

Critical Junctures: Anarchistic Leanings of Current Urbanization in Malaysia

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Abstract

Development in Malaysia has reached a critical juncture where the expectations of end results and processes have drastically changed from the first time the New Economic Policy (NEP) outlined the future for the country. The focus on technocratic solutions to social problems, while still dominant, is increasingly being contested and supplemented by negotiated meanings of multiple symbols and evolving objectives, proposed at various entry points. Global market forces have changed the effectiveness of earlier centralized planning efforts and have opened up local development avenues that are not as dependent on the State as they were before. This has led to an increasingly anarchistic approach of direct development, a pattern that has caught many development planners by surprise. The urbanization phenomenon today is increasingly driven by individuals that take up risks and responding faster to the uncertain conditions of the market than the established bureaucracy of development planning. These new agents of development are aware but no longer simply following the path set by the State, negotiating to capitalise on State-led programmes but with independent agendas. The current result is the creation of a syncretic rural-urban society with blurred physical and social boundaries. Using the everyday content of urbanization, the paper attempts to provide some insights into this dynamics of development that has permeated the rural-urban landscape of Malaysia. The Bernam-Linggi region which has experienced the changing whims of development and development planning is used as an example to illustrate the emergence of the urban through a coalescing of local drivers responding to the State and Market. The argument of the paper is articulated within a rhizomatic approach to the current urbanization phenomenon, emphasizing the bottom-up, lateral proliferation of individually determined views of development which resulted in the current urban-rural landscape of the the Bernam Linggi region in particular, and Malaysia in general. The paper also posits several implications for planning analysis and development programmes evaluation.

Keywords: Urbanization, rhizomatic analysis, Bernam Linggi, anarchistic urbanization

Abstrak

Pembangunan di Malaysia telah mencapai titik kritikal di mana jangkaan hasil akhir dan proses yang telah digariskan buat pertama kalinya dalam Dasar Ekonomi Baru (DEB) bertujuan untuk pembangunan masa depan negara telah berubah secara drastiknya. Tumpuan terhadap penyelesaian secara teknokratik kepada penyelesaian permasalahan sosial, walaupun masih dominan, semakin dipersoalkan dan disokong oleh perundingan bermakna, simbol pelbagai dan objektif yang berubah dan dicadangkan dari pelbagai sudut. Gerak kuasa pasaran global telah mengubah keberkesanan usaha perancangan berpusat yang terdahulu dan membuka ruang pembangunan lokal yang tidak bergantung kepada pemerintah seperti sebelumnya. Keadaan ini membawa kepada peningkatan pendekatan anarkistik pembangunan langsung, corak yang memerangkap dan mengejutkan ramai perancang pembangunan. Fenomena pembandaran hari ini dipandu oleh individu yang mengambil risiko dan tindakbalas lebih pantas terhadap keadaan pasaran yang tidak terjangka daripada birokrasi pembangunan perancangan yang telah kukuh. Agen-agen pembangunan baru ini menyedari tetapi tidak lagi mengikut aturan yang telah ditetapkan oleh pemerintah, perundingan dengan para pemodal dan perancangan yang dipimpin oleh pemerintah tetapi dengan agenda tersendiri. Hasilnya adalah pembentukan masyarakat desa-bandar yang sinkretik yang mencampuradukkan sempadan fizikal dan sosialnya. Dengan menggunakan aktiviti harian pembandaran, artikel ini cuba memberikan pandangan secara lebih dekat ke atas dinamika pembangunan yang telah membentuk landskap desa-bandar. Wilayah perbandaran Bernam-Linggi yang telah mengalami pembangunan yang pesat dan perancangan pembangunan digunakan sebagai gambaran yang terhasil daripada perkaitan dan tindakbalas pemacu lokal terhadap pemerintah. Hujah yang dikemukakan dalam artikel ini diartikulasikan dalam pendekatan rizomatik terhadap fenomena pembandaran semasa, menekankan pendekatan bawah-atas, penghasilan kreatif yang menentukan pembangunan secara individu dan hasilnya adalah landskap desa-bandar Lembangan Bernam-Linggi semasa ini khususnya dan Malaysia amnya. Artikel ini juga mencadangkan beberapa implikasi untuk analisis perancangan dan penilaian program pembangunan.

Katakunci: Pembandaran, analisis rizomatik, Bernam-Linggi, pembandaran anarkistik

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is continuously undergoing rapid changes both in economic and social components, currently at the stage of an industrial-post industrial country with an increasingly better educated population. Established planning norms that have served well in the past are often inadequate to face the challenges of today and the future, and perhaps the failure to achieve many of the current planning goals can be seen as symptoms of these inadequacies.

This article inquires into the urbanization process in Malaysia and that of the Bernam to Linggi basin region in particular, in the light of current patterns discerned from the area through the idea of anarchistic leanings in development. The paper extends Jacobs's argument that 'a city is not a work of art' (Jacobs, 1970) and Alexander's comment on 'a city is not a tree' (Alexander, 1965) that have questioned many accepted approaches towards urbanization and methods used for regional development.

Development requires an impetus, a reason for changing. In very stable conditions change is difficult to accept – it is simply not needed. One might call it the development comfort zone, different priorities or whatever, in well established agricultural cores the focus is on ensuring the continuity of the status quo and local hierarchies. It is external capital, impinged by the need to invest, with surrounding areas being the most viable choice for development that result in the conversion of rural land to accommodate urban activities. The patterns of change to be considered by planning need to include spatio-temporal clustering and contiguity, and be tempered by an understanding of the people's perception and acceptability towards these changes. It is expected that the changes and the functional relationships for these changes are non linear in nature, requiring the appropriate tools to analyse. For such an approach, the traditional core-periphery theory of development is inadequate.

The core-periphery theory of development proposes that for development to be effective there must be a central area, which serve as the loci for development. In terms of physical design, this center must be distinguishable from a less developed - in fact even underdeveloped - periphery. This theory emphasized that each has its own function to fulfill. However, this means that the selected center will have the urban activities and amenities that go with modernization while the periphery remains agricultural and non-urban in nature. Some type of development needs a place to start and that is usually the urban center while the periphery waits its turn in development.

Another concept that goes with the core-periphery idea is the trickle down effect, and the immersion

of development into the periphery is often just that - a trickling. The urban areas are often provided images of development that far exceed that of the rural periphery. These images of development subsequently attract the young and the labor force away from the rural to the urban. Since labor is needed to develop an area, development in rural areas remain at a minimum. While economists can claim that the urban is where the work is, the impact of development image cannot be downplayed. While there are jobs elsewhere, labor tends to go where development is more apparent - or expressed. Even when the place is more expensive to live in. This is perhaps a reason why industries still prefer to remain in larger urban areas even when smaller areas are offering better incentives. Thus, while the labor market would go anywhere the jobs are, given a choice of places, the areas perceived to be more developed are often more attractive. For these, process and change indicators for planning are needed, together with the identification of nodes and lattices within the networks of change that make up alternative scenarios of possible sustainability futures.

If the entire planning outlook, goals and approaches need to be modified, there are two major concerns that need to be addressed: The first being the approach towards planning in which little natural development takes place (Batty, 2009), and the second being the organizational structure of Malaysian planning itself.

Critical Transitions of Urbanization: Changing Roles of State and Market

The government, as well as its critics often look at the success of a particular regional plan or agency on the basis of how close the target region's achievements conform to the original objectives. The whole approach, as Jacobs would put it, is towards painting the perfect portrait, where each color and stroke is under the total control of the artist. The federal government, in trying to promote development in some regions, comes close to fitting the description of the artist. Even if the artist is a master and the painting invaluable, the development would have failed to take advantage of the valuable dynamics and rich sub cultures of the region. In emphasizing only one set pattern of development, the regional plans have stifled the growth of a natural masterpiece.

When we deal with cities we are dealing with life at its most complex and intense. Because this is so, there is a basic esthetic limitation on what can be done with cities: A city cannot be a work of art Jacobs (1961).

While Jacobs discussed this with respect to the city, the quote is equally applicable to the development of different regions in Malaysia. Although Malaysian

regions, especially the countrysides, do not have the city's fast paced intensity in their atmosphere, they are nevertheless as complex.

The approach of total planning assumes the ability of the government to control the environment and the responses of each component totally, as would an artist. Here evidence abounds as to how the complexity of the region has frustrated many attempts at resculpturing it, and in response, it either ignores the plan or forces changes onto the plan. In cases where the plan works, it has taken tremendous government intervention in controlling the environment. A common response by government officers when their plans are not taken up by the communities is to claim the non readiness of the community, malaise or lackadaisical attitudes. Seldom do they argue that perhaps their approach and assumptions towards development itself is flawed or that approaches fit for a different era are no longer central at the present time. The processes that make up the experiences of urbanization are not just behavioural in function, they are also very much symbolic. Following Burke, while behavioural functions aim at solving a problem, symbolic functions aim at the manner by which a problem is solved. In the case of urbanization, the issue is not merely 'becoming' urban but the manner in which 'becoming' urban is achieved (Table 1). Thus the articulations of urbanization that have come to represent the phenomena also reflect this interplay between actual development and its presentation. Among the many articulations include the oft-used concept of post colonialism to explain the development landscape of countries that gained their independence from colonial forces.

Critical Transitions in Developing the Region: From Economic Regions to the Sustainable Regions

The idea of a region has always been a point of contention among planners. The questions is whether it refers to a scale of analysis, a planning implementation body or simply a demarcation of space. For the purpose of this paper, based on our research premise, we refer regions to be an area that spans several local areas, and in this case we limit the idea of regions to that within a country.

Planning a sustainable region can take on several meaning and approaches. In Malaysia, economic regions tend to be developed using the developmental state concept, as a response approach, with the role of the state going beyond assisting the economy to actively determining the outcome. The role is not merely to develop policies and create an attractive economic environment or infrastructure, but to be involved directly in the development process, even to the level of individual firms.

The Third Malaysia Plan was a landmark national policy which opened up a floodgate of oppportunities for the rural population. The state embarked on a large scale development plan attempting not only to guide but to change the path of development – and consciously include the rural population in its development agenda. It was during this period that the mass urbanisation took place for many of the ruralites. For the first time job opportunities in the form of new factory employment arose. The state also increased its public service jobs, attracting increasing number of the rural and fringe population as well as the recently urbanised.

Table 1: Urbanizing the Rural – Between State and Market

	Market Produce Purchaser	Labour Consumption	New Product Developer
State Physical infrastructure	nascent		
Regional economic development programmes		pseudo	
Human capital development programmes (with a tinge of the social)			Current mega-urban?

Coalescing the State with The Market

This not only changed the role of the state but also the relationship between the State, the market and the world system. If previously there was as if a given hierarchy and network (within which the third world countries need only take their place in the new world order), there exist a retro-movement from individual states to take charge of their own economy and development path. This concept revived an older idea by List in the 19th century (White, 1988). List was of the opinion that when societies with different levels of development meet, the more developed and productive societies would create a marginalizing competition in the less efficient and economically developed society. This will cause an economic marginalization and structural deformation if not corrected by the individual state through taking the economy and society out of international competition, even though temporarily (Hoogvelt, 1997).

At the beginning of the 21st century the dominance of global structure has undergone changes. An amorphous global machine has begun to change adapting to local and regional needs, interests and concerns. Cultural values and local idiosyncracies are adopted by global corporations in advertisements and marketing strategies. In a global village, sub communities emerged. Identities that re-assert meaning for the local began re-emerging. These local identities coalesce into regional identities better equipped to implement changes and make demands at the global scale. While there is an old saying in regional planning – a region is what planners defines it to be – the definition will be more strongly based on the local. New development regions re-align the local to the global and the local need to be well prepared for such re-adjustments. This will include the creation of new circuits of capital to move development projects at all scales and to re-link the broken chains of development. Yet Malaysia has always developed its region from the top down. The various earlier attempts at regional development, Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA), or Regional Development Authorities (RDA) all are federal or central attempts at developing the region in a comprehensive manner.

What we are having today however are the smaller areas and communities being fused together by processes that are influenced but not determined by these central efforts. These communities self organizes into a region of variable cohesiveness. A main flaw, perhaps, in the planning of the region, has been to ignore these vibrant communities. Communities develop at their own pace, given traditional agents and networks.

Anarchistic Leanings of Direct Development

In a tradition of development that emphasizes structure, and grand structures in particular, it is easy to forget the workings of small hands. Yet, if one peruse various development reports one would not fail to realise that many grand plans that worked in one place when replicated elsewhere didn't work elsewhere. In fact the bulk of the planning tradition is to look for means to create consistency of results in the plans they propose. Traditional planning emphasizes well thought out objectives and procedures to implement these objectives.

The paper uses anarchistic leanings in its small structure sense, where individual and local efforts move towards development not for any grand plan but taking destiny in their own hand, as they perceive their needs to be. These local agents are aware of drivers that attempt to mold their environment but the actual acceptance and implementation of the plans are dependent on the agents' own perception of the specific situation. Anarchistic leanings move apart from a controlling big structure. These anarchistics leaning are not in the same tradition as Proudhon and Kropotkin where there is a conscious effort to rebel against big structures, rather they are necessary strategies, directly influencing development to cope with uncertainty and be part of the changing urban with little capital and information.

There are several manifestations of these anarchistic leanings. The first is the movement patterns of the rural to the urban (Abdul Samad et al, 2008). The, second, perhaps the most visible physically, is the sprawling development of housing areas taking over from previously agricultural land (Shaharudin et al, 2009). This paper extends from these previous findings to argue that while an overarching structure attempts to organize and develop space (in this context, the regional basin), local patterns are derived from a more complex interrelation between State, Market and the people.

Rhizomatic Analysis Approach Towards Anarchistic Urbanization

An important element of the approach in explaining the phenomena is the interplay between the local and the global. Any study that attempts to make such an explanation will have to deal with the multiple entry points that locals use to participate in economic and social activities. These entry points create a network of nodes that response to drivers from outside and within. The rhizomatic analysis approach proposed by Deleuze and Guattari allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in seeking out relationships and interpreting the connectivities. A rhizome works with horizontal and trans-agent

connections, where two or more different agents interact together to form a multiplicity, a unity based on multiple possibilities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

The rhizomatic network used in this paper aims at reconstructing the process and paths that lead to active involvement and responses to State and Market driven programmes by community members. For the purpose of the study we define involvement as a network of social agents that enable the decision to get involved and participative distance as the sum of steps that social agents needed to complete the network.

It is argued that members of the rural community participate through a given set of networks and it is seldom that they participate on their own and independent of the network. The paper argues that request chains and participation networks are important in determining involvement. A rural person decision to get involved is largely based on these network chain of invitation, else he or she might decline.

Linkages within the network represent accepted sources of authority or respect that lend themselves to the participation process. Thus participative distance is a function of social, authority and spatial distance. These elements are represented as lattices in a request chain or network (Figure 1). A programme that originate from outside the community, as with the

case of Federal and State government programmes often have longer participative distance, having to go through several layers of authority while local programmes often are less lengthy in origin-participant connectivity. These networks might be broken and given substitute lattices that complete the programmes. These programmes are subdivided into participative social, economic and religious functions.

A Rhizomatic Example Of Non-Economic Social Development

Urbanization is not necessarily only about economic growth. The creation fo a neighborhood is a salient local example on how urbanization proceeds. Take the example of street use in a neighborhood. The first child decides to play in the street and another child joins in, setting up a game among them. Other kids will look and start joining in, as long as their parents let them be. In a short span of time the children will naturally form groups, self organized for play. The street comes alive, every evening perhaps, after school in the evening. The neighborhood then increases in livability and becomes a home, a kampung halaman.

However if an accident occur, or something else unfortunate, a first kid will be disallowed to play. A second child will respond by following suit, then a third and a fourth. Soon the street will no longer be used as a playground, and the neighborhood becomes vulnerable.

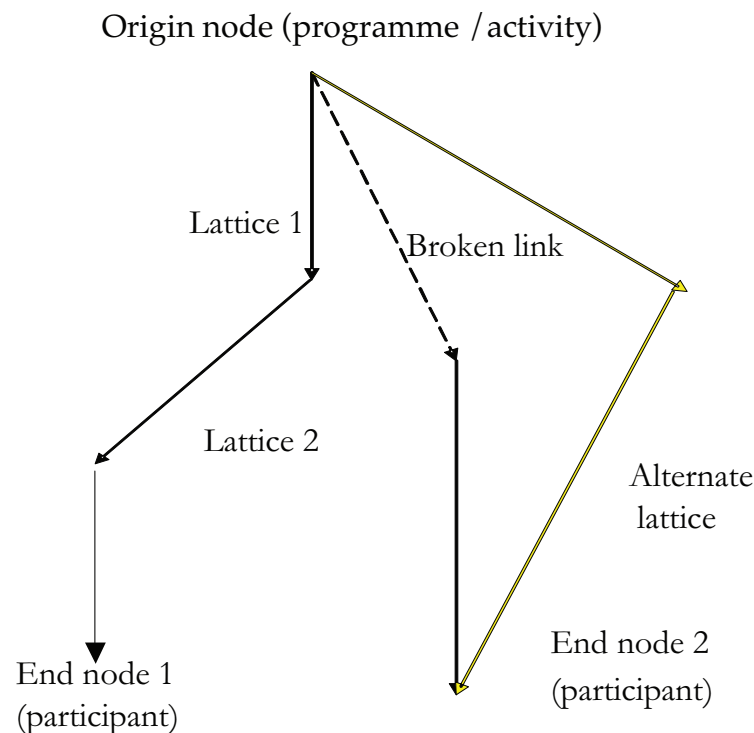


Figure 1: Participative Network

These changes will impact upon and be impacted by the infrastructure and the community, resulting in changing livability and sustainability potential. The patterns of change will be analysed to include spatio-temporal clustering and contiguity, and will be tempered by a study of the people's perception and acceptability towards these changes. It is expected that the changes and the functional relationships for these changes are non linear in nature, requiring the appropriate tools to analyse. Process and change indicators will need to be developed, together with the identification of nodes and lattices within the networks of change that make up alternative scenarios of possible futures. The actual changes in landuse type for example are the results of social processes that include the economic as well as the non-economic drivers, and the impacts of these changes are dependent on the people and institutions affected.

EVALUATING THE URBANIZATION PROCESS IN BERNAM-LINGGI BASIN

If sustainability is about the future, sustainable development then is about the investment for the future. This investment would be the communities' investments as well as individuals' decisions to better themselves. Individuals make many decisions that do not seem to connect to one another but the sum total of their decisions have a direct impact on the future of the community as a whole. This study looks at three investments, the individuals, the business community, and the local institutions.

This study began as part of a research on modeling local urban sustainability. However in designing the urban sustainability model there was a need to explicate the structure of rural everyday life that urbanizes over time and builds into a larger pattern impacting upon the urban, bringing together both the question of urban and rural sustainability and whether the dichotomy is still pertinent, especially in the study area context. The idea of complex system thinking is used to reconstruct the scenario building up from an agent-base approach. We felt that a good indicator of urbanization as a function of the relationship between the local people, the State and the Market is the shift in what we call local engagement network that somehow gels individual decisions to be involved into community wide engagements. We attempt to look at the tipping points that cause this to occur and situations when it did not.

We argue that for increased livability and sustainability to occur, this process of gelling up must occur of which community engagement with State and Market driven programmes is an important indicator. What we discover is not a simple scenario of decline or resilience, but rather that the structure

or engagement itself has evolved and this included perceived responsibilities, expectations and willingness. Urbanization brought about alternatives to community engagement as well as opening up new access and modes of participation. Of late these present themselves in the form of commercialism.

We also argue that local engagement is part of what makes a place, the breaking up of which can turn established places in the form of kampungs into bypassed spaces. In the scenario of uncertain urbanization and development

The Rhizomatic Nature Of Local-State-Market Engagement Networks

As discussed earlier, there are two general stereotypes on the public engagement in rural communities. The first is that 'traditionally,' rural communities are very much involved in community level activities. The second 'stereotype' is that such a traditional has been in decline. Delving inside these stereotypes the research uncovered several salient patterns:

General level of 'traditional' public engagement

The study pointed towards a more diverse picture. Early education activities such as the kindergarten have the highest rate of community participation with involvement declining as the age of the schoolers increase. Celebrations or feasts rank second in engagement although the form of participation have changed from being actively involved in the preparations of the feasts to being attendees. This is followed by religious activities of all kind. Activities that are unexpectedly low are communal self help or gotong royong and nightwatch that used to be the mainstay of community engagement (Table 2).

What has increased, though, are economic collaborations between groups of community members. These might not be community wide but they involve increasing numerous segments of the community that once were connected through social and religious means rather than the economic.

Participative distance of community/collaborative activities and programmes

The study identified actual engagement to be linked to both participative function and distance. Economic and religious functions are more dependent on participative distance than social functions. Respondents are equally willing to participate in social functions that originate close to them (shorter distance) as well as programmes that originated from farther down the communication line. However for economic and religious functions the majority respond more towards programmes with short

Table 2: General level of public engagement

Activities	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
Kindergarten	80%	20%	
School	60%	40%	
Nightwatch	20%	40%	40%
Religious activities	65%	30%	5%
Celebrations/Feasts (weddings/rites of passage)	70%	30%	
Communal self help (gotong royong)	20%	60%	20%
Economic/business collaboration	32%	43%	25%

Head of household/spouse survey 2008; n = 280.

Table 3: Participative distance and functions

Participative distance	Participative functions		
	Social	Economic	Religious
Short/near (N): 1 – 2 lattices	48%	70%	76%
Distant/far (F): >=3 lattices	52%	30%	34%

Source: Head of household/spouse survey 2008; n = 280.

participative distances compared to those that have had to go through a longer network chain (Table 3).

Out of these participations, the rate of success of these participative activities is higher for local programmes compared to outside programmes. However about half of the programmes that were disconnected earlier on the network were completed through alternative means (Table 4). These alternative means include political and individual mechanisms. A common example is when an individual felt that he or she was bypassed in the process of getting involved in a programme. The person would then use his or her political or social connections to still get into the programme.

The study then developed a social investment analysis through a combination of questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews of residents, businesses and local institutions. Stratified and

snowball sampling strategies were used to target 280 respondents that provided a temporal view of changes in individual families, businesses and institutions. While the focus of the survey is on investment patterns, the historical and decision making context of individual investments are also inquired into. The next section highlights the regional sustainability and cohesiveness aspect of the study as a function of local social investments.

CRITICAL TRANSITIONS OF SOCIAL INVESTMENT IN THE BERNAM REGION

The study identified different patterns of investment between all four towns in the Bernam basin. Within each town there is a correlation between several types of social investments. These indicate different potential for sustainability as well as different planning strategies that will be required to enhance the social sustainability of the areas.

Table 4: Success and failures of participative activities (past five years)

	Completed	Broken links	Alternate
Outside programs	52%	33%	15%
Local programs	72%	28%	
Economic collaborations	32%	51%	17%

Based on respondents' knowledge, attempts and successful participation of activities:

n = 280

For towns that are categorised to be matured, that of Kuala Kubu Bharu and the older section of Tanjung Malim, the past five years have seen stable and at times declining investment in all three social investment categories. Local economic investments have seen a slight decline (5%) while institution investments are about the same (6%). There was a mixed response in terms of household investments where there is a similar percentage between stability (27%), decline (30%) and increase (33%). These are correlated to the family lifecycle, with younger families having increased investments while older families being either stable or slightly declining in their social investments.

For towns that are considered new development and rapid growth areas such as Beranang, Batang Kali and the new section of Tanjung Malim, there were increased investments in all categories, the difference being the level of increase. These show vibrancy and optimistic expectations from the residents and the businesses. Local economic investments by the respondents have increased by 30% over the past five years while households record an increase in at least 15% of their social investments. The demographics of the residents and businesses also explain the vigor. Most of the respondent residents are younger families, and the businesses have a good mix of experienced and new ventures.

Areas that are on the decline economically have lost various social investments as well. Kerling and Rasa have been facing a decline for several years. Interestingly enough they are not much affected by the global crises, partly perhaps because they have already been at the margins. There were no significant shift in the trend of overall investment over the past twenty years. The business sector respondents in Rasa and Kerling have been reducing their overall investments (10%) due to reduced clientele (13%). Some have even divested their business interests

(5%) and began looking for other places including Behrang and Rawang. Attempts to develop near the two areas (Bukit Beruntung near Rasa and Lembah Beringin near Kerling) have failed resulting in acres of abandoned and incomplete housing. Contributions from local institutions however have remained relatively the same. Most of the respondent residents have been staying in the area for more than twenty years. The apparent lack of new residents show a stagnancy common in declining areas. More than 30% do not see the possibility of moving out of the area although pessimistic about improvement in their area. They have already reduced their investment into the renovation and upkeep of the houses (Table 5).

CONCLUSIONS

The findings point towards mixed impacts of State and market influences the on the local communities. New development areas were developed to meet demands generated by the State and new market but there are also areas that are bypassed by these developments. The oscillations of economic growth have resulted in a cautionary attitude among local residents and businesses. Combined with the demographics of the different local areas, these result in different levels of risk taking and local resilience.

Using several rural communities in the Bernam valley as a case study, the paper presents findings on community sustainability in the face of urbanization, and in the particular case of the Bernam valley, an erratic process of urbanization. However, the issue of public involvement with the State and market goes beyond reacting to programmes; community participation as a whole has changed. This article presented the changing structure of local engagement with the State and Market, the resulting regional social investment pattern as well as positing several reasons for the change using an agent-based approach.

Table 5: Summary of social investment findings

	Local Economic investment (LEI)	Household investment (HI)	Institutional investment (InI)
Matured areas. (stable) Kuala Kubu Bharu; old section Tg. Malim	Stable, even declining over the past 10 years.	Stable communities, stable high participation	Increasing investment by political and private sector
Rapid growth: Batang Kali (Liga Mas)	Increasing investments in all areas	High new investment; moderate continuing investments	Moderate increase in institutional contributions, stable contributions from private sector
New development: Behrang 2020; New section Tg Malim	Increasing investments Increase in for sale	New investment; High time participation, New family participaiton	Low, stable financial investment; high contribution of time Stable institutional contributions;
Declining area Rasa (Bukit Beruntung) Kerling (Lembah Beringin)	Reduction in investitures. High level of incomplete housing.	Decreasing investment yet inability for owners to move out. Renters moving out.	Reduction in private sector donations

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