

Exploring the Sustainable Retirement Village Concept in the Malaysian Context: An Initial Review

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ABSTRACT

The sustainable retirement village is designed for senior citizens to enhance the quality of the living environment by providing suitable accommodation, services, and facilities which meet residents' social, economic, and environmental needs. The concept of a sustainable retirement village can be adopted in Malaysia as the population aged 65 years and older is expected to increase to 24 per cent in 2050. However, in Malaysia, the provision of the elderly home is still at the introduction phase, and the concept of a retirement village is not clear because there is no technical and legal definition. Thus, this study aimed to explore the sustainable retirement village potential practices in Malaysia. A systematic literature review analysis was conducted based on practices in Malaysia and other countries. The findings of the study indicated that independent living, age-friendly environment, affordability and location are the main concepts of the retirement village. This paper provides a basis of reference to assist various stakeholders such as the government, developers, researchers and society in understanding the concept for the development of a sustainable retirement village.

Keywords: *Elderly; Malaysia; retirement village; sustainable*



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INTRODUCTION

A retirement village is a community for older people which offers suitable accommodation, services, and facilities to meet the needs of the elderly (Hu, Xia, Skitmore, Zuo and Buys, 2017). As highlighted by Ng, Zhao, Lim, Basha and Sambasivan (2020), the concept created in the retirement village is to have a well-maintained, current, and age-friendly environment for the elderly to live in. By developing a sustainable retirement village, the issue of unaffordability and social isolation could be addressed (Xia, Zuo, Skitmore, Chen and Rarasati, 2015). In other developed countries, the request for living in retirement villages is increasing year by year.

According to Judd, Olsberg, Quinn, Groenhart, and Demirbilek (2010), almost 63 per cent of Australians prefer moving to a retirement village after their retirement. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, more than 30 per cent of the elderly population have considered living in a retirement village after retirement to enhance their quality of life (Holland, Boukouvalas, Wallis, Clarkesmith, Cooke, Liddell, & Kay, 2017). However, in Malaysia, the progress of the sustainable retirement village is still lagging, as it is relatively new. The norm in Malaysia is the older adults will be taken care of first-hand by their children and extended family.

Nevertheless, current and future older adults in the modern world are now looking forward to a more productive retirement life. According to the Statistics Department, Malaysia (2016), the country will be officially categorized as an 'old country' by 2050 with an increase in the elderly population of up to 24 per cent. The demand for elderly homes is expected to increase by 2030 (The Star Online, 2017). This is because the total population aged 60 years and above is increasing from 1.4 million (6.2%) to 4.9 million (13.5%). Thus, it provides a vast opportunity for the development of retirement villages in Malaysia and the concept of a retirement village will be viewed positively among Malaysians (Lim, Ng & Basha, 2019).

This paper aims to provide insights on the basic features in the retirement village concept. The keywords such as 'retirement AND Village' were identified from past literature as well as the Scopus and Web of Science's website and limited to articles published within the last five

years. All articles are in English, and ten main articles were selected to be reviewed as the pilot articles. The snowball technique was used to find further evidence to support the main findings. The review is limited to the definition and the features of a retirement village.

Some Definitions of Retirement Village

A retirement village is a good option for the elderly to increase the quality of life after retirement. It is widely accepted in Australia for a long time as an accommodation option for older people (Hu et al., 2017). Currently, apart from Australia, this concept has been well received in developed countries such as New Zealand, United Kingdom, and the United States where the number of the elderly moving to retirement villages is increasing from year to year (Retirement Village Association, 2011). In the United Kingdom, the term used is "age-friendly retirement villages". However, Liddle, Scharf, Bartlam, Bernard and Sim (2014) noted that the concept is only focused on the social and economic sustainability of the retirement village without taking into account the environmental sustainability element. Meanwhile, in Australia, the green features are highly emphasized in environmental sustainability as it has a significant impact on the daily life of the residents (Xia, Zuo, Skitmore, Buys, & Hu, 2014).

Table 1 summaries the definition of a retirement village provided in the literature. A sustainable retirement village is a specific or specially designed locality that incorporates a sustainable living environment.

Features and Characteristics of a Retirement Village

Traditionally, living arrangements among the elderly in most Asian countries like Malaysia were limited to residing with their children or aging-in-home (Hu, Xia, Hu, Skitmore, & Buys, 2019; Ren & Treiman 2015; Silverstein, Cong, & Li, 2006). In addition, it is a cultural practice for the children to take care of their aging parents (Mao & Chi, 2011). In this day and age, modern younger generations are living a hectic lifestyle and preoccupied with life commitments, making it a challenge for them to take care of their elderly parents. This has caused this practice to makeshift to new ideas of aging in a retirement village (Lim, 2020; Ng et al., 2020 and Wenyi, 2014). The development of a retirement village is one of the

living arrangements widely accepted for older adults as a viable living alternative. An increase in the number of baby boomers posed many pressures on housing services where they have to cater to the unique requirements and higher expectations by these older people (Ozanne, 2009).

Table 1: Summary of Retirement Village Definition

| Authors | Definition | Keywords |
|--|---|---|
| Hu, Xia, Chen, Skitmore, Buys, and Wu (2018) | Retirement village refers “to an age segregated community that provides diverse services and facilities to meet the residents' unique needs in later life” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • age segregated community • provides diverse services and facilities • needs in later life |
| Lim, Ng, Basha, Cheah, and Ting (2020) | Retirement village represents “a novel living option where spaces, services, activities and facilities are tailored to meet the ergonomic needs of the elderly” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ergonomic needs of the elderly |
| | Retirement village is “designed with diverse amenities and services based on elderly's unique requirements” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • amenities and services based on elderly's unique requirements |
| Hu, Xia, Chong, Skitmore, and Buys (2019) | Retirement village comprises “a residential environment that is specifically designed to provide older people with accommodation, services and facilities to meet their requirements” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • older people • with accommodation, services and facilities |
| Xia, Zuo et al. (2015) | The retirement village is “one of the viable housing options that can accommodate and care for the growing aging population” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • viable housing options • accommodate and care • growing aging population |
| Hu et al. (2018) | Retirement villages are suggested “to embrace social, economic and environmental sustainability features to deliver a sustainable living environment” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social, economic and environmental sustainability features • a sustainable living environment |

The retirement village is one of the living arrangements of older Australians in Australia and recognized as a viable living choice for older people, housing about 5% of older Australians (Xia, Zuo et al., 2015). There are approximately 2160 retirement villages in Australia (Ma & Reed, 2018). On the other hand, New Zealand has reached about 29, 801 units by 2019 (Nielson, Wiles, & Anderson, 2019) and according to Holland et al., (2017) more than 30% of the older adults in the United Kingdom are seriously considering moving into retirement villages. The idea and development of a retirement village may be at an infant stage in a developing country like Malaysia. Nevertheless, it has started initiatives and has received support from local developers. More effort is needed to introduce the concept to the relevant authorities: the housing ministry, local state councils, financial institutions, developers and consumers (Lim, 2020).

A conducive retirement village aims to provide residents with an excellent living environment by first providing the basic settings for these elderly residents followed by sustainable needs (Hu, Xia, Buys, Skitmore, Kennedy, & Drogemuller, 2015; Xia, Skitmore, Zuo, & Buys, 2015). To encourage older people to accept the idea of moving into a retirement village, it is vital to meet the basic needs of the residents. It includes the whole village physical environment design which refers to the village location, available facilities and accessibility and the outdoor and indoor space design. All the necessary health-related services should be made affordable and accessible to the residents. A conducive retirement village should also incentivize consumers with low interest rates, income tax rebates and exemptions from stamp duty (Lim, 2020). Thus, this review has identified five main features suggested for the retirement village: the basic needs, the sustainability agenda, the location, affordability and the social activities (refer to Figure 1).

i. The Basic Needs

Explorations on the idea and concept of a retirement village were spearheaded by Xia, Zuo et al., (2015) and Zuo, Xia, Barker, and Skitmore, (2014). A retirement village should be able to cater to and accommodate the needs of this growing number of older people. Therefore, it is essential to identify the basic features that fully address the unique ergonomic needs of older people. Given the declining mobility of older people, a barrier-free design is necessary to ensure that their environments are accessible

(Menec, Means, Keating, Parkhurst, & Eales, 2011). An age-friendly design strategy (e.g., panic buttons and grab bars in the bathroom, lower height switches and slip resistant flooring) could encourage independent living among the elderly as it addresses the growing chronic morbidity and functional deterioration of elderly life (Lim et al., 2020; Lim, 2020).

ii. The Sustainability Agenda

According to Hu et al., (2015), to provide a more conducive living space for the elderly, the features of sustainability should be added in the concept of developing a retirement village. The three essential pillars to creating a sustainable living consist of environmental, economic and social sustainability (Xia, Skitmore et al., 2015; Xia, Zuo et al., 2015). This concept is further endorsed by a study conducted by Barker, Xia, Zuo, & Zillante (2012) in which current and future elderly residents demanded living arrangements incorporating the same sustainability elements.

The findings of a study conducted by Lim et al., (2020) on environmental sustainability are important predictors of the attitude of the Malaysian elderly towards a sustainable retirement village, supporting previous literature which found that environmental characteristics are the key factors affecting the perceptions of the elderly (Hu et al., 2015). As the elderly population ages, they may slowly deteriorate in their biological functions and this becomes one of their considerations in choosing a housing design that may support their therapeutic needs like green, natural, soothing, fresh air and many more (Kim, Lee, Kim & Kim 2013; Van Cauwenberg, De Bourdeaudhuij, De Meester, Van Dyck, Salmon, Clarys, & Deforche, 2011; Wargocki & Wyon 2013). A public health study suggests that the health of the older population is disproportionately affected by environmental risks. In particular, due to their increased susceptibility to environmental threats such as exposure to neurotoxins and air pollution, an outstanding indoor environmental quality is needed to support the health of older people (Stein, Schettler, Rohrer, & Valenti, 2008; Lee, Yoon, Lim, An, & Hwang, 2012; Wargocki & Wyon, 2013). Therefore, a retirement village should have a physical environment with an appropriate level of environmental quality indoors, energy efficiency, security, ease of access and maintenance.

iii. Affordability

A study by Lim et al., (2020) corroborated Finn, Mukhtar, Kennedy, Kendig, Bohle, & Rawlings-Way (2011) finding that affordability is an essential element in the development of a retirement village. Economic sustainability is one of the considerations that these residents will take into account as they come from different socio-economic backgrounds. These include the entry contribution, ongoing costs and departure fees which determine whether they can afford their village life (Hu et al., 2015). After their retirement, the residents' financial affordability declines as their main sources of retirement income are government pensions and allowances (Jefferson & Preston, 2005). Some of the residents have insufficient savings and lower levels of financial security due to various reasons (Finn et al., 2011; Humpel, O'Loughlin, Wells, & Kendig, 2009; Snoke, Kendig, & O'Loughlin, 2011). A sustainable retirement village may be costly but the affordability is made possible by implementing practices that focus on the residents' welfare rather than profits (Zuo et al., 2014). One example is Keperra Sanctuary which capped the Deferred Management Fee or DMF (fee paid when the residents sell their property) at 30% of the purchase price for nine years occupancy. The village retains 100% of any capital gain arising from the sale (Xia, Zuo et al., 2015).

iv. Social Activities

Hu et al., (2015) indicated that characteristics of social activities include independent and healthy living, the security of privacy, support and accessibility of facilities, social engagement, residents being informed and their learning and development throughout their lives. The development of a retirement village must be able to address social criteria, including encouraging an active and safe lifestyle for residents, most of whom feel that social interactions, friendships and social networks are central to their quality of life (Buys, 2000; Barker et al., 2012). Some of the most pressing challenges faced by the elderly are the sense of depression and isolation (Crisp, Windsor, Butterworth, & Anstey, 2013; Gilleard & Higgs 2005). The retirement village can, therefore, play a crucial role by creating a socially engaging atmosphere that can strengthen the sense of belonging for the elderly (Bernard, Bartlam, Sim, & Biggs 2007; Gracia, Moyle, Oxlade, & Radford, 2010). A study conducted by Xia, Zuo et al. (2015), revealed that 98% of respondents believe social activities,

friendships and social networks are essential to improve the quality of their life.

v. Location of the Retirement Village

Suggestions concerning the environmental characteristics of older people’s living environments have also been frequently raised. For example, friends and family members and service providers should live close to the location of their living area (Hunt, 1992). Although the retirement village expects to offer a comfortable home for the greying population, support from friends and family members is also crucial. The location will influence family visitation and attention. Thus, it is suggested that the location of the retirement village is within a reasonable distance and not too remote.

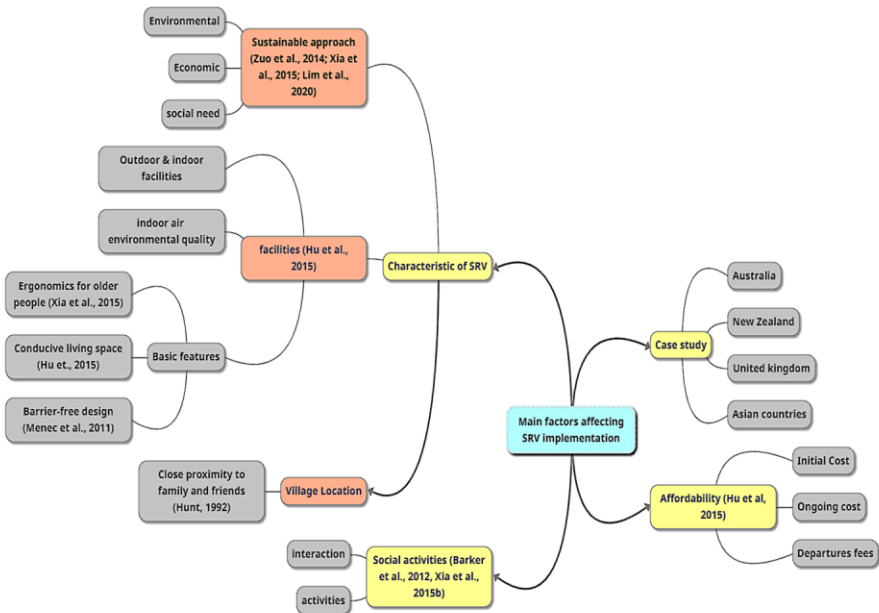


Figure 1: Summary of Review on the Features and Characteristics of Retirement Village

SUMMARY

This paper describes the results of a literature review on the sustainable retirement village concept. The outcome of this paper could help to spread awareness on the potential of the sustainable retirement village in the Malaysian context. The findings identified the key definition of retirement village and concepts that will affect the retirement village development. More evidence is also needed to validate the points made with more extensive literature review and scientific approaches such as interview and questionnaire. It is hoped that this paper will help to pave the way for the government, academia, industry practitioners and community to explore the potential of the retirement village in Malaysia. The outcomes of this research support the initiatives to improve the well-being and quality of life for the greying population in Sarawak. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Economy and Nation chapter 11.7 specifically urges all countries to provide access to a safe and green space, including for older persons.

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