



# The relationship between satisfaction towards neighbourhood facilities and social trust in urban villages in Kuala Lumpur



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## ABSTRACT

A plethora of studies have surfaced associating neighbourhood elements with social cohesion and integration, indicating the importance of quality neighbourhood design and facilities. From macro planning of neighbourhoods to local management of facilities and amenities, most researchers seem to agree that good quality physical environment encourages social interaction. While Malaysia recognises the importance of national unity and social integration towards achieving Vision 2020, urban villages in the country have remained in a state of neglect. Commonly associated with longstanding traditions and socio-cultural heritage, these urban villages suffer from ineffective management, poor maintenance, and inadequate community facilities. This paper focuses on the 'New Village' (or NV), one of the three types of urban villages in Malaysia. Based on a perception survey involving 334 respondents, this paper developed a model for predicting social trust among villagers using structural equation modelling technique. The results support previous literature findings which identified satisfaction towards neighbourhood facilities as a significant predictor of social trust. Thus, there is a need to improve perception and satisfaction of residence towards neighbourhood facilities, particularly the commercial and educational facilities in NVs.

## 1. Introduction

While it is generally acknowledged that the characteristics of urban villages differ from one country to another, New Villages (NVs) in Malaysia are very specific. They are unique by the very nature of their origins, physical setting and their well-known identity as Chinese settlements amidst the predominantly ethnic Malay nation (Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, 2011). In a break with urban villages globally which are invariably premeditated or planned settlements, NVs are products of post-war conflicts between British colonialism and anti-colonial sentiments. These unconventional urban villages were forced into existence militarily with the single aim of curtailing anti-colonial insurgencies. The campaign was administered through a nationwide resettlement of communist sympathisers, believed to be primarily squatters of Chinese ethnicity, resulting in the relocation of more than half a million rural dwellers into more than 400 highly concentrated and hastily 'planned' NVs (Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 2004; Phang & Tan, 2014).

It was little wonder then that these NVs immediately turned into highly dense, shanty settlements with temporary structures as resi-

dence, bundled with limited facilities and amenities although this seemed like advancements to Chinese settlers who were living in poverty (Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, 2011). Now, more than sixty years later, present-day NVs have still to contend with insecurity of tenure since a majority of their villagers have yet to secure freehold title to their residential plots. With no proper land use guidelines or development plans, ad hoc developments and illegal constructions and structures flourished, creating yet another set of problems for future planning and developments. This domino effect of unresolved problems is the reason NVs are left to the perils of time in their poor, disorganised and dilapidated state even after six decades (Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 2004; Phang & Tan, 2014). On the plus side, many urban villages today enjoy positive externalities conferred by the spillover from the city, finding themselves being enclaved by skyscrapers and modern infrastructure (Phang & Tan, 2014). With increased mobility and car ownership, residents of these NVs have no trouble obtaining their daily necessities within a short distance of travel.

With the advent of the 2020 deadline for turning the Vision into reality, recent years have seen renewed interest of the government to redevelop and upgrade urban villages (Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 2004)

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with Kampong Baru being the most notable current redevelopment example (The Malaysian Insider, 2016). However, there seems to be a lack of motivation for community integration or social capital in the development plan of these villages. In pursuing the aim of bringing economic progress to these urban villages, often by planning to replace the rustic enclaves with skyscrapers that are designed with ‘culturally’ inspired architecture, the plan has risked neglecting the intangible aspect of sustainable development that is equally important for the development of a holistic nation. In line with the objectives of Vision 2020, it is important to take into account the nation’s unity and social cohesion along with economic growth (Mahathir Mohamad, 1991).

This paper examines the relationship between satisfaction towards neighbourhood facilities and social trust in one of the many New Villages in Kuala Lumpur. The twin objectives are first to ascertain if perception, in this case satisfaction towards neighbourhood facilities, is a significant predictor of social trust, and subsequently to determine the type of facilities to be improved given the nature of the relationship between the two.

This paper starts by delving firstly into the role of trust in building social capital, establishing trust as a substantial factor in fostering social capital. It then brings together neighbourhood design, length of residence and social trust by providing empirical evidence of their association. The methodology section continues by detailing the study area of Salak Selatan New Village, introducing the conceptual framework and relationship hypotheses conjured, as well as sampling and data collection method, plus insights to data analysis procedures. Section 6 provides the results of data analysis, kicking off with a brief descriptive followed by exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis, and model fit testing via structural equation modelling through AMOS software. The paper later concludes by discussing the results obtained, offering recommendations and stating the implications of this study in addition to the body of knowledge.

## 2. Embedded trust in social capital

The dynamics of neighbourhood growth has long been a popular topic with many social scientists. The role of neighbourhood design and perception towards it have been associated with change in human psychological behaviour and physical health (Norstrand & Xu, 2012). Recently, there seems to be a trend linking social sustainability to neighbourhood characteristics (Dixon, 2011). While numerous attempts have been made to decipher the complex characteristics of social sustainability (Dempsey, Brown, & Bramley, 2012; Ghahramanpouri, Lamit, & Sedaghatnia, 2013; Murphy, 2012) the definition is still vague to many. Nonetheless, terms such as ‘social capital’, ‘social cohesion’ and ‘social inclusion’ are commonly in use in addressing works of social sustainability in areas of planning and built environment design. Since the publication of *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam (1995), many researchers have employed the concept of social capital in neighbourhood studies (Dixon, 2011).

Social capital refers to a network of relationships between individuals, groups and/or organisations, formed in an environment of trust that produces the capacity for action towards a mutual benefit or common goal (Putnam, 1995). It is a resource in relationships and networks exclusive to those who are in connection with others in possession of the same resource and is prone to depletion due to technological, demographic and socio-economic modifications (Grootaert, Narasayan, Jones, & Woolcock, 2004). Thus, it is apparent that social capital is sensitive to neighbourhood change.

This study utilises the concept of social capital as a foundation to examining *Social Trust* among residents of a neighbourhood. *Social Trust* is the general measurement of confidence one has towards another. It is the amount of trust individuals have in people they know as well as in people they do not know, including trust in formal institutions, in this case with local governing agencies, local authorities and law enforcements. Indeed, one of the foremost elements in any kind of relationship

is *Trust* (Foxton & Jones, 2011). It forges a bridge between individuals, organisations or communities and eases any kind of exchange between one another. Thus, it can be said that trust is a resource used when building relationships and interacting with others (Bryant & Norris, 2002). Anderson and Milligan (2006) too emphasized trust as a resource and potential measurement proxy when they linked social capital to the process in which people work together collectively in an environment of *trust* that goes together with a common goal (Anderson & Milligan, 2006). Although Bryant and Norris (2002) were uncertain as to whether trust is a preamble to social networks and participation or vice versa, they argue that it is an integral part of social capital. Nonetheless, this paradox has since been cleared in a meta-analysis study conducted by Bullen and Onyx (2007) on causal influence of social capital factors. In the study, *trust* has been determined as one of two strongest causal factors to have the possibility of generating positive outcomes. However, in the same study, community participation is established as an outcome factor, whereby other factors lead to it, not the other way around. As discussed above, trust as a significant factor is not just a theoretical notion in literature, but appears to be an empirical phenomenon.

## 3. The effect of neighbourhood design on social capital and trust

The Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, Malaysia defines neighbourhood as ‘a geographically localised community within a larger city, town or suburb’ with considerable number of shared amenities and face-to-face interaction among its community. This is supported by Kleinhans, Priemus, and Engbersen (2007) who describe neighbourhood as a socio-spatial unit in which residents who are economically and socially included, establish and maintain a small portion of their aggregate social network (Kleinhans et al., 2007) by engaging in daily shared activities or shared interest (Platts-fowler & Robinson, 2013). Despite the fact that only a minimal level of trust is needed to initiate social interaction and reciprocity, a positive social interaction may in turn reinforce social trust (Kleinhans et al., 2007). ‘Meeting’ is a prerequisite for social interaction. It is the starting point to any relationship involving trust as a core component. Therefore, facilitating meetings means facilitating social trust. This section brings together the literature involving shared spaces and social interaction, social capital, and social trust. (Malaysian Institute of Planners, 2011).

Shared spaces are usually found in the form of community infrastructure or public spaces whereby access is unrestricted. Acting as meeting points for people whether for community group activities or social events, community infrastructure provides opportunities for the initiation of communication between residents (Abu-Ghazze, 1999; Platts-fowler & Robinson, 2013). In fact, public shared spaces are generally planned for the purpose of promoting social interaction and sense of belonging. Platts-fowler and Robinson (2013) even mentioned the importance of a planned neighbourhood centre as a shared space. With the inclusion of facilities and amenities in neighbourhood centres, the chance of people encountering one another while going about their daily activities will increase along with community association and interaction (Platts-fowler & Robinson, 2013). In addition, Ahmad Farouk and Abu Bakar (2007) concurs that face-to-face interaction promotes social capital which is essentially a collection of social networks and interaction. Not only that, positive face-to-face interaction provides the possibility of generating trust between racially and culturally heterogeneous communities (Ahmad Farouk & Abu Bakar, 2007). On the other hand, the importance of having a ‘meet’ or an ‘encounter’ to enhance social interaction and formation of trust can be found in Abu-Ghazze’s paper in which shared paths were considered a part of shared spaces. People will more likely meet one another if they travel along shared paths to and from shared activity sites.

As mentioned above, the provision of public facilities and amenities provides a place for congregation. Physical social infrastructures such as schools, medical facilities, transportation hubs, commercial facilities, community buildings, and public spaces are dimensions of place that

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