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THE CO-LIVING CONCEPT IN MALAYSIA: ADOPTION BY DEVELOPERS AND USERS

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Abstract

The concept of co-living housing is a trendy housing concept that is making its way into the real estate business. However, this concept is considered a new housing concept in Malaysia, and limited studies have been conducted focusing on this concept. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to identify level of adoption among Malaysian property developers on co-living concepts in housing development as well as to study the benefits of applying the co-living concept to individuals working in urban areas particularly in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative methods including online survey of co-living residents, and qualitative method which is an interview with Malaysian property developers. The data collected from the interviews were then analysed using narrative analysis, whereas the data obtained from the online survey method were then analysed using descriptive and cross-tabulation analysis. The results showed that majority property developers were familiar with co-living concepts, and they are motivated to implement this concept for future development. On the other hand, majority respondents or residents agreed that the co-living concept was the good initiative to provide affordable housing options through co-living concept implementations which are safe, comfortable, and accessible for those who live in the urban areas. Hence, implementing co-living concepts into new development is an environmental solution that addresses both the affordable housing crisis and environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Co-living, Community, Housing development, Sustainable

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INTRODUCTION

Malaysia's urban affordable housing issue has become a significant concern, with high- cost housing dominating the supply. As urbanization and populations grow, demand for affordable housing has increased (National Housing Department, 2018), leading to the introduction of various new trends of housing concepts as a solution to the housing shortages in urban areas which including co-living concept (Corfe & Salutin, 2019). Co-living is a new housing concept that is a modern housing arrangement in which individuals that share similar interests, aspirations, and values share a living space, almost like a family (Wycech, 2020; Mehl, 2021). The idea of this concept is not entirely new, but the millennial generation redefined the concept of co-living.

This concept has gained appeal in recent years as a solution to city life's issues, such as high living costs and social isolation (Shaharudin, 2022). To build a sense of community among residents, co-living places frequently include amenities such as housekeeping services, social activities, and co-working areas as well. Co-living concept nowadays has become a commercialized industry with private companies offering fully furnished apartments and shared facilities to young professionals and digital nomads. The concept of co-living continues to evolve and adapt to changing social and economic trends, with new models emerging that focus on sustainability, well-being, and intergenerational living (Vivarium, 2023).

However, Malaysians still have limited knowledge and understanding of co-living because this concept is new in Malaysia. Moreover, while relatively unheard of amongst Malaysians, it is a well and alive concept that is widely practiced abroad. In fact, the concept is gaining traction amongst the digital nomad/international community in Malaysia as an alternative lifestyle and it is only a matter of time before more Malaysians latch on to the trend too.

To apply a new concept to a place, particularly a country, the concept must be clearly conveyed so that the community understands the purpose and benefits of the concept. Furthermore, the community's acceptability of this new concept should be considered since community acceptability can have a significant impact on the implementation of a new concept. Therefore, this study focuses on the level of awareness among Malaysian property developers and co-living providers on co-living concepts in housing development and identifying the benefits of applying the co-living concept to individuals working in urban areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Co-living Concept

Co-living has recently become a trend in the real estate business, particularly among young professionals, digital nomads, students, and freelancers, however,

no specific conceptual definition of the term co-living has been established, although some researchers or the publics appear to describe the term without defining it (Steding, 2019). The concept of co-living is a housing concept that involves a shared living space where individuals or groups of people live together in a setting that is community-oriented, and this arrangement of living typically includes private bedrooms and shared common areas such as the kitchen, living room, and bathrooms (Corfe & Salutin, 2019). The young people who choose to move to new cities for career opportunities and want to meet as well interact with new people are the main reasons behind the increasing popularity of co-living spaces (Frank, 2018).

Previous models of co-living practiced providing a basic level of accommodation for bachelors, students, or freelancers. High-rise buildings provide an ideal setting for co-living spaces because these structures are designed to accommodate many people in a relatively small area. This allows efficient use of space especially in urban areas that have limited land for housing development. Co-living facilities usually aim at young adults who have recently left their family homes but are not yet entirely independent or have a solid idea of where they want to live. In recent times, co-living has been promoted to individuals who are not students as a unique style of living. This evolution has entailed not just providing the bare necessities of life, but also promoting it as a more luxurious option with modern design elements such as studios, restaurants, beautiful public rooms, or working spaces. Provides individuals with a desirable lifestyle and a chance that their current living situation requires (Ehrenberg & Keinonen, 2021).

Co-living In Malaysia and Overseas

The co-living trend in Malaysia gained momentum starting from 2016, with a focus on central locations, particularly in Kuala Lumpur (Yi, 2022), where co-living in Malaysia is a growing trend in shared apartment rentals, bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds to live, work, and forge new friendships. It offers a cost-effective alternative to dorms, providing furnished rooms with individual leases and inclusive pricing.

The rise of co-living spaces in Malaysia is driven by several factors such as urbanization, evolving work patterns, and changing lifestyle preferences (The Next Six Sdn Bhd., 2023). It is primarily aimed at students, working adults, and couples, catering to the lifestyle preferences of the ambitious and innovative millennial and Gen Z generations. Although co-living is still in its early stages in Malaysia, there is a belief that the concept will gain momentum as the sharing economy continues to grow in popularity. Still, there is a demand in Malaysia for co-living because it provides a group of people who prefer a little higher end living experience. Co-living provides absolute convenience, an enjoyable experience, cheap leasing fees, and the chance to experience a communal lifestyle

(Chan, 2020). In addition, co-living could address the issue of unsold properties in Malaysia by repurposing them into co-living spaces (Chan, 2020).

There are several co-living businesses that have already established their presence in the local market such as Travel Hub KL, The Hatchery Place, Forward School, Hut Co-living, Co-Living @ Damai Residence, JL Co-living, The Bed KLCC, Insides Co-living, Nestz, Selborn Co-living, Cozylab, Commune Co-living, Upstairs Downstairs, Sunway House, Youtopia Co-living, Homax Co-living, Living KL, Hom, Komune Living, and Utopia.

On the other hand, experience from Asian cities showed that co-living adapts to local housing pressures and lifestyle trends by combining private living spaces with shared communal facilities, offering more flexible leases and community-oriented living. While the specifics — from Singapore's growing, professionally run co-living market to Hong Kong's lifestyle-oriented communal spaces and Tokyo's blend of share houses and co-living formats — differ by context, the core idea remains focused on convenience, community, and adaptability in expensive urban housing markets.

Types of Co-living Arrangement

Communal living arrangements differ from typical single-family households because they involve individuals who share a living space or a group of living spaces based on their interpersonal relationships rather than primarily family relationships (Hilder, Edward, Sigle, & Metcalf, 2018). These different types of living arrangements are determined by significant similarities, including shared spaces, social interaction, resource sharing, cost-effectiveness, and a desire for a communal living experience. These elements foster a sense of belonging, social relationships, and a supportive atmosphere among residents.

Co-housing

Co-housing serves as a bottom-up movement initiated by residents, whereas co-living is a more top-down approach in which the building or flat is designed towards shared dwellings. The ideological motivation differs between both co-housing and co-living, which arguments for co-housing are often based in feminist interaction, for example making housekeeping services more visible, communal maintenance actions, and equality, whereas co-living is a market solution developed by business organizations or landlords who may offer similar services (Ehrenberg & Keinonen, 2021).

Shared Housing

Shared housing is when a group of people share a regular home or apartment, with private rooms and shared common areas. It lacks dedicated communal

spaces like co-living spaces, and utilities are divided equally among the roommates (Hossam, (2021).

Benefits And Challenges of Co-living Adoption

Table 1 and Table 2 below summaries the benefits and challenges of adoption co-living concept by property developers and co-living operators.

Table 11: Benefits of adoption co-living concept by stakeholders

Benefits	Details
Affordability	Co-living offers an affordable alternative in densely populated urban areas, with monthly rents comparable to similarly sized studio apartments. This is particularly beneficial as co-living arrangements often do not require a security deposit, which typically equals two to three months' rent. A further advantage is the inclusion of utilities, water, internet, and gym access in a single monthly bill, reducing the need for multiple contracts and simplifying expenses (Bott, 2021). Residents also benefit from private living spaces, usually including a personal bathroom, with many units fully furnished. This removes the need to purchase or dispose of furniture when relocating, increasing convenience and flexibility (Ehrenberg & Keinonen, 2021).
Sustainability	Co-living promotes sustainable living through efficient space use and shared resources (Coliwoo, 2022). Higher housing density reduces land consumption, helping to prevent deforestation and land degradation. Shared facilities such as kitchens, living areas, and laundry rooms improve resource efficiency and lower energy use. Additionally, the social structure of co-living encourages sustainable behaviors, including carpooling and bulk shopping, which reduce individual consumption and waste, resulting in a smaller ecological footprint (Wycech, 2020).
Community building	Living alone can limit social interaction, making it challenging to maintain a fulfilling social life. Co-living addresses this issue by fostering environments where residents can easily connect with like-minded individuals at similar life stages. These spaces meet the growing need for community by encouraging social interaction and meaningful relationships. Additionally, community guidelines and managers help maintain a harmonious living environment (Ehrenberg & Keinonen, 2021). As a result, co-living offers residents a sense of belonging and social support in an increasingly isolating society.
Flexibility	The rise of co-living has transformed accommodation by offering flexible, convenient housing options. The ability to book rooms online without long-term lease commitments empowers residents and reduces the administrative burden of traditional rentals (Christy & Tan, 2022). Additionally, the option to change rooms enhances comfort and personalization. For students and individuals with extended commitments, co-living provides a stable yet adaptable living environment (Ehrenberg & Keinonen, 2021).

Benefits	Details
Accessibility	Co-living spaces promote accessibility while fostering a strong sense of community through shared facilities and services. Communal areas such as co-working spaces, TV rooms, kitchens, and recreational amenities encourage social interaction, collaboration, and sustainable living (Ehrenberg & Keinonen, 2021). Free access to these spaces supports inclusivity and a sense of belonging. Additionally, the shared principles of co-living and co-working enhance networking and engagement among like-minded individuals, particularly in urban areas with strong remote-working cultures (Inamdar, 2020). As demand for community-oriented housing grows, co-living spaces provide supportive environments where residents can thrive.

Table 2: Challenges of adoption co-living concept by stakeholders

Challenges	Details
Social interaction	Co-living is not primarily designed as an affordable solution to the housing crisis but rather reflects rising urban costs and consumption-driven demand for convenience (Coricelli, 2022). However, amid demographic shifts and worsening affordability in cities, it could play a meaningful role if thoughtfully integrated. While improving the co-living experience is important, it should not overshadow the need to address core challenges of affordability, flexibility, and convenience (Patel, 2020).
Affordable	Co-living is not primarily designed as an affordable solution to the housing crisis but rather reflects rising urban costs and consumption-driven demand for convenience (Coricelli, 2022). However, amid demographic shifts and worsening affordability in cities, it could play a meaningful role if thoughtfully integrated. While improving the co-living experience is important, it should not overshadow the need to address core challenges of affordability, flexibility, and convenience (Patel, 2020).
Privacy concern	Unlike traditional renting, co-living residents have limited control over access to their private spaces and must compromise on personal preferences within shared environments (Ehrenberg & Keinonen, 2021). Shared amenities can become crowded or untidy, reducing privacy and making it difficult to find quiet or clean spaces (Homes, 2023). While some residents value the social aspects of co-living, others may find the lack of personal space and privacy challenging.

SDG – Goal 11: Making Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient, And Sustainable.

Over half of the global population currently resides in urban areas, however many of these cities are not ready for this rapid urbanization, and it outpaces the development of housing, infrastructure, and services, which led to many social issues. Co-living concepts is one of the alternatives to solve the social issues or problem of society through sustainable cities and communities. The fact is the sustainable development cannot be achieved without the way urban spaces are

built and managed, and without strong commitment by various institutions to make the cities and human settlement inclusive safe, resilient, and sustainable.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative methods including online survey of co-living residents and qualitative method which is an interview with Malaysian property developers and co-living provider. The aim of this interview is to find out about the level of awareness among Malaysian property developers and co-living providers on co-living concept in housing development, as well as the benefits of adoption these concepts into property development. On the other hand, the survey aimed to obtain information related to the benefits of applying co-living concepts to individuals working in urban areas. The structured questionnaire for the online survey used a scale based on five (5) points, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, where this scale helped analyse the trends and patterns. The questionnaire was blasted through online platforms including professional networks in LinkedIn, co-living communities, and WhatsApp for each co-living space within the research scope in form of Google Form and poster as well.

The study was conducted within Kuala Lumpur since the goal of the initiative is to provide affordable housing options through co-living concept implementations which are safe, comfortable, and accessible for those who live in the urban areas. This serves as a significant advantage in optimizing land use and management, especially in areas where demand for accommodation is high.

The respondents participated in this study were identified through a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling entails the deliberate selection of people with relevant information and experiences related to the co-living concept. The most important was, the respondents selected for this study were actively participated in property development activities and get involved directly and indirectly in co living concept in housing development. Moreover, the respondents are willingly to share their information and experiences related to the issues being studied. Apparently, throughout the research procedure, ethical principles such as informed consent and privacy protection were strictly followed.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate

The one-to-one in-depth interviews were successfully conducted with ten property developers and co-living providers, to ensure a diverse range of opinions and experiences, to allow a deeper understanding and motivations behind each respondent. Interviews were sufficiently well answered to allow a response rate of 100% to be obtained.

On the other hand, from the total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, only 82 questionnaires were returned, and resulted 82% response rate. Table 3 and Table 4 below present the demographic profile of the respondents participated in this study.

Table 3: Respondents' profile - interview

Respondents	Gender	Position	Department	Working experiences (Years)
R1	Male	Manager	Accounting & Finance	6 years
R2	Male	Project Manager	Project	>10 years
R3	Male	Executive	Project	10 years
R4	Female	Administrative executive	Human resource	8 years
R5	Male	Assistant Manager	Human resource	>10 years
R6	Female	Administrative executive	Finance	7 years
R7	Male	Project manager	Project	8 years
R8	Female	Administrative executive	Administrative	6 years
R9	Female	Financial Executive	Finance	6 years
R10	Male	Executive	Aset and Facility	5 years

Table 4: Respondents' profile – survey questionnaire

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender:		
Male	35	42.7
Female	47	57.3
Age:		
18 - 25 years old	38	46.3
26 - 33 years old	43	52.4
34 - 41 years old	1	1.2
Above 41 years old	0	0
Race:		
Malay	38	46.4
Chinese	23	28
Indian	9	14.6
Others	12	11
Marital status:		
Single	81	98.8

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
married	1	1.2
Employment status:		
Public sector	14	17.2
Private sector	43	52.4
Self employed	25	30.5
Income level:		
Below RM 2000	14	17.1
RM 2001 - RM 3000	15	18.3
RM 3001 – RM 4000	24	29.3
RM 4001 – RM 5000	16	19.5
Above RM5000	13	15.9

The Level of Awareness Among Malaysian Property Developers on Co-Living Concepts in Housing Development

From the interviews it appears that all interviewees were aware of the co-living concept within housing development. Even though only small number of property developers had undertaken this concept within housing development projects, but the number of co-living projects in Malaysia is forecasted to be increased in future especially in urban areas. This finding was consistent with previous study which mentioned the co-living concept is one of the new trends in the housing development and has gained popularity in recent years as a solution to the housing shortages in urban areas (Corfe, & Salutin, 2019). In addition, Hsia, Chuan & Choong (2024) highlighted that the concept of co-living is emerging and feasible in Malaysia due to booming in technology and education along with the development of tourism.

Moreover, co-living concept provides individuals with a desirable lifestyle and a chance that their current living situation requires (Ehrenberg & Keinonen, 2021). Co-living developments have shown superior efficiency in using space when compared to the traditional housing developments. This serves as a significant advantage in optimizing land use and management, especially in areas where demand for accommodation is high (National Housing Department (2018). Hence, the co-living concept can encourage a sustainable way of living by promoting community-oriented living, space optimization, lower carbon emission and conserving resources (Vivarium, 2023).

However, until year 2023, there was no figure recorded that indicated co-living population for Malaysia, but findings from the study forecast that co-living project will be increased in the future. Therefore, the researcher would recommend identifying co-living population in Malaysia in future research.

Identifying The Benefits of Adopting the Co-Living Concept to Individuals Working in Urban Areas

From the survey, they were asked about the benefits of adopting co-living concept to the individuals working in urban areas. Table 5 summaries the results.

Table 5: Benefits of adopting the co-living concept to individual working in urban areas

Variables	Mean Score
Affordable Housing	4.74
Accessibility	4.73
Community Building	4.34
Sustainability	3.98
Flexibility	3.84

Based on the findings, the result reveals that people choose co-living space because of its affordability factor and how it will benefit individuals working in urban areas where in this research, the researcher labels the variable as affordable housing. This analysis indeed aligned with the findings from National Housing Department (2018), the co-living space is a reasonably priced option for housing in major urban areas. Moreover, study conducted by Nor Suzylah (2022) was determined that the affordability issue clearly impacted the B40 group of young professionals the most, since their household income and expenditure margins were very tight, leaving them with little residual cash to pay for housing costs.

Next, the result demonstrates that the second highest benefits when applying this co-living concept is because of its accessibility factor. Co-living residents agreed that co-living spaces are more accessible, especially when this modern housing concept is located strategically in the heart of the city. Not just convenience in terms of the public transportation, co-living space also prioritizes accessibility through the multiple communal spaces and the services provided in the co-living space. From previous research, Ehrenberg & Keinonen, (2021) revealed that this public space's accessibility in co-living space arrangement enables residents (to interact with each other which leads to enhancing the individual's living experience in a busy place like the city. In addition, it is widely believed that co-living can provide living closer to the quality amenities (Hsia, Chuan & Choong (2024).

Community building was also identified as one of the benefits of applying the co-living concept to individuals working in urban areas with mean score = 4.34. It is evident that the development of co-living spaces aims to provide a focus on community building in which fellow residents are encouraged to connect and socialize with others. According to Ehrenberg & Keinonen (2021) the emergence of co-living spaces addresses the inherent need for community in

modern society, and this concept of housing also strongly emphasizes promoting social engagement, as stated by (Corfe & Salutin, (2019).

Furthermore, co-living is known for its significant environmental benefits. The concept promotes sustainable living through efficient space utilization which is in accordance with (National Housing Department, (2018) previous study highlighting its benefits in optimizing land use, especially in densely populated areas with high housing demand. As Vivarium, (2023) emphasizes that co-living spaces promote sustainability by encouraging residents to share facilities and resources, thereby developing sustainable habits in individuals.

Furthermore, co-living provides flexibility, which is a significant benefit for people who work in cities. Previous research indicates that the co-living concept has transformed the approach to accommodation by allowing individuals to easily book a room online without committing to a long-term lease, adding a layer of flexibility (Ehrenberg & Keinonen, 2021). Apparently, co-living allows people from diverse backgrounds to live in a supportive community without the need to invest in long-term rental or homeownership due to the concept's inherent flexibility.

RECOMMENDATION

The goal of co-living initiatives is to offer affordable housing options through the applications of these concepts in housing development while fostering a sense of community-building where residents can connect and share experiences. Besides, co-living space developments contribute to more sustainable and inclusive urban environments. Possible strategies include partnering with developers to build affordable co-living spaces, looking at alternative financing sources such as fundraising, and collaborating with local governments to encourage the development of affordable co-living spaces with proper regulation applied. Hence, these spaces should be safe, comfortable, and accessible to those living in urban areas.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to answer questions about the level of awareness of this co-living concept in housing development as well as the benefits of adopting co-living concepts within housing development by property developers and co-living providers. Based on the analysed results of the research, both established research objectives are successfully achieved. The growing urbanization and modern lifestyle lead to the introduction of many new ideas with co-living concepts are no exception. As a new modern housing concept that is recognized for its various benefits aligned with modern lifestyle while offering an affordable monthly rental rate, this concept should be further studied and developed into a large scale with

a sufficient framework. Moreover, the stated limitations and suggested recommendations could be references for future study. In conclusion, an application of co-living concept within housing development with proper guidelines and legal regulation from local government authorities will potentially make co-living as a long-term lease solution for affordable housing options in urban areas.

LIMITATION

The co-living concept remains relatively new in Malaysia, with a focus on central locations, particularly in Kuala Lumpur, restricting the survey sample to individuals with prior co-living experience. Limited cooperation from some co-living operators due to cybersecurity concerns resulted in a smaller respondent pool, although an acceptable response rate of 82% was achieved. In addition, only 10 interviews were conducted, limiting the depth of qualitative insights.

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