land-use activities at Kampong Gunong Pasir are presented in Figure 1.

The mapping data was then translated into the comparative graph, as shown in Figure 2. The graph in Figure 2 describes the land typology of Figure 1. Figure 2 shows changes in land use activities in agriculture (land for agriculture), settlement (houses) and others (including community and commodities facilities). According to Hussain (2015), the blue line (land use agriculture) shows a consistent increase from 6% in the 1950s to 28% in 1970 and 35% in 2012. While the land-use settlements show a decrease from 24% in 1950 to 22% in 1970 and 13% in 2012. These decreased changes are a result of the rural to urban migration which left the land unattended. The last colour of the green line also represents a fluctuating trend in communal areas/ infrastructure which shows 70% usage of land in 1950, 49% in 1970 and 52 % in 2012 (remaining almost unchanged for the last 40 years).

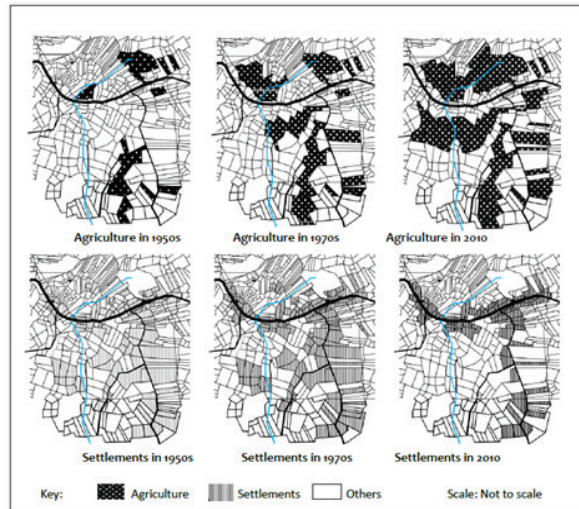


Figure 1. Land Use Activity Changes in Kg Gunong Pasir

Source: Hussain NHM (2015)

Therefore, Hussain (2015) furthered in her research stated that based on the graph, the agricultural occupancy is predicted to increase significantly reaching asymptote of 40% of the total kampong land within the next 20 years. Moreover, through the recent data gained from the statistical department, the land-use settlements and land-use agricultural were both occupied at 30% of the overall total areas in the year 2020. This condition represents an equal increasing and decreasing trends of the settlements and agriculture land in Kampong Gunong Pasir which is almost reaching asymptote as predicted in the earlier study. Thus, this situation indicates that the land capacity in kampong is potentially available to help people prosper in terms of settlements, life and wellbeing.

The Sampling Analysis

Furthermore from the land-use analysis, this study presented the sampling analysis which involves three scales of investigation that include (i) macro scale investigations of the overall productive land (agricultural land) that remains available within the kampong areas, (ii) micro-scale investigations on the immediate surroundings of the participants' dwelling areas, and (iii) additional assets (such as kebun or ladang), which include

the other additional land that are owned by the participants within the kampong boundary areas.

The investigations begin with an observation throughout the whole kampong to identify the physical characteristics and select the potential sampling areas. During the inventory, photographs were taken and a video record of the surroundings was made (within ethics approval) to enable overlaying mapping of resources. This stage has resulted in the typology mapping of the kampong.

The typology of kampong based on-site investigation are displayed in Figures 3(a) and (b). The figures illustrate the process of analysing the data of productive land. The measurements and photographic records undertaken in the survey of the kampong were transferred to maps that were subsequently analysed according to areas of productivity.

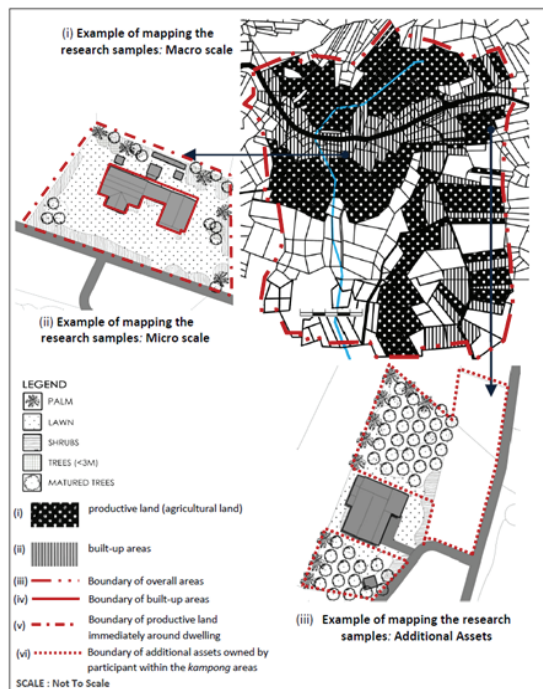


Figure 3 (a). Mapping the Research Sample Areas

Source : Hussain NHM (2015)

Figure 3(a) illustrates (i) the macro-scales that involves the overall boundary of the kampong consisting of houses, immediate land, productive land and also unattended land; (ii) micro-scale involving a personal house boundary and (iii) additional assets that conducting farming activities but belongs to a personal owner (kampong residents).

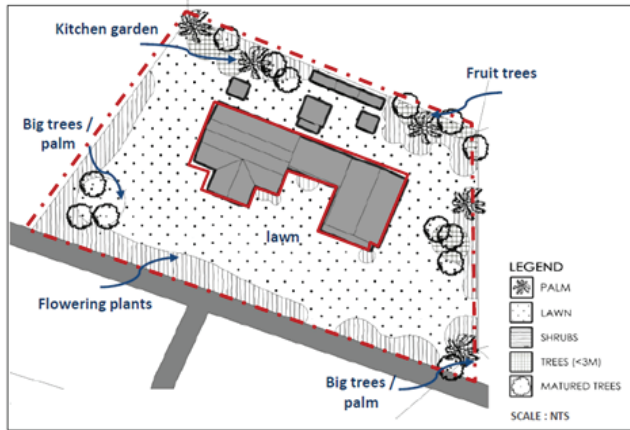


Figure 3 (b). Detail of the sampling area in plan views

Source : Hussain NHM (2015)

Meanwhile, Figure 3(b) represents the micro-sample of the land-use surrounding the participants' houses. The areas of immediate land around the house include the productive land activity such as planting of fruit trees, vegetable growing or remain as an open lawn. However, the usage of lawn areas in the context of a kampong is also partially assumed as the productive areas as it may be a grazing area for husbandry activities such as sheep, goats cows or chickens.

Furthermore, the observations and measurements on the 'land surrounding the dwellings' for the households illustrate that the productive land that is available at the macro and micro scales (refer to Figure 3 (b)) is typically about 1544sqm per household and the ratio of built-up areas to productive land is 1:11 (based on the grid-based analysis).

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The data collected has been summarised into tables and graphs to

calculate the total population that the land capacity in kampong could contain in the future. Thus, to achieve a subsistence lifestyle, an assumption need to be made about the relative areas of land. This study extrapolated the land capacity prediction based on the council statistics. With the assumption that agricultural land will not exceed asymptote of 40% due to the typology of the land, the ‘settlement’ land would increase to about twice its current size (the year 2012). The extrapolated data presented are as Table 1.

Based on the secondary data analysis on land use in Kampong Gunong Pasir, Seri Menanti in 2012, the study indicates the total percentage land-use for subsistence is 55.9% of the kampong area that represents the total 71.25 ha. With a ratio of built-up areas to productive land is 1:11 (based on the grid-based analysis), the findings equate 0.114ha per person to a population of 625 people.

Table 1. Prediction of Land Capacity for Subsistence Living

	Year 2012		Year 2020	
Population	625		270	
	%total of Kg areas	%used for subsistence	%total of Kg areas	%used for subsistence
Others	39	1	40	0.8
Agriculture	35	31.5	30	27
Settlements	26	23.4	30	27
Total		55.9		54.8

Source: Author

Subsequently, according to the recent data gained from the District Office of Kuala Pilah and Ketua Kampong of Kg Gunong Pasir, the total population in 2020 was 270 which is almost half of the population which decreased from the year 2012. Therefore, as the population is inversely proportional with settlements, this study equates that the findings have doubled the percentage of land-use for subsistence to be 0.228ha per person for a population of 270 people. The total percentage of land-use for subsistence within the whole kampong is 54.8%.

Therefore, these findings found that the trends are reaching asymptote and there are possible capacity of land in a kampong (rural areas) to cater for urban returnees. Furthermore, this ratio is predicted to proportionately expand until the year 2025.

In addition, the findings demonstrated the reason that agricultural land increased in kampongs during and after the rural-to-urban migration, albeit at a slow rate, is that the land was tended primarily by non-residents of the kampongs. This situation has been raised by Hussain (2015, 2016) who highlights that not only the area of land but also the use has changed due to the loss in local demand. However, the potential of abandoned and agricultural land in kampong have attracted some residents and other ethnic groups to become involved in 'enterprise farming'. According to Omar et. al,(2013) 'enterprise farming', agricultural resources together with technologies could assist the traditional way of life and initiate various farming programs. Instead of leaving their land unattended, some of the urban migrants have engaged in 'enterprise farming' through entrepreneurs farming in the cash crops production of fruits such as watermelon, mango, lime, jack fruit and star fruit.

Consequently, this 'enterprise farming' has also played a significant role in expanding the subsistence living through subsistence farming to the national and global markets (Sudarwanto et. al 2019). Although, this 'enterprise farming' might happen temporarily or with regards to certain limits of time it could be one of the significant activities that the kampong community could benefit from as it not only caters for the demand of the locals but eventually provides more opportunities and income to the community. As a result, this situation not only helps to increase the living standard and physical development in which will not only raise the community quality of life but would remain as subsistence living in the future.

CONCLUSION

This paper documents the beginnings of reverse migration. As people begin to move back to their customary land, they are learning again to live successfully with the land rather than with industry. The circumstances that have allowed this to happen are unique to Malaysia. Malaysia has special laws that protect 'customary land' from being sold. This means that many of the rural-to-urban migrants have land and kampong to return to whenever necessary.

This paper analyses the observation that the houses and land, previously abandoned by the rural-to-urban migrants, are once again utilised by the urban-to-rural migrants. The study then investigated whether there is adequate land capacity for the urban returnees to live in a near self-sufficient manner with a subsistence lifestyle. A kampong was selected for detailed analysis based on its remoteness from urban areas and a kampong that historically was left by migrants for the cities. The area and usage of the land were audited for their productivity and capacity to maintain a self-sufficient population. This study adopted desktop analysis from secondary data gained by the council together with field study conducted on the case study areas. Thus, based on the findings, with a ratio of built-up areas to productive land is 1:11, the study revealed that the kampong had exponentially almost reached asymptote of 40% of the land -use areas that will be available for subsistence living. This is presented by the data taken in 2012 and 2020 which shows a relative increase in the total of subsistence areas of 0.114ha per person in the year 2012 and 0.228ha per person in the year 2020. Therefore, the doubled ratio of this land-use areas has proven that the kampong or land do have the capacity to cater for the urban returnees of the reverse migration trends in Malaysia.

Furthermore, the findings also discovered that the kampong is able to cater for these urban returnees for the next 20 years. This study which adopted a storytelling approach that connects with the participants in both rural and urban areas, has subsequently discovered stories of hope and happiness in fulfilling the desires and need to keep surviving and improving the quality of life. In conclusion, this study witnesses that returning to kampong or land is not returning to poverty. With the promise that land offers can benefit everyone; it not only allows the urban returnees and the society to live with subsistence but also makes it possible for them to have not only a decent life but a prosperous one too.

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