

**THE IDEAL COMMUNITY FOR AGEING IN
PLACE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN TAIPING,
PERAK**

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PERAK**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFCC	Age-Friendly Cities and Communities
KMM	Pertubuhan Kebajikan Masyarakat Marhaen Taiping
MyAgeing TM	Malaysian Research Institute on Ageing
NAB	National Ageing Blueprint
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
WHO	World Health Organization

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**KOMUNITI IDEAL UNTUK WARGA EMAS MENUA DI TEMPAT:
KAJIAN KUALITATIF DI TAIPING, PERAK**

ABSTRAK

Peningkatan kadar warga tua di kawasan bandar menekankan keperluan mendesak untuk membina bandar yang sesuai untuk didiami dan lebih mesra usia. Di negara membangun seperti Malaysia, konsep "menua di tempat sendiri", di mana warga tua terus menetap di kediaman dan komuniti apabila mereka menua, masih kurang maju, walaupun bilangan warga tua kian meningkat. Menurut Institut Penyelidikan Penuaan Malaysia (MyAgeing™), lebih daripada 50% warga tua di Malaysia memilih untuk menua di tempat sendiri. Namun demikian, kajian yang mengenal pasti ciri-ciri komuniti ideal yang menyokong hasrat ini masih terhad. Jurang ini memerlukan keperluan mendesak untuk memahami dengan lebih mendalam ciri-ciri komuniti yang memudahkan kejayaan penuaan di tempat sendiri. Kajian ini menangani persoalan kajian berikut: (1) Apakah pengalaman hidup warga tua yang menua di tempat sendiri dalam komuniti mereka di Bandar Taiping? (2) Sejauh manakah infrastruktur fizikal sedia ada di Bandar Taiping menyokong warga tua yang tinggal secara berdikari? (3) Bagaimanakah keupayaan (pengalaman warga tua) dan sumber (infrastruktur fizikal) membentuk penuaan di tempat sendiri di Bandar Taiping? Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka ciri-ciri komuniti ideal yang membolehkan warga tua menua di tempat sendiri, dirangka melalui pendekatan teori Pendekatan Kemampuan (*Capability Approach*). Kajian ini secara khusus meneliti hubungan antara keupayaan warga tua (pengalaman dan fungsi mereka) dan sumber yang tersedia (infrastruktur dan perkhidmatan). Reka bentuk kajian kualitatif digunakan, dengan menggunakan temu bual separa berstruktur dan pemerhatian tanpa

penyertaan. Data dikumpul daripada 12 orang warga tua berumur 60 tahun ke atas yang menetap di Taiping, serta lima orang informan utama yang terlibat dalam perancangan atau pengurusan perkhidmatan untuk warga tua. Pemilihan peserta dilakukan melalui persampelan bertujuan; persampelan bola salji digunakan untuk merekrut warga tua, manakala persampelan mudah telah digunakan untuk informan utama. Data dianalisis secara tematik menggunakan perisian NVivo 11 Pro. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa komuniti ideal untuk penuaan di tempat sendiri dibentuk melalui saling tindakan di antara kemampuan individu dan sumber komuniti. Tiga teras kemampuan yang muncul daripada temubual: (1) kemampuan untuk kekal terlibat secara fizikal dalam komuniti, (2) kemampuan untuk mengekalkan hubungan sosial, dan (3) kemampuan untuk merasai keterikatan dan keselamatan psikologi. Sumber komuniti yang menyokong kemampuan ini termasuk enam komponen utama: (1) bangunan awam yang mudah diakses, (2) ruang luar yang inklusif, (3) sistem jalan raya yang selamat, (4) perumahan yang sesuai untuk warga tua, (5) pusat aktiviti komuniti, dan (6) infrastruktur komunikasi dan maklumat digital. Kajian ini memberi sumbangan penting dalam bidang penuaan dengan membuktikan bahawa Pendekatan Kemampuan (*Capability Approach*) merupakan kerangka yang sesuai untuk menilai dan mereka bentuk komuniti mesra usia. Penemuan ini mempunyai implikasi besar kepada pembuat dasar, perancang bandar, dan penyedia perkhidmatan dalam usaha menyokong kesejahteraan dan tahap berdikari warga tua. Dengan menyelaraskan sumber komuniti dengan keupayaan sebenar warga tua, persekitaran yang lebih inklusif, berdaya tahan, dan menyokong penuaan di tempat sendiri dapat diwujudkan.

THE IDEAL COMMUNITY FOR AGEING IN PLACE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN TAIPING, PERAK

ABSTRACT

The growing proportion of older people in urban areas highlights the urgent need to build more livable and age-friendly cities. In developing countries like Malaysia, the concept of ageing in place, where older people remain in their own homes and communities as they age, remains relatively underdeveloped, despite a rising ageing population. According to the Malaysian Research Institute on Ageing (MyAgeing™), over 50% of Malaysian older adults prefer to age in place. However, there is limited research on what constitutes an ideal community that supports this preference. This gap necessitates a deeper understanding of the community characteristics that facilitate successful ageing in place. This study addresses the following research questions: (1) What are the lived experiences of older people ageing in place within their community in Taiping City? (2) To what extent does the existing physical infrastructure in Taiping City support older people who reside independently? (3) How do the capability (experiences of older people) and resources (physical infrastructure) shape ageing in place in Taiping City? The aim of this study is to explore the characteristics of an ideal community that enables older people to age in place, framed through the Capability Approach. Specifically, the study examines the relationship between older people's capabilities (their experiences and functioning) and the available resources (infrastructure and services). A qualitative research design was adopted, utilising semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. Data were collected from 12 older adults aged 60 and above residing in Taiping, and five key informants involved in planning or managing services for the elderly.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling; snowball sampling was applied to recruit older adults, while convenience sampling was used for key informants. Data were analysed thematically using NVivo 11 Pro software. Findings show that the ideal community for ageing in place is shaped by the dynamic interplay between individual capabilities and community resources. Three core capabilities emerged from the interviews: (1) the capability to remain physically engaged with the community, (2) the capability to maintain social connections, and (3) the capability to feel psychological attachment and security. The community resources supporting these capabilities include six main components: (1) accessible public buildings, (2) inclusive outdoor spaces, (3) safe road systems, (4) age-appropriate housing, (5) community activity centres, and (6) digital and information communication infrastructure. This research contributes to the field by demonstrating how the Capability Approach provides a valuable framework to assess and design age-friendly communities. The findings have significant implications for policymakers, urban planners, and service providers aiming to support the wellbeing and independence of older people. By aligning community resources with the lived capabilities of older adults, more inclusive, resilient, and supportive environments for ageing in place can be created.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In Malaysia, an ageing nation or an aged group is defined as a nation with a group population aged 60 years and above that reaches 15% (Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development, 2011). For instance, there were 3.8 million older people (11.3% aged 60 years and above) in July 2023 compared to 3.6 million older people (11.1% aged 60 years and above) in 2022 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). Furthermore, the size of the ageing population in Malaysia is predicted to increase to 15% by 2030 (Ismail et al., 2019; Mohd Aini et al., 2016). In this regard, the demographic shift in Malaysia calls for the crucial need to create cities to accommodate ageing people due to cities having large numbers of older people presently. For instance, in 2018, 18.2% of people aged 51 years and above lived in urban areas, and this demonstrates the importance of building more livable and age-friendly cities to enable older people to age in place (Ministry of Rural Development, 2018).

In principle, the concept of ageing in place is defined as staying in your home or community as you age (Grove, 2020). In Malaysia, the Malaysian Research Institute on Ageing (MyAgeingTM) discovered that 77.6% of older people choose to age where they live (The Star, 9 July 2017). Technically, ageing in place is considered successful when older people live in an environment that supports their independence and well-being. Therefore, this chapter discusses the background of the study, followed by the problem statement, research objectives, and research questions. This chapter also focuses on describing the idea of ageing in place in the community among older

people. In addition, the significance and scope of the study are presented, and the definitions of key research terms are supplied at the end of the chapter.

1.2 Background of the Study

The ageing population presents significant challenges in terms of development, impacting individuals, families, societies, and the global community. As people grow older, their needs for healthcare, mobility, and social interaction increase, often placing considerable strain on families and communities. Traditional family structures, which historically provided support for older adults, are evolving due to factors such as migration, urbanisation, and smaller family sizes, reducing the availability of informal care. Economically, the ageing population shifts the demographic balance, with a growing proportion of non-working older adults compared to the working-age population. This change places pressure on pension systems, healthcare services, and economic productivity. Culturally, perceptions of ageing vary across societies, but in some, ageism and negative stereotypes persist. These attitudes can marginalise older adults, limiting their ability to participate fully in social and economic activities and diminishing their overall contribution to society.

Globally, the ageing population is growing rapidly. By 2030, one in six people worldwide will be aged 60 years or older, and by 2050, this number will double to 2.1 billion (World Health Organization, 2024). This demographic shift is occurring fastest in low- and middle-income countries, where 80% of older people are expected to live by 2050. The World Health Organization highlights that ageing populations present both challenges, such as increased healthcare demands, and opportunities, including fostering older adults' contributions to society through healthy ageing initiatives. The

WHO's Global Network for Age-Friendly Cities and Communities exemplifies efforts to adapt environments and services to the needs of older populations.

Essentially, development is a process of improving the quality of all human lives (Todaro & Smith, 2011). Since the present ageing process is more pervasive, the concept of ageing in place has gained popularity due to the widespread preference among older people to remain, if possible, in their homes (Lux & Sunega, 2014). Nonetheless, it should be noted that the difference between ageing in one's home or one's community is essential for the quality of older people's lives, as some older people might not age well in inaccessible or unaffordable homes. However, they could still benefit from ageing in a community where social networks are present and when they are familiar with services and have perceived comfort and safety levels.

As one of the indicators for housing in the Global Age-friendly Cities guideline, the World Health Organisation (2007) defined ageing in place as housing near services and facilities. This description explains that ageing in place requires developing services and facilities to enable a person to remain in their home or preferred environment while growing older (Mohd Tobi et al., 2017). In 2019, two cities in Malaysia, namely Ipoh and Taiping, took the initiative to submit their commitment letter to the Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities to become more age-friendly (World Health Organisation, n.d.). Consequently, Taiping was selected to implement the first phase of the Age-Friendly Cities pilot project in Malaysia (The Star, 31 October 2019). Furthermore, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) drafted a pilot project to establish an Age-Friendly City in Taiping after the Taiping Municipal Council fulfilled various criteria based on the standards set by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (World Health Organization,

n.d.). Taiping is the second-largest city in Perak after Ipoh, the state capital (Taiping Municipal Council, 2021).

As of 2021, the total population in the Larut Matang and Selama districts in Perak constituted 313,200 people (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022b). Currently, a range of projects such as construction as well as upgrading and repairing of structures and facilities in the areas has been implemented as part of the efforts to turn Taiping into an Age-Friendly City (The Star, 26 April 2021). Thus, it is crucial to highlight the ideal community that supports older people's preferences and experiences to age in place in the community.

In the ASEAN region, the challenge of population ageing is increasingly evident, with countries like Singapore and Thailand responding in different ways. Singapore has implemented an Action Plan for Successful Ageing, emphasising lifelong learning, enhanced healthcare services, and stronger social integration to support its older population (Ministry of Health Singapore, 2023). Conversely, Thailand faces significant economic and social challenges as one of the region's most rapidly ageing societies. With a fertility rate of just 1.16 children per woman in 2023 and an ageing dependency ratio of 44%, the country grapples with labour shortages, rising healthcare costs, and a shrinking workforce (Anamwathana, 2024). These efforts and challenges align with Malaysia's proactive measures, such as Taiping's participation in the Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities, showcasing the region's commitment to addressing the complexities of population ageing.

1.3 Problem Statement

Ageing in place is one of the primary drivers in addressing the ageing policy. This policy is crucial, especially in building a developed environment that promotes social engagement, well-being, and sustainability. The WHO has characterized ageing in place as an indicator in the Global Age-Friendly Cities (World Health Organisation, 2007). In Western countries, this demographic shift has turned ageing in place into one of the underpinning themes of the government's policy to support ageing (Van Dijk et al., 2015). Their national policies involve community-based initiatives for older people living independently at home (World Health Organization, 2015). In Australia, an aged-care policy empowers older people with more choices of service support to enable ageing in place (Stones & Gullifer, 2016).

Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, the care approach includes delivering services to support older people to remain at home instead of moving them to hospitals or care homes (Burgess & Morrison, 2016). These examples highlight communities as an essential element of ageing in place in development planning. Although the community element is recognised in the development policy related to ageing, there is a lack of deeper insights into how the community could respond to ageing in place (Van Dijk et al., 2015). Therefore, the review by Pani-Harreman et al. (2020) has recommended examining the relationship between ageing in place and communities in order to provide informal support to older people.

Based on a survey conducted by the Malaysian Research Institute on Ageing (MyAgeingTM) in 2017, 77.6% of older people in Malaysia preferred to age in place (The Star, 9 July 2017). Several studies conducted in Malaysia have also revealed that most older people prefer living independently in their current homes without moving

out (Ismail et al., 2020; Mohd Tobi et al., 2017). However, limited studies have examined the experience of ageing in place among older people. Since Malaysia is expected to become an ageing nation by 2030 (Ministry of Women Family and Community Development, 2017), many property developers have included more age-friendly features in future projects, enabling Malaysians to age in place while maintaining the country's global status as one of the best places to retire (Lim, 2020).

The selection of Taiping as Malaysia's first Age-Friendly City pilot project under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (World Health Organisation, n.d.) is significant because the city serves as a benchmark for other cities in Malaysia to develop age-friendly environments. Taiping's rich history, demographic composition, and infrastructure position it as an ideal study to explore ageing in place. Unlike larger urban centers such as Kuala Lumpur and Penang, Taiping reflects a medium-sized city context that better represents Malaysia's broader urban-rural demographic mix.

While some studies have examined age-friendly initiatives in other cities, such as Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Penang (Azmi et al., 2021; Elsawahli et al., 2017; Md. Yassin et al., 2018), research remains limited in understanding how these cities cater to older adults' needs. This raises questions about whether other cities in Malaysia are equally friendly for older people and what lessons can be learned from Taiping's implementation of age-friendly initiatives. This study focuses on Taiping not to disregard other cities but to highlight its pioneering role as a pilot project and explore its effectiveness as a model for future initiatives elsewhere in Malaysia.

Essentially, it is estimated that over 80% of the global population of older people will live in developing countries by 2050 (United Nations, 2015). Nevertheless,

compared to developed countries, there are limited studies on the trend and desire for ageing in place based on community characteristics since the ageing population is a new development issue in developing countries. Most significantly, the pattern of the older population is also not homogeneous (United Nations Population Fund, 2012). Thus, the diverse patterns between developed and developing countries in addressing ageing issues should not solely depend on studies conducted from the perspectives of developed countries. Besides, most developing countries struggle to create policies related to the ageing population due to informal support systems and insufficient budgets for their social support and infrastructure (Tan et al., 2016).

In Malaysia, traditional caregiving norms are increasingly challenged by the ongoing rural-to-urban migration of younger adults, driven by economic opportunities in urban centres. As a result, many older adults are left behind in rural communities, often living alone or without immediate family support (Evans et al., 2018). This shift not only challenges the old cultural expectation of family-based elderly care but also creates significant gaps in caregiving, especially in areas where institutional or professional care services are limited or non-existent (Digital Workie, 2025). Furthermore, the concentration of elderly care services in urban areas highlights the complete urban-rural disparity, worsening challenges for rural elderly populations who face limited access to health services, social support, and engagement opportunities. Social isolation, loneliness, and mental health risks are rising among this demographic as familial support structures erode (Evans et al., 2018). In this context, the concept of ageing in place emerges as a critical strategy to address the growing care gap.

In general, most previous studies on ageing in place in Malaysia have focused more on the features of housing preferences (Chang et al., 2022; Ismail, Muhamad

Halil, et al., 2020a, 2020b; Ismail, Nordin, et al., 2020; Lai et al., 2016; Mohd Aini et al., 2017; Ying et al., 2021) rather than the community itself. Unfortunately, while the eight age-friendly domains were tested in previous studies for their significance in creating an age-friendly environment (Lai et al., 2016; Rashid et al., 2022; Chang et al., 2022), there is a shortage of studies on how effective they are in improving the well-being and quality of life of older adults. In addition, there are limited studies highlighting the related opportunities and challenges in terms of how both the experience and community aspects shape the ability of older people to age in place.

Overall, the present study urges further understanding of the ideal community for ageing in place among older people, mainly through their experiences of ageing in place and the physical infrastructure of the community that they enjoy being in. Hence, a qualitative study has been conducted in the city of Taiping, Perak, involving two types of informants. These two informants are older people and key informants, the representatives from the Taiping Municipal Council, the Department of Social Welfare, the Malaysian Research Institute on Ageing (MyAgeingTM), Pertubuhan Kebajikan Masyarakat Marhaen Taiping (KMM), and Pusat Warga Tua KP.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study mainly aims to explore the characteristics of the ideal community that makes older people age in place. Based on this aim, three research objectives were constructed:

- i. To explore the lived experiences of ageing in place within the community among older people in Taiping City.
- ii. To investigate the existing physical infrastructure of Taiping City that support older people to reside independently.

- iii. To examine the interplay between the capability (experiences of older people) and the resources (physical infrastructure) in shaping the ageing in place functioning in Taiping City.

1.5 Research Questions

In line with the objectives, three questions were derived from the research objectives:

- i. What are the lived experiences of older people ageing in place within their community in Taiping City?
- ii. To what extent does the existing physical infrastructure in Taiping City support older people who reside independently?
- iii. How do the capability (experiences of older people) and resources (physical infrastructure) shape ageing in place in Taiping City?

1.6 Significance of the Study

There are several key objectives to accomplish. First, to deepen the understanding of the essential characteristics that define an ideal community for older people to age in place and to explore how older people perceive a community that supports their desire to age in place. To achieve these objectives, the present study conducted a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature on ageing in place within communities. The research direction is particularly significant because the previous studies on this topic in Malaysia are rather limited. Thus, by addressing this research gap, the findings of this study are expected to significantly contribute to the body of knowledge on what constitutes a community for successful ageing in place.

One of the contributions of this study is its focus on understanding how the experiences of older people and the physical characteristics of a community impact older people to age in place within the community. This crucial aspect has not been extensively explored within the context; thus, the insights gained will provide valuable empirical evidence for policymakers, urban planners, sociologists, and researchers. Besides, by bridging this knowledge gap, this study can serve as a resource for stakeholders to better understand how older people define and experience ageing in place within the unique context of age-friendly cities like Taiping.

Furthermore, this study directly aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the objectives of the theme of the 11th Malaysia Plan (Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2018), both of which emphasise improving the well-being of individuals. Specifically, this study resonates with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), which support Target 3.8 that aims to achieve universal health coverage, including access to quality essential health-care services. In addition, this study also relates to SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), which focuses on Target 11.7 that provides universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for vulnerable populations including older persons. By addressing factors that enable older individuals to age in place, this study contributes to enhancing their health and well-being while promoting inclusive community development. Therefore, the findings of this research have the potential to advance these SDGs, particularly in the context of creating age-friendly environments for the aging population.

Moreover, this study is significant for stakeholder engagement, as it empowers policymakers to recognise the significance of creating age environments in a way that

enhances and promotes such environments to support the increasing trend of ageing in place among older people in Malaysia. Local authorities and developers will also find this study valuable since it offers knowledge on how to strategically incorporate age-friendly features within communities. As such, by highlighting the features and guidelines, this study equips the stakeholders with the tools needed to create essential environments for the well-being of older individuals.

Additionally, the present study informs people about their rights concerning supportive environments, as it is not only about finding communities for older people but also about empowering them by helping them understand the supportive environment for ageing in place. In summary, the findings of this study will benefit the groups involved, thus improving the well-being of older populations. Overall, by filling in the research gaps in accordance with the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), this study contributes to the broader aim of creating age-friendly communities where older people can age in place comfortably and with dignity.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study is situated in Taiping, Perak, selected due to its growing ageing population and its designation as the first location to implement the Age-Friendly Cities Pilot Project in Malaysia. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2024), approximately 9.9% of the state's population was aged 65 and over, with Larut, Matang, and Selama showing an even higher percentage at 11.2%. These statistics highlight the relevance of Taiping as a research site, particularly in examining the unique challenges and opportunities associated with ageing in place.

In 2019, Taiping was selected to implement the first phase of Malaysia's Age-Friendly Cities Pilot Project, a global initiative endorsed by the World Health

Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Taiping Municipal Council fulfilled the WHO's age-friendly criteria within a five-year period, positioning the town as a national pioneer in promoting independent living, accessibility, and active participation for older adults (The Star, 31 October 2019).

The study focuses on older adults aged 60 years and above who reside in their own homes in Taiping, thereby representing individuals with firsthand experience of ageing in place. In addition, the study includes perspectives from key informants such as officers from governmental agencies, research officers, caregivers, and representatives from non-governmental organisations based in Taiping. Given the research objectives and context, a qualitative, deductive approach was adopted to capture the rich, context-specific experiences of older people and the diverse perspectives on what constitutes an ideal community for ageing in place. Quantitative methods were deemed insufficient for achieving this level of depth, particularly in exploring the application of the Capability Approach in this setting.

However, the study faced several limitations. The actual number of older informants and key informants was lower than initially targeted due to a number of declined invitations to participate. Many older adults were still cautious about health risks following the Malaysian Movement Control Order, while others did not receive permission from family members to be involved in the research. Additionally, some informants expressed reluctance to discuss personal matters, often due to feelings of shame or frustration surrounding unresolved issues in their daily lives.

Moreover, the findings cannot be generalised to the broader Malaysian population, as the research is geographically delimited to the city of Taiping. The experiences and perspectives gathered are thus context-specific and may not reflect

those of older individuals in other urban or rural settings across the country. Nevertheless, the study provides valuable insights into the lived realities of ageing in place in a city recognised for its commitment to age-friendly development, and it offers implications for similar contexts seeking to support the well-being of their ageing populations.

1.8 Operational Definition of the Key Terms

1.8.1 The Ideal Community

The concept of a community is often rooted in geography, defined as settlements of any scale, including villages, small towns, or urban centers (Menec et al., 2011). It represents a group of people connected by social relationships, shared values, and collective actions within a specific place (Macqueen et al., 2001). An ‘ideal community’, however, goes beyond geography; it reflects a setting where aspirations for well-being, reciprocity, and trust among individuals are realized (Flint, 2013; Ortegon-Sanchez & Tyler, 2016). For older people, the ‘ideal community’ is one that promotes ageing in place, the ability to live independently, safely, and comfortably in one's own home and community of choice (Wiles et al., 2012; Van Dijk et al., 2015). This ideal is shaped by social, cultural, and infrastructural factors that meet the needs and expectations of older individuals.

In Malaysia, local wisdom and cultural values emphasize family ties and communal care for older people. The concept of *gotong-royong* (mutual cooperation) and *silaturahmi* (maintaining family relationships) highlights the role of community in providing emotional, social, and informal caregiving support to older adults (Kurnia et al., 2023). In a Malaysian socio-cultural context, the *ideal community* aligns with these traditional practices, promoting intergenerational bonds

while allowing older people to remain within familiar environments. From an Islamic point of view, caring for older adults is a religious and moral obligation (Zam Zam & Yayat, 2023). The Qur'an emphasizes kindness to parents (*Surah Al-Isra, verse 23*) and respect for elders, embedding this responsibility within community life. Similarly, other belief systems, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity, also stress respect, care, and dignity for the elderly. Therefore, an *ideal community* integrates these ethical and spiritual values in ensuring that older adults feel respected, valued, and included.

On a global scale, the *ideal community* aligns with frameworks such as the WHO Age-Friendly Cities initiative, which promotes inclusivity, accessibility, and active participation of older people in community life (Judith et al., 2023). Regionally, countries like Japan and Singapore offer valuable models, focusing on intergenerational living, smart infrastructure, and community-based services that support ageing in place. Malaysia can learn from these examples to shape its own culturally appropriate strategies. An *ideal community* for older adults also contributes to national development by promoting active and healthy ageing (Abdullah et al., 2024). In the context of Malaysia's ageing society, ensuring age-friendly infrastructure, housing, and social systems aligns with sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Such communities enhance older people's quality of life and position them as contributors to societal progress, rather than dependents.

Thus, in this study, the term 'ideal community' refers to a place that shaped by local cultural values, religious ethics, global best practices, and national development goals, where older people experience ageing in place with dignity, safety, and comfort.

It is a community that supports intergenerational relationships, provides adequate infrastructure, and reflects the aspirations of older adults to live fulfilling lives in their chosen environments.

1.8.2 Ageing in Place

Ageing in place refers to the condition in which an older person stays and continues to live in the community with a certain level of independence compared to living in residential care (Wiles et al., 2012). According to Grimmer et al. (2015), ageing in place is about allowing older people to remain in their own homes for as long as possible without having to move to a long-term care facility. Meanwhile, the Global Age-Friendly Cities guidelines defined ageing in place as a home located close to services and facilities (World Health Organisation, 2007), such that an affordable service is provided for older people to enable them to remain at home. Accordingly, in the present study, the term ‘ageing in place’ refers to older people’s ability to continue to stay and live independently in their homes and the communities located close to the necessary services and facilities for as long as possible.

1.8.3 Older People

The World Health Organisation described older people or ageing people as those aged 60 years and older. In light of this, Malaysia has adopted the age group of 60 and above as the cut-off point (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, 2011). This definition is also in line with the 1982 United Nations World Assembly on Ageing in Vienna, in which it was stated that 60 years old and above should be introduced to address ageing issues. In this study, the terms ‘older people’ and ‘ageing’ refer to those aged 60 years and above. The other terms for older people used in this study also include older adults and elderly.

1.9 Summary

This chapter has outlined the background and context of the study, highlighting the growing importance of ageing in place within one of Malaysia's designated age-friendly communities, Taiping. The research problem, objectives, and questions were clearly defined, and the significance and scope of the study were presented. Additionally, this chapter discussed the limitations and introduced the theoretical perspective guiding the research. The next chapter will provide a review of relevant literature that supports and contextualises the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates how older people perceive an ideal community that could support ageing in place, what keeps them in their community as they age, and how the characteristics of the community influence and challenge their ability to age in place. This chapter also provides a framework and reviews the relevant literature to answer the research objectives.

2.2 Evolution of Development

The concept of development has evolved significantly over time, reflecting the changing priorities and perspectives of societies. Initially, development was connected primarily with economic growth, focusing on increasing national income and productivity. This early understanding viewed development as a linear process of industrialization and technological progress aimed at boosting economic output. This growth-focus view always perceived development as a linear and measurable process tied to modernization.

However, over time, this narrow focus revealed its limitations, as it often failed to address social disparities, poverty, and the overall well-being of individuals. These shortcomings urged scholars and policymakers to re-evaluate the definition of development. In response, modern understandings began to emphasize a more holistic approach where one that goes beyond income to include human welfare, capabilities, and freedoms. According to the United Nations Development Programme (n.d.), human development involves expanding people's choices and opportunities, enabling them to live long, healthy, and meaningful lives. This shift aligns development more closely

with human well-being, recognizing that sustainable progress must account for social, psychological, and environmental dimensions.

The evolution of the concept of development reflects significant changes in understanding and priorities over time. During the early Western concept of development (1700–1945), the focus was closely tied to the growth of capitalist economies, emphasizing quantitative economic indicators like per capita income (Mirakhor & Askari, 2010). This growth-centric perspective dominated development thinking, viewing progress as a linear process tied to industrialization and modernization.

After World War II, the focus of development broadened to address the challenges of less-developed economies. This era marked a shift from a purely economic focus to an understanding that development also involves qualitative improvements, including the expansion of capabilities and choices for individuals and groups (Mirakhor & Askari, 2010).

The early theories of development were heavily influenced by economic growth models of the 1930s and 1940s, which posited that all societies progress through a pre-ordained sequence of stages akin to those of industrialized nations (Gunaratna, 2018). However, this linear perspective has been increasingly criticized for its failure to account for environmental sustainability and the diversity of developmental paths among societies (Gunaratna, 2018). Modern perspectives advocate for human-centered development, emphasizing that progress should focus on comprehensive growth, including social equity and environmental sustainability, rather than merely economic metrics (Li-juan, 2008).

During the mid-20th century, development efforts concentrated on achieving high rates of growth in income per capita, as economic growth was perceived as the

primary driver of progress (Todaro & Smith, 2011). However, this approach came under scrutiny as many countries achieving economic growth targets continued to experience widespread poverty, unemployment, and income inequality. This disconnect highlighted the inadequacy of focusing solely on economic growth as a measure of development (Todaro & Smith, 2011).

As a result, the 1970s marked a paradigm shift in how development was understood. It was redefined as a process aimed at reducing or eliminating poverty, inequality, and unemployment within the context of a growing economy (Todaro & Smith, 2011). This broader perspective emphasized that development must go beyond economic growth to ensure tangible improvements in people's quality of life, including access to basic needs like education, healthcare, and sanitation.

In the late 20th century, the focus of development further evolved with the introduction of human-centered approaches. Amartya Sen (1999) revolutionized the discourse by framing development as a process of expanding people's freedoms and capabilities. According to Sen, development should not merely focus on increasing material wealth but instead on enabling individuals to live the lives they value. Sen introduced the concepts of "functionings" and "capabilities." Functionings refer to the various activities and states of being that people value, such as being healthy or receiving an education. Capabilities, on the other hand, represent the freedom to choose from these functionings (Sen, 1999).

Sen's Capability Approach highlighted the importance of addressing social, cultural, and political factors alongside economic ones. Elements like health, education, empowerment, and social inclusion were recognized as crucial to enabling people to achieve well-being and freedom. This perspective broadened the scope of development indicators, emphasizing that economic growth alone could not capture the

multidimensional nature of progress. As a result, alternative measures, such as the Human Development Index (HDI), were introduced to provide a more comprehensive view of development (Todaro & Smith, 2011).

The complexity of development has necessitated a multidisciplinary approach, integrating various fields such as systems theory, economic development, social innovation, and sustainable development. This holistic view acknowledges the interconnected nature of social, economic, and environmental systems, promoting adaptable models of development (Laszlo et al., 2002). Moreover, modern development frameworks also include ethical and value-based considerations, recognizing that genuine development requires the equitable distribution of income, resources, and well-being (Pellizzari, 2008).

Entering the 21st century, development thinking further incorporated the principles of sustainability and inclusivity. The concept of sustainable development, as articulated in the Brundtland Report (1987), emphasized meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This shift highlighted the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental systems, advocating for a balance between growth and sustainability.

The adoption of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 expanded the development agenda to include 17 goals aimed at eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, improving health and education, combating climate change, and fostering global partnerships. This framework represented a holistic approach to addressing the multidimensional nature of development.

The evolution of development thinking is reflected in the way its progress is measured. Traditionally, economic indicators such as GDP and income per capita were the primary metrics. However, these measures were criticized for their inability to

capture the well-being of individuals and social disparities. The 1970s redefinition of development emphasized the importance of broader indicators, including poverty, inequality, and unemployment rates, to better gauge the effectiveness of development efforts (Todaro & Smith, 2011).

In addition, the contemporary development discussion now incorporates concepts such as social inclusion, environmental sustainability, equity, and empowerment. Within this broader context, the present study positions itself within the human development and capability approach, focusing particularly on how development influences community well-being and individual functioning. Rather than viewing development solely through economic indicators, this perspective considers the real freedoms people have to lead the lives they value.

In Malaysia, the government developed the Malaysian Well-being Index as a step towards measuring the holistic well-being of its citizens. This index incorporates both economic and social well-being and provides insights into the benefits and life satisfaction associated with social, environmental, and economic aspects (Bakar et al., 2016). The index reflects a comprehensive view of development, aiming to ensure that economic progress translates into tangible improvements in the quality of life for all citizens.

Moreover, well-being is increasingly understood as encompassing emotional, spiritual, social, financial, and health dimensions (Mohammad et al., 2016). Studies have shown that disadvantaged groups, such as those living in poor neighborhoods or experiencing social and economic marginalization, tend to have lower levels of well-being (Nieboer & Cramm, 2018). This emphasises the importance of development efforts that address both individual and community needs, rather than focusing solely on economic metrics.

Development is now understood as a dynamic and context-specific process that evolves with changing social and historical conditions (Sheng-rong, 2008). It involves both quantitative and qualitative changes driven by internal and external factors, characterized by natural change, structural transformation, and the emergence of new connections within and outside the system (Teshuva, 2020). These insights highlight the importance of considering both the depth and scope of development processes.

The evolution of the concept of development from a narrow focus on economic growth to a broader, more inclusive understanding reflects significant progress in recognizing the multifaceted nature of development. This transformation incorporates insights from diverse fields, emphasizes sustainability, and acknowledges the unique paths of different societies. Development is now seen not just as an outcome but as a process shaped by ethical considerations, human values, and dynamic, context-specific factors (Pellizzari, 2008; Sheng-rong, 2008; Teshuva, 2020).

This study adopts a human-centered and well-being-oriented understanding of development, grounded in Sen's Capability Approach and aligned with the principles of sustainable and inclusive development. It recognizes development as a dynamic, context-specific process that goes beyond economic metrics to encompass social equity, environmental sustainability, and the expansion of individual and community capabilities. Within the Malaysian context, the study draws upon national frameworks such as the Malaysian Well-being Index to evaluate development from a holistic and multidimensional perspective.

2.3 Sustainable Development

The Brundtland Commission (1988) defines sustainable development as a process that fulfils the current needs without compromising the ability of future

generations to meet their own needs. While it aims to balance and integrate economic, social, and environmental needs, sustainable development also acknowledges that economic growth, social progress, and environmental protection are interdependent and should be pursued in a way that supports long-term well-being (Žak, 2023). This helps promote economic growth and social progress while ensuring that natural resources are used efficiently, and the environment is protected and conserved (Izah et al., 2025).

Development in this context refers to a universal and balanced plan of action aimed at achieving sustainable progress while ensuring the realisation of human rights for all people, at all ages (United Nations Development Programme, 2017). It is a balanced and sustainable progress where development encompasses economic, social, and environmental goals to create long-term solutions that benefit all (Žak, 2023). In addition, development prioritises the dignity, rights, and agency of individuals, and recognising their contributions to the society. Besides, development also aims to address the needs and potentials of all age groups, countering discrimination and fostering equity.

The process of sustainable development encompasses various aspects and demands consistent evaluation, adaptation, and sustained effort to accomplish its objectives. Through continuous work towards sustainable development, gradual progress can be made over time, and this ultimately ensures a better life for future generations (Žak, 2023). Therefore, every individual must begin by contemplating and comprehending the sustainability principles in order to live in a sustainable city or community. Correspondingly, both governments and individuals can contribute to the goal of sustainable development through various means.

2.3.1 Sustainable Cities and Communities

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development serves as a framework to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are inclusive and cater to the needs of all individuals, with a commitment to leave no one behind. SDGs, also known as the Global Goals, were unanimously adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and promote peace and prosperity for all by 2030 (United Nations, 2016). In this regard, SDGs provide a comprehensive blueprint to tackle global challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice. The significance of this blueprint cannot be overstated, as it lays the foundation for achieving a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

SDGs are a continuation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted in 2000, which primarily focused on poverty reduction. The 17 SDGs were designed with specific targets and indicators to measure progress towards achieving each goal. These goals encompass a broad range of areas, including poverty reduction, health, education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, renewable energy, sustainable cities and communities, and responsible consumption and production (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). SDGs are also universal in their applicability and aim to address the interconnected nature of global challenges. Recognising that the achievement of sustainable development requires a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach, SDGs call for the involvement of governments, civil society, the private sector, and individuals alike.

SDGs serve as a framework for countries and stakeholders to prioritise, allocate resources, and monitor progress towards sustainable development with a shared vocabulary and agenda for global action, fostering collaboration and partnerships