Rethinking ‘kampung’ or ‘village’ in the (re)making of Singapore and Singaporeans

Anupama Nallari and Ate Poorthuis¹

Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS)

Singapore University of Technology and Design, Singapore

Published as: Nallari, A. and Poorthuis, A. (2021), Rethinking ‘kampung’ or ‘village’ in the (re)making of Singapore and Singaporeans. Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjtg.12382>.

Abstract

‘Village’ as a metaphor, propelled by mobilizing nostalgia for the ‘rural’ as counter to urban fragmentation, has been used across nations to engender a sense of place and community in urban spaces. In Singapore, the narrative of kampung (Malay for village), rooted in restorative nostalgia, has been used repeatedly to foster living in harmony. However, it remains unclear in what ways ‘kampung’ and related social policies resonate with current citizens.

The main objective of this research is to generate a grounded, interpretive lens on the term kampung to better understand its meaning and relevance in the context of urban living. A mixed methods approach comprising discourse analysis, in-depth interviews and Q-methodology was used to engage a diverse group of residents in generating grounded perspectives around the construct. We show ‘kampung’ is a heterogeneous concept that can be understood through five analytically distinct perspectives wherein race, place, neighbouring, and personal agency vis-à-vis the role of government are recurring themes. The findings lend a social constructivist perspective to wider geographical debates around the urban/rural dichotomy and outline some possibilities for ‘kampung’ under present conditions.

Keywords: kampung, nostalgia, village, urban, q methodology

¹ Ate Poorthuis is now an Assistant Professor at the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, KU Leuven, Belgium

Introduction

A brief read of Singapore's urban developmental history will show a smattering of metaphorical visions. 'Garden city', 'renaissance city', and 'smart nation' have all been used to envision, plan, and build the 'global city'. The use of metaphors in the urban realm is certainly not unique to Singapore. The complexity of the city has long attracted metaphorical rhetoric to understand current conditions and imagine future utopias or dystopias—from Ebenezer Howard's 'garden city' and Arif Hasan's 'informal city' to William Mitchell's 'networked city' and the more recent 'smart city' and 'sustainable city'. The power of metaphor allows reimagining and reframing urbanity from different perspectives. Some metaphors are more abstract, such as 'informal' and 'networked', and therefore might engender critical reflection and a multitude of viewpoints, whereas others, such as the recent use of 'smart', are couched in more dominant and often positivist frameworks.

In a similar fashion, 'village' has been used in many nations as a metaphor or tool, particularly in the context of urban planning, to engender a sense of place and community. For example, strategies such as Urban Village in the UK and Traditional Neighbourhood Development in the US gained prominence in the 1980s and 1990s. They reference the socio-spatial qualities of idealized village living in top-down efforts to reproduce these qualities in an urban context. There is some evidence, however, that for people living in places developed as such, there is no apparent desire for, or experience of, 'village-like' qualities (Biddulph *et al.*, 2003). In Wollongong, Australia, a regeneration effort evoked through the 'urban village' concept to fix declining infrastructure and social ills, resulted in heightening differences and legitimizing social exclusions (Barnes *et al.*, 2006).

In Malaysia, the 'kampung' or 'village' has been employed to conjure up 'community living' and 'neighbourliness' to create enclaves for the rich, while at the same time erasing urban kampungs (housing the poor) from the city (Bunnell, 2002). This recurrent and uncritical use of 'village' as a metaphor is often facilitated by mobilizing nostalgia for the 'rural' as counter to urban fragmentation. As such, it provides a vantage point to analyse the co-production of inextricably linked urban and rural geographies and associated sociabilities (Perkins, 2006).

In Singapore, metaphorical framings such as 'smart nation' and 'garden city' have been unpacked to a certain extent (see Kong & Woods, 2018; Han, 2017). However, 'kampung' or 'village'—an often-used metaphor in driving urban (social) policies—has received less attention from this perspective. In this paper we explore ways in which the notion of the

kampung resonates with Singaporean citizens today. We use the term kampung in the subsequent sections of the paper to refer to both the place as well as the concept. The main objective of this paper is to generate an interpretive lens on the kampung, to understand its meaning and relevance in the context of urban living. A secondary objective is to use this lens to help guide urban policies and programmes that might conjure the kampung narrative. In the next sections, we first review epistemological frames of the kampung in the context of Southeast Asia generally, and Singapore in specific, and then analyse the meaning and relevance of the kampung for today's residents through the interpretive analysis of in-depth interviews and q-methodology.

'Kampung' as a construct in urban geography

In Southeast Asia, 'kampung' as a physical and social construct defies the urban-rural dichotomy as they exist on the urban-rural continuum as peri-urban settlements, urban poor settlements, and rural settlements. This intermingling of rural and urban is also emphasized in the concept of 'desakota',¹ put forth by McGee (1991) to identify sprawling areas at the outskirts of cities where the urban and rural are inseparable. Although 'kampung' is spatially a somewhat stretched concept—it could mean a house, a group of houses, or an administrative unit—it has solidified as 'village' or administrative unit following colonial rule in the region (Rigg, 1994).

The rural 'kampung' or 'village' in its framing, both colloquially as well as in academia, has been largely associated with traditional village life comprising egalitarian and communitarian values. However, Rigg (1994) argues that this framing of the sociality of the village as communal is mainly a product of *development* and not as congruent with traditional village life as is often assumed. For example, traditional village communities were often divided by power, access to land, and wealth and largely lacked the aforesaid values. Similarly, Newberry's (2008) study of an urban kampung in Yogyakarta shows that feelings of communal mutuality are reproduced by governmentality and economic production (kampungs are often sites of micro-industries), which is an aspect often missing from narratives of 'kampung' espoused by the state as is evidenced below.

In an analysis of rural kampungs in Malaysia, Thompson (2004) finds that residents' lived experiences largely conform to an urban sociality and have little resonance with the extolled virtues of communal mutual self-help, kinship ties and subsistence economies of rural kampungs. On the other hand, the metaphor of kampung as a 'traditional village' is pervasive in urban government and administrative discourses in the region (Bunnell, 2002), where it is

used to align with traditional values, community bonding and self-assistance to socialize and moralize city dwellers. Thompson (2004: 2357) proffers one explanation: ‘nostalgic and derogatory narratives of modernity and urbanism fix kampung in social memory as sites marginal to and outside urban modernity’. In his most recent work (Thompson, 2020) reveals how ‘kebun’ (orchard) culture in Malaysia, traditionally associated with *rural* kampung, is now embracing socio-cultural patterns associated with urban settings, i.e the privacy and anonymity that accompany planetary urbanization.

‘Kampung’ and ‘kampung spirit’ in the context of Singapore

In Singapore, kampungs have existed in diverse forms and made up much of the country’s landscape before they were largely erased from the physical landscape to make way for modern high-rise housing. They existed well over a span of 200 years, starting as small fiefdoms and fishing villages and later diversified to support cash-crop plantations and house a growing number of immigrants from the region. In some cases, they also became centres of trade and power.

While ‘kampung’ often portrays an image of stasis, these villages were largely in flux due to political disenfranchisement, development of infrastructure and preferential sanctions (Turnbull, 2009; Rahmat, 2008). Kampungs also existed as squatter settlements close to the city centre to house an expanding population amidst a rising deficit of affordable housing. More often than not, kampungs were stratified by ethnicity, language and dialect, with migrants from different regions of their host countries (predominantly China, Malaysia, and India) usually living together in different kampungs. The term ‘kampung’ rooted in Malay, could embody for Malay Singaporeans certain sociocultural as well as spatial characteristics associated with Malay culture, whereas for Chinese and Indian Singaporeans the term is more likely to embody administrative and government rhetoric circulated around the term. Chang (2000) characterizes Malay kampungs as having gendered spaces within homes and large open spaces for socialization. In contrast, Chinese kampungs laid more emphasis on privacy and territoriality and were influenced by geomancy.

Post-independence, the government’s agenda of universal public housing to improve physical living conditions, unify ethnically stratified groups, and provide a tangible link between citizenship and nation building, replaced almost all kampungs with multi-level and high-rise public housing (commonly referred to as HDBs²) over a span of 30 years. With this change from grounded and self-built to ubiquitous, stacked public housing, much of the socio-cultural spatial characteristics of the kampungs were lost. While most moved willingly,

political tensions were embroiled in the rehousing of residents from some kampungs, and for some, rehousing was accompanied by a loss of income and livelihood (Loh, 2009). Alongside infrastructural prowess, a race-based framework identifying Chinese, Malay, Indians and Others (CMIO) as the constituent races in Singapore was put forth at this time as well. The CMIO framework underlies various socio-economic policies even today, despite increasing inter-ethnic marriages and racial diversity.

Post-settlement in the new HDBs, most residents were appreciative of their new homes and accompanying infrastructure such as paved roads, running water, private toilets that many villages had lacked. While some residents were nostalgic for life and spaces in the kampung, and some residents, particularly Malays, perceived a dissipation and dilution of cultural values (Alhabshi, 2010; Chua, 1997) many settled into their new homes and routinized lives fairly quickly (Walter, 1978; Chua, 1997).

While kampungs have largely disappeared from the physical landscape, 'kampung spirit' has gained popularity in government rhetoric. It is a colloquial term,³ that references the communal shared living, and mutuality, of life in the kampung. The government has evoked 'kampung spirit', in this regard, to drive road and sanitation projects in the early days post-independence and to foster mutual tolerance in newly built multi-racial HDBs. Reflecting on the government's focus on rekindling the 'kampung spirit' in HDB dwellings, Chua (1997) suggests that this fixing of the kampung as a utopic vision of the future is driven by 'nostalgia' and statecraft, where the government uses the kampung to recall a 'mythic Asian communitarian society' to provide a remedial reference frame to counter the present state of malaise of 'stressed lives'.

Across diverse geographies, 'nostalgia' is often referenced as a central perpetrator in the remaking of the 'village' or 'kampung' in the urban (Rigg, 1994; Thomson, 2004; Chua 1997; Perkins, 2006). In her iconic work, Svetlana Boym (2007) theorizes two states of nostalgia: 'restorative nostalgia', which dwells on the recreation of the real or imagined past, usually using a single narrative tied to national or religious identity, and 'reflective nostalgia' that dwells on the longing for the past but from a critical point of reflection, using multiple reference frames constantly shifting from and questioning past, present, and future conditions. According to Boym (2007:13), 'restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. Reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. Restorative

nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt'. While Boym offers this typology as a springboard from which to recognize and engage with the different aspects of nostalgia, she does not see them as absolute binaries and suggests there is ample ground for overlap between the two, and that the reference frames for both could overlap.

One can find traces of 'restorative nostalgia', as well as Chua's framing of political nostalgia for the *kampung* spirit, in these recent quotes by government officials:

We want to create a society where everyone both gives and receives the care and support they need. We want Singaporeans to enjoy a culture of neighbourliness and rekindle the 'kampong spirit' within our communities (Speech by Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Ms Grace Fu, March 2018) (Fu, 2018).

Next year, we will be commemorating the Bicentennial anniversary of Sir Stamford Raffles' arrival in Singapore. It is timely to reflect how our forefathers survived the early years of hardship and difficult times by exemplifying the "Kampung Spirit" of caring, and watching out for one another. They worked together to build the Singapore we have today. We must carry on this "Kampung Spirit". In many of the conversations we have had with the public, Singaporeans shared their aspirations to build a caring society and strengthen our sense of togetherness . . . (Speech by Minister for Finance Heng Swee Keat, 16 November 2018) (Heng, 2018).

The insistence of a return to the 'kampung spirit' as a 'truth' and 'ideal' fixated on a single narrative of the past in the face of change is evident in these speeches. It is presumed that there is little 'care' and 'support' in current society and that somehow this can be 'created' by a return to 'kampung'. However, Singaporean society has changed vastly in the past five decades. Falling birth-rates, an ageing population, increased immigration and diversity, families with both parents working, and high smartphone penetration (Deloitte, 2016) all characterize the demographic and social changes in current society. How relevant and plausible then is 'kampung spirit' in present times? In what ways do Singaporeans, many of whom have never lived in 'kampungs', associate with this term? Does nostalgia for the 'truth' and 'ideal' of 'kampung spirit' hold sway for Singaporeans?

Current policies and practices around the rhetoric of 'kampung' and 'kampung spirit' reflect a 'restorative nostalgia' and are predominantly rooted in the 'sociable' and 'communitarian' aspects of the past. 'Kampung' nostalgia is bridged with 'smart nation' through 'postmemory' freezeframes to recreate an idealized and sanitized past in the digital

and hi-tech medium of the future (Gonzaga, 2019). In this sense, ‘kampung’ has inspired smartphone gaming apps to commemorate SG50 and built environments like the ‘Kampung Admiralty’, a new planning model for ageing-in-place. The ‘kampung’ narrative also obliquely cushions the government’s ‘Many Helping Hands’ approach to social welfare where the burden of care is placed on family, community, and voluntary organizations. This is reflected in the government support for neighbourhood initiatives⁴ using the ‘kampung spirit’ narrative.

While ‘restorative nostalgia’ might fuel the government narrative, a cursory read of the online discourse around the kampung also reveals a ‘reflective nostalgia’ for the kampung among Singapore’s residents. For example, an opinion post in Rice Media, ‘Can We Just Let The Kampung Spirit Die in Peace?’ (*RICE*, 2018)(an alternative Asian news media) argues kampung spirit to be a ‘paradise invented’ to serve political agendas. Debates have ensued on whether the last remaining kampung should be preserved or not, and heated discussions in social media indicate the term ‘kampung’ could hold differing meanings and values for Malay and Chinese residents. This shows a heterogeneity of discourse around the construct of kampung and warrants unpacking these meanings from the perspectives of various residents to better understand its relevance in the context of urban living and social policies.

Research methodology

To establish and unpack heterogeneity around the kampung, we adopt a research design based on Q methodology. Although not a mainstay in urban studies, Q methodology has been used effectively in diverse fields such as political science, education, and environmental behaviour to better understand differing political viewpoints (Brown, 1980), attitudes towards educational approaches (Barker, 2008), and discourses around environmental issues (Addams & Proops, 2000). It combines quantitative and interpretivist approaches to systematically identify ‘social viewpoints and knowledge structures relative to a chosen subject matter’ (Watts & Stenner, 2012: 42) and offers a creative approach to understand diverse perspectives around the ‘kampung’. We provide a short overview on how we adopt the methodology in our specific context in this section but would refer readers to Watts & Stenner’s (2012) comprehensive textbook treatment for a more exhaustive coverage of both theoretical and practical aspects of Q-methodology. More recently, Nost *et al.*, (2019) provide a critical discussion of the method’s use in representing subjectivity.

In its essence, Q-methodology consists of two stages, summarized in Figure 1. In the first stage, a holistic worldview or concourse of the chosen subject matter (i.e. kampung) is created that reflects the breadth and variety of all potential perspectives on the subject, and a subset termed Q-set, is extracted. In our specific case, we extracted 49 statements from a discourse analysis around the term kampung, as well as in-depth pilot interviews with eight Singapore residents (cf. Figure 2 for an overview of all statements). For the discourse analysis we extracted relevant articles from The Straits Times (Singapore's newspaper of record), as well as a sample of posts from Facebook, Twitter, and a local online forum (HardwareZone) that included the terms 'kampung' and 'kampung spirit'. These articles and posts, as well as interview data, was collated into three main emergent categories (mentioned below) to generate a representative set of statements around these categories. Care was taken to ensure that the Q-set was unbiased towards particular or specific viewpoints on the kampung, easy to understand, and interesting enough to provoke a range of reactions.

The Q-set generated from the first stage of the research includes both 'restorative' and 'reflective' nostalgia for the kampung and comprises three main categories. A short overview is provided below:

- Kampung of the present (12 statements). Statements in this category relate to the relevance of kampung in current and future society (e.g. S1; S4).
- Kampung of the past (6 statements). S20, S21, and S47 construct the kampung of the past as having racial undertones, being unsafe, and lacking in trust between neighbours, whereas S13, S45, and S49 depict past kampungs as idyllic with close knit communities.
- Nature and viability of kampung spirit (31 statements). Statements on kampung spirit dwell on its definitional, experiential, and feasibility aspects. Statements elaborate on its meanings (S19, S22, S23, S25, S46) and where or with whom it is experienced (S2, S6, S42, S12, S30). They also cover the viability of the kampung spirit in the current day (S29, S32, S36, S40) and who it includes (e.g. foreign workers (S9) and new citizens (S10)). Finally, it includes statements on how such a spirit can be engendered (S17, S33, S34, S48).

Some of the larger themes that arise in the Q-set are the roles of place, institutions and race in urban living. Figure 2 provides a collation of statements and associated themes and we suggest the reader use this as a ‘compass’ while reading the subsequent empirical analysis.

In the second stage of the research, participants were invited to narrate and encode their own, subjective perspective of the kampung by *sorting* the statements, printed on physical cards, in various degrees of agreement/disagreement. Following Q-methodology, this sorting exercise was done in a specific structure (cf. Figure 1), forcing the respondent to only place a limited number of statements at the extreme ends of the scale.

Each participant would have their own, individualized view on the topic which is referred to as a Q-sort. As individual viewpoints are affected by larger social structures or processes, when multiple viewpoints are taken together, these structures (often referred to as ‘social facts’ (Watts & Stenner, 2012)) materialize as latent ‘factors’ through a factor analysis procedure (discussed below). These latent factors, or perspectives, offer us empirical anchor points for understanding the varying meaning and relevance of kampung and related urban policies.

In this phase, 37 Singaporean residents were interviewed. The interview format comprised both a conventional qualitative interview, as well as a Q-method component. Participants were first asked what the terms kampung and kampung spirit meant to them using a semi-structured interview guide, followed by a sorting of the statements. After participants completed the sorting activity, follow-up questions were asked to better understand why they placed certain statements in certain positions. The finished Q-sort was recorded through a photograph so it could be digitized easily later on. The entire interview process typically took 45 minutes, and most participants said they enjoyed the sorting activity. Interviews were either audio recorded or recorded via notetaking depending on the participant’s preference. The research was approved by the Singapore University of Technology and Design Institutional Review Board.

Factor analysis and interpretation

Post-fieldwork, the 37 Q-sorts were combined, and factor analysis was used to extract latent factors, or perspectives, across the different sorts. These perspectives represent ways in which a group of participants thinks about or gives meaning to the term kampung. More specifically, we used the R *qmethod* package (Zabala, 2014) to conduct this analysis. This package implements the required factor analysis through principal component analysis with varimax rotation of the factors.

As with any factor analysis, deciding on the number of factors is not a straight-forward choice (Watts & Stenner, 2012). We paid attention to the variance explained by the number of factors extracted, in conjunction with the factor loadings and interpretation of factors. We chose to extract five factors as each perspective derived would have a unique identity. This unique identity is lost by extracting fewer factors (i.e. multiple perspectives get merged into a single factor), while extracting more factors leads to overlaps in the perspectives across factors. As our aim is to understand the distinct perspectives on the kampung, we applied VARIMAX rotation on the factors, as implemented in *qmethod* (Watts & Stenner, 2012: 125; Zabala, 2014). These five factors together explain 53 per cent of the total variance in our study, with 29 of the 37 participants loading significantly (i.e. more than 50 per cent) onto one of the 5 factors. This underscores that the kampung is a highly heterogeneous construct, which is understood and experienced by various groups of people in differing ways.

In the next section, we provide a succinct summary analysis of each perspective based on a combination of the factor and conventional interview analysis. To aid in our interpretation, we followed the ‘crib sheet’ method, detailed by Watts and Stenner (2012). Interview transcripts of participants were used to further distil and corroborate emerging viewpoints within each factor or perspective. Each perspective was given a name that provides a gestalt that reflects the main thrust of the perspective.

Perspective 1: Kampung as unity

The central aspect in the first perspective revolves around uniting people across differences (S26: +6). In this sense, kampung is considered to be very important and relevant in current society (S11: -5) and participants feel it can be fostered if people have a shared sense of identity (S22: +5) that extends beyond familial units and individual identities (e.g. age, race, religion, ethnicity).

Mutuality is also seen as a key aspect of kampung spirit (S19: +5). However, this is experienced only to a limited extent in neighbourhood (S42: 0, S12: 0) and work settings (S6: 0). The increasing insularity of daily lives (e.g. valuing privacy over shared communal living) is seen to decrease kampung spirit over time. In addition, the role of place is seen as integral to enabling or disabling kampung spirit (S14: +4) and participants reference loss of common spaces such as void decks, and the Lift Upgrading Programmes (LUP),⁵ as examples that inhibit social interactions.

To an extent, the government is seen to leverage the construct of kampung to foster cohesive living among its citizens (S31: +3). Participants are willing to be part of this effort

(S17: +2), and some of the pathways suggested are community gardening programs and neighbourhood volunteering activities (S48: +4). Overall, this perspective is optimistic and sees potential for housing in Singapore to be like a modern day kampung (S29: +4).

Perspective 2: Kampung as diversity

This perspective, more than any other, ‘unfixes’ the kampung from the rhetoric of communitarianism. It calls for a nuanced exploration that takes into consideration present day realities. Race and diversity play a pivotal role in this perspective (S19: +6), and kampung is considered to hold different meanings for different people (S23: +4). Unlike Perspective 1, kampung represents multiculturalism and the expression of a multitude of voices (S22: 0). In this specific way, kampung is considered to be relevant to current society (S11: -4) and participants’ everyday lives (S39: -3, S16: +2).

Similar to Perspective 1, kampung spirit as mutuality is not experienced to a great extent either with neighbours (S42: -1), at work (S6: -2), or in community events (S12: 0). In addition, and contrary to Perspective 1, place is not seen as an essential underpinning or impediment for experiencing the kampung in present day (S34: -5; S14: -4).

Participants feel strongly that future living in Singapore can encompass some of the qualities of the kampung (S29: +5), but it has to be driven by more inclusive processes that include a plurality of voices (S5: -6). In contrast to the other perspectives, this perspective also suggests that kampung in present day is co-opted by nationalistic discourses and embodies little of its ‘communal’ roots (S1: -1, S8: 0) and is largely romanticized (S7: +3).

Perspective 3: Kampung nostalgia

Nostalgic accounts of kampung living form the central theme of this perspective and elderly participants associate with this perspective especially. Similar to Perspective 1, the notion of kampung is considered important as a way for uniting people from various backgrounds and cultures (S26: +5, S18: +5).

Kampung spirit is seen as relevant to day-to-day living (S16: +3) as well as in current society (S11: -3), however participants seldom experience this in their present lives (S6: -4, S12: 0, S42: -1). Many participants reminisced about the past sociality and spatiality of kampungs: open doors, shared social norms, sharing food, helping one another, catching fish, and climbing trees were often cited in recounts of kampung living.

Participants reflected on a freedom of mobility and time that is dramatically different than the constraints in childhoods of current day. Government (S33: -6) and institutions (S25:

+6) are considered to be integral to fostering kampung spirit. Participants themselves are less enthusiastic about leading efforts to enable kampung spirit in their neighbourhood and feel these need to be taken on by ‘charismatic’ individuals (S5: 1) and backed by the government.

Perspective 4: Family is kampung

This perspective portrays the possibility of experiencing kampung spirit in neighbourhoods to be largely impossible. Instead, the notion of kampung is strongly associated with family (S2: +5). While participants strongly align with kampung as helping others across racial boundaries (S19: +6) they too (as in the previous perspectives) rarely experience it with their neighbours (S42: -4) or at work (S6: -6). Neighbourly relations are expressed as seldom going beyond cursory greetings, and competitiveness (S40: +1) and privatized living (S36: +2) are considered as obstacles to nurturing kampung-like living.

For many participants, family reunions and caring for (extended) family come closest to the notion of kampung living (S2: +5). Participants associate kampung spirit with family gatherings around festive occasions, visiting grandparents, and taking care of ageing parents.

The physical environment of HDB estates is seldom found to encourage kampung spirit (S34: +2), with the exception of older estates (S30: +1). Overall, participants find kampung to be irrelevant in their current lives (S16: -2; S39: +1), are sceptical whether current and future HDB living can ever reinstate the sociability of the past (S34: +2, S29: -3), and therefore not keen to contribute towards a potential revival of the kampung spirit (S17: -3).

Perspective 5: New urban kampung—Not possible

This perspective adheres to the idea of the kampung as a state of harmony between person and environment (S46: +6). Kampung spirit is experienced more by participants in this group than in others (S42: +3, S12: +2, S6: +1). However, they are sceptical whether the pressures of modern society (S36: +5) and associated daily routines and practices (S32: +3) can sustain the kampung spirit in current and future society.

The rhetoric of kampung spirit is seen as part of a government agenda (S31: +4) and participants have little faith in its current day relevance. Participants feel strongly that kampung (in present times) is a lost cause (S40: +5). This could be why its manifestation in current times seems bleak and tends to overshadow their visions of the future (S29: -2). They are not inclined to contributing toward its cause (S17: -1).

Mapping these five perspectives onto Boym's (2007) typology of restorative and reflective nostalgia, we find some significant differences between perspectives. In Perspective 1, the nostalgia for kampung is more 'restorative' and aligns with the singular government narrative for unity and mutuality. In contrast, Perspective 2 is more reflective in its stance and questions the singular narrative of kampung spirit espoused by the state. In doing so, it calls for (re)constructing kampung and kampung spirit informed by the multitude of narratives of its diverse residents. Perspective 3 is more common with participants who have lived in (past) kampungs and leans towards romanticizing the spatial and temporal rhythms of past living. Possibilities for restoring kampung spirit are fixated on a restorative logic. Finally, Perspective 4 and 5 exhibit no particular nostalgia or longing for kampung or kampung spirit. They simply do not see its relevance to present or future living. They deviate in their view in that Perspective 4 sees the intimate scale of family life as the continuation of the communitarian aspect of kampung spirit, while Perspective 5 represents cynicism for kampung spirit with respect to current and future living.

Together, these perspectives give us several anchor points to analyse, 'unfix', and reveal the possibilities for kampung and kampung spirit in the context of present-day life. To further analyse these possibilities, we zoom in on the themes of race, place, personal agency and the role of government and analyse how they manifest in each perspective. We provide an overall summary in Table 1 and discuss these themes in more detail in the next section.

Diversity and inclusion

The historical context of kampungs described in the earlier section of this paper shows that Singapore, as a nation, was born in diversity. This diversity has grown steadily over the years and is manifest across categorizations such as race, class, sexual identity, and family-type. While the early calls for kampung spirit might have resonated with the common goals for nation building and the promise of housing and jobs, the same call in today's developed economy with universal housing and low unemployment is regarded as 'old fashioned', 'out-of-place', and 'abstract' by many participants.

Participants, when reflecting on the kampung, often fall back to a 'restorative nostalgia' that valorizes past sociability as being 'negotiable', 'egalitarian', and having a 'human touch' and pits it *against* the present. For example, rich and poor are seen as living seamlessly together in kampungs, whereas in modern HDBs 'office-workers and civil servants' are seen to 'put on airs' and look down on the general populace. 'Kampung spirit' drew depictions of entire

neighbourhoods in shared mutuality and participants often used this as a yardstick to belittle current experiences of everyday civilities and exchanging practical favours with proximate neighbours. In this sense, the evocation of the kampung spirit can possibly heighten divisions in society and casts a shadow of doubt on people's current sociability.

Although existing events like Racial Harmony Day hold relevance, especially for the elderly (as evidenced in Perspective 3), they are largely driven by restorative nostalgia. There is also a perceived need for more efforts towards recognizing diversity as already identified by other scholars (*NewNaratif*, 2017; Tan & Tan, 2014; Yeoh, 2004), especially with regard to new immigrants comprising both blue- and white-collar workers. S9, S23, and S24 point out that kampung should be inclusive of new immigrants, but also that kampung could mean different things to different people. Perspective 2 in particular pays attention to understanding how people can live together with others who might be different from themselves. This is a clear call for multiple narratives of the kampung, rather than a singular one.

The call for kampung spirit as it is characterized in the highlighted quotes by governmental officials in the first section is a *universal* call for communitarianism. While this call is acknowledged by most participants (S19), the practice and nature of belonging is seen to be not necessarily bound to the discrete compositions of race, ethnicity and nationality that so often underscore social mixing policies (Cheong *et al.*, 2007; Anthias, 2013). In the following section we discuss this intersectionality of kampung spirit and how it is experienced in different contexts.

Neighbours and neighbouring

As is evident in four of the perspectives, most participants seldom enjoy relationships with neighbours that go beyond everyday civilities. While kampung spirit is acknowledged as 'nice to have' by some, the community of care advocated by the government is seen as unachievable by most, primarily due to 'competitiveness', 'busy lifestyles', and a 'change in mindset'. Some residents related to support from 'family' and/or 'church community' as experiencing kampung spirit. For example, one participant stated:

kampung spirit means like a community of support. I never grew up in a kampung, so I don't know how it look like in the past. But I grew up in a church setting [...] you get so much support from church members that, that is a form of the kampung spirit (pers. comm., Punggol, October, 2018).

Several participants made reference to kampungs in Malaysia and Indonesia and noted ‘their lifestyles’ and ‘mindset’ to be more amenable for fostering kampung spirit. The longing for homeland and reconciliation with the exile, as Boym (2007) explains, are deep-seated reference frames for the reflective nostalgia held by immigrants. For example, an immigrant who moved from a kampung in Malaysia recalled her first experiences in this way:

In our kampung it’s all open. We can share and we can talk . . . When I moved into Singapore, I feel that a lot of people close the doors and are not helpful. I shift here I always cry . . . Singaporeans how come all like this? They don’t like to talk, a bit funny. Something happen and nobody want to help . . . but in kampung area everyone is all very helpful (pers. comm., Punggol, November, 2018).

She went on to say that she has acclimated to her host country and is now more ‘Singaporean’. As such, while her nostalgia for the past employs reference frames of mutuality and communitarianism also evident in the government narrative, her present intent is reflective and adaptive to her host nation. In this sense, belonging is as much a personal narrative that hinges on past and current context, as it is a cultural one. Resonating the fragmentation of a collective conscience, one participant describes what he terms ‘the generational change in the culture of sharing food’:

My grandparents’ generation usually would cook more food than they needed so that they would actually have more to share with neighbours and so on, then my parents’ generation usually cooked just enough for our family but if there were leftovers they would just walk over to our neighbours and give it to them. . . . But now in my generation, I find that when people have more food then they just end up throwing it... you know it’s just more convenient . . . and also because I don’t know, I don’t want to disturb them (neighbours) . . . and who knows how my neighbour will feel if I give our leftovers . . . it’s not done anymore (pers. comm., Tampines, September, 2018).

These individual and personal narratives that are substantiated with memories, symbols, as well as longing are what reflective nostalgia epitomizes. Participants swayed between *reflective* and *restorative* aspects of nostalgia for the ‘kampung’. Current day practices of sharing of food between neighbours, looking out for each other (e.g. informing about car lights being left on), attending community events, celebrating racial harmony day, and the creation of Facebook groups in new housing blocks were cited as examples of kampung spirit.

The older generation were quick to recall an ideal community where ‘everyone knew everyone’ and where help was rendered across the community at large. The younger generation, in contrast, point out that kampung spirit can potentially lead to ‘gossip’ and ‘invasion of privacy’ and question its relevance in current times. One participant noted:

Kampung spirit was about survival, in the past, because people were very poor. But now we are relatively rich, we no longer need these ties for survival. We don’t need our neighbours to actually survive. So, there’s no need for all this [kampung spirit] (pers. comm., Punggol, October, 2018).

But, for the older generation, the kampung was not merely about survival—it was also a way of life. The sociability of the kampung is relayed, even now, as an embodied trait that is often recognizable and special. As one 63-year-old participant said:

. . . neighbours on the 11th and 13th floors all came from the kampungs. They are good to converse with. They do not come from the same kampungs but it is easier to converse with them. This is strange, I do not know why . . . the strange thing is that when we talk . . . it is better (pers. comm., Jurong East, December, 2018).

However, even the older generation admits bringing back ‘kampung spirit’ is a ‘lost cause’. An elderly participant said her parents’ funerals were attended by the whole kampung, whereas she expected only a few close family members and friends to attend hers. She attributed it to ‘changing times’ and sees it as unavoidable.

Across perspectives, participants often link current experiences of kampung spirit with family settings (S2) and communities of interest. As today’s daily routines are straddled between many physical and virtual communities, a focus on the differences and overlaps between those communities and lived experiences is likely to resonate more than a one-size-fits-all kampung spirit, rooted in a restorative nostalgia. Rethinking the kampung spirit along the intersectional nature of belonging and everyday routines may ultimately provide more relevant possibilities for fostering social cohesion.

Role of place

The reference frames for state-driven nostalgic accounts primarily focus on the past real or imagined sociabilities of mutuality and communitarianism, coupled with imageries of

grandiose transformation from unsanitary rural settlements to sanitized and comfortable high-rise living, while pointedly leaving out the diverse nature and imageries of past kampungs. In contrast, current high density living evokes an imagery of ‘spacious’ kampung living. Participants describe kampungs as ‘very big’, ‘very spacious’, and having ‘a lot of space to move around’. The ‘urbanity’ of kampungs is suppressed and the ‘idyllic village’ is brought to the forefront. Kampungs are remembered or imagined as agricultural spaces, places for animal rearing, and as comprising an abundance of ‘nature’—all of which is absent from HDB living.

A shift in everyday materiality and spatiality is often cited as a reason for the diminishing of kampung spirit. For example, one participant notes ‘in kampungs, kid play hopscotch . . . Nowadays they play iPad’. An elderly participant associated increasing commercialization of everyday spaces to loss of social capital and increasing anomie:

The wet market in the past used to be bigger and the people you know are all neighbours. Nowadays, it is all supermarkets, who will have contact? If you lack fifty cents to buy something, they will not sell to you . . . not like in the past . . . Kampung spirit is diminishing (pers. comm., Punggol, November, 2018).

‘Open doors’, a rarity in current times, is a deeply embedded spatial characterization of kampungs that surfaces constantly in interviews. There is marked amplification around the ‘openness’ of kampungs, often stated in contrast to the ‘closed doors’ of current flats. For example, one participant remarks ‘kampung has no doors and gates. It was always open, people could just go over anytime they like’ and another said ‘my understanding of kampung spirit is like the olden days where you don’t have a physical door and the entrance that blocks you from speaking to your neighbour’. As such the present and future repeatedly inform the imagery of the past in a multitude of ways traced through both individual and collective reference frames.

Even though doors existed in kampung houses and were largely kept open for practical purposes (Chua, 1997), they have come to symbolize ‘kampung spirit’ and are used uncritically (by both young and older participants) to gauge current sociability. For example, as one participant exclaimed: ‘everyone closes their doors, so how do they recreate that (kampung) spirit? You have to knock at the door but they may not open it. They might not be in also’, and another said ‘my neighbours are very friendly, but they prefer their door to be closed’. Restorative nostalgia for ‘open doors’ reveals another limitation of using kampung to foster sociability in current times.

Apart from ‘open doors’, common spaces such as void decks, and ‘large gathering spaces’ are seen as essential for fostering kampung spirit. Housing design in Singapore has paid due attention to this aspect and HDB estates are fitted with common amenities such as playgrounds and resident corners. Nonetheless, participants highlight the need for softening of boundaries between the private space of homes and public common spaces. One participant observed ‘it’s difficult to get [kampung spirit] in a HDB setting because every unit feels individual lah. It feels like a stack of units lah . . . The inside and outside feels a bit sharper’. Kampung also evokes communal shared ‘fenceless’ living that goes against the grain of present day ‘private’ living. As one participant describes ‘in kampung there is no fencing as well. Neighbours . . . can come into our house without any worry. They can come in through our front door and leave through the back door’.

Common spaces in HDB estates (particularly the older estates) are shown to support everyday conviviality, street vitality, and citizen engagement (Yeo *et al.*, 2016; Wise & Velayutham, 2014). However, there are concerns among our research participants about their slow disappearance and the concurrent increase of segregated private and public spaces, which is echoed elsewhere as well (Heng, 2017, as cited in Yeo *et al.*, 2016). This evoking of older estates could also be tinged with a nostalgia for slower temporal rhythms rather than their inherent spatiality, as is conveyed in S30 (Figure 2): ‘The older estates (Tanglin Halt, Tiong Bahru) have the kampung spirit feel . . . it is their lifestyle which creates the kampung spirit (e.g. older people sit around and talk etc)’. As such, it is important to understand the underlying (layers of) references for these concerns before using them directly to inform policy and practice.

In newer estates, the challenge is to reimagine these spaces from the perspectives of an increasingly diverse group of residents so they can continue to embody and support a similar vitality as found in older estates. For the elderly, tangible experiences of past living hold powerful nostalgic memories. Revisiting this through creative recreating could be one way to encourage inter-generational bonds, create shared memories, as well increase one’s mental wellbeing (Dempsey *et al.*, 2014).

Personal agency and role of government

Despite decades of government references to kampung spirit (or perhaps because of it), participants emphasize that engendering the kampung spirit should ‘come naturally’, ‘cannot be forced’, and needs to ‘grow organically’. While terms such as ‘naturally’ and ‘organically’ are tinged with romanticism and undermine the role of government in past and current

sociability (Rigg, 1994; Newberry, 2008), they do express, in layperson terms, the incompatibility of the ‘ideal’ kampung with present day.

For some participants, the key pathway for rekindling kampung spirit entails a structural shift in the way of life, which they believe can only be achieved through government intervention and not by individuals. This quest for a slower pace of life and a return to past rhythms is aligned to the *restorative* aspect of nostalgia.

For other participants, existing programs like the ‘Many Helping Hands’ program and community garden efforts are examples of fostering kampung spirit and are seen as pathways to invest *personal* efforts. Large neighbourhood festivals and community events, often incentivized by government institutions, are recognized as modern-day kampung spirit by some but seen as exclusionary by others. One participant expressed this as ‘it’s the same people who participate every time’. Lack of ‘co-creation’ and citizen ownership and a heavy-handed government are seen to be major impediments to sustaining neighbourhood initiatives (Gopalakrishnan & Chong, 2020; Tan & Neo, 2009).

In Singapore, the government plays a dominant role in developing urban policies and infrastructure, and citizens tend to be largely ancillary to these processes. As such, active citizen engagement in many of its current forms is seen as tokenistic by research participants. In addition, there is a possibility that residents have developed a ‘learned helplessness’ around such processes. This could be one reason why participants in most perspectives are reluctant to invest personal efforts towards fostering kampung spirit (S17) and are looking primarily towards the government to take the lead (S33), with only a smaller set of viewpoints focusing on a more inclusive, citizen-driven approach to the process.

Conclusion

While metaphorical and nostalgic rhetoric around the ‘village’ has been used to commodify and reproduce people and place, we highlight some limitations of this approach. In this section we connect our analysis of perspectives on the kampung to wider geographical debates around the urban-rural dichotomy and discuss the viability of the concept in the Singaporean context.

This paper provides a social-constructivist perspective on the theme of kampung nostalgia and adds to a body of previous work that has highlighted how the kampung is conflated in rural-urban and traditional-modern dichotomies (McGee, 1991; Bunnell, 2002; Thompson, 2004). The concept of kampung evokes geographical comparisons with countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia where the term has its roots. But it also elicits longitudinal

comparisons within the same city—between past, present and future Singapore. In our empirical analysis, we find that these comparisons are rooted in everyday practices and culture (e.g. comparison of lifestyles and mindset) and underpinned by intersecting personal and national narratives, rather than simplistic urban/rural binaries. This highlights the need for an interdisciplinary approach to unpack the complexity of the construct bridging individual, group, national, and regional scales.

In Boym's (2007) reading, the restorative *frame* might collide with the narrative of reflective nostalgia, but the two narratives will remain distinctly different, with the former perpetually fixed on spatializing time and the latter attuned to temporalizing space. In contrast, our empirical analysis shows that the narratives of restorative and reflective nostalgia collide in Singaporean's perspectives on kampung and kampung spirit. This can sometimes happen in unproductive ways where the ideal imagined or real past is used as a mirror to belittle or disavow the conditions of the present, as in the case of the 'open doors' mentioned by our participants.

While Boym's heuristic of nostalgia compels us to navigate and identify real/imagined, singular/multiple, national/individual reference frames for restorative and reflective nostalgia, we find that in the lived experiences of participants these binaries flow into one another and are difficult to separate. The restorative narrative of the state is socialized at the individual level and coexists or sits in tension with individual reflective forms. Through the application of Q-methodology, however, we are able to reveal and co-construct various perspectives or 'social facts' that exist simultaneously and in parallel around kampung/kampung spirit. These perspectives can be directly in opposition of each other: for some Singaporeans kampung spirit is relevant and achievable today, even under the rhythms of modernity, while for others it manifests as anachronistic in present times.

On occasion, reflective nostalgia for kampung can be compressed into a singular restorative narrative. In 2012,⁶ as part of a national visioning process for the future of Singapore, a series of national engagement dialogues between the government and Singaporeans were facilitated with the purpose of better informing policy. This process, which involved 47 000 residents in 460 dialogue sessions, chose to highlight and publicize just one narrative around kampung spirit that clearly supports the national narrative: 'We aspire to a strong "kampong spirit", and we want to strengthen our sense of togetherness and build a compassionate society'. (Our Singapore Conversation Survey, 2013)(p.35). This narrative is then reinstituted through ministerial speeches (see also our discussion in the 'Kampung' and 'kampung spirit' in the context of Singapore' section) and national policies and programmes.

The weakness in this approach is that this is just a single perspective around kampung—out of many—and is thus essentializing a complex construct with a singular narrative. Instead, the state can more effectively and meaningfully explore the possibilities for kampung or kampung spirit in the present day if it recognizes and provides room for alternate perspectives. These alternate perspectives can be used as a springboard for further exploration of the diversity of everyday life of Singapore’s current residents. Given the diversity of meaning these constructs hold, repeated and universal evocation of the kampung metaphor based on a single perspective runs the real risk of alienating different sections of the population, as we see happening in some of the perspectives surfaced through our empirical Q-methodology analysis. When such a single perspective is subsequently used in policy, social programmes built on it may be perceived as out-of-sync with its polity. As such, an uncritical adoption of these constructs should be used with caution, particularly as a singular focus on restorative nostalgia can result in an undermining of current sociabilities. Exploring the meaning of kampung in participatory ways, with a focus on a *reflective* nostalgia, is likely to be more productive in co-creating the present and future.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Cheryl Low and Qing Qing Chen for their support in data collection and analysis, as well as our broader team members of the Quality of Life research group Dr Mihye Cho, Dr Kim JiYoun, and Ong Yanchun.

This research, led together with the Housing and Development Board, is supported by the Singapore Ministry of National Development and the National Research Foundation, Prime Minister’s Office under the Land and Liveability National Innovation Challenge (L2 NIC) Research Programme (L2 NIC Award No. L2NICTDF1-2017-4). Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not reflect the views of the Housing and Development Board, Singapore Ministry of National Development and National Research Foundation, Prime Minister’s Office, Singapore.

Endnotes

- 1 *Desa* in Malay and Indonesian translates to ‘countryside’ and *kota* meaning ‘city’.
- 2 Public housing estates built by the Housing Development Board are commonly referred to as HDBs both by residents as well as public officials.
- 3 In neighbouring Malaysia and Indonesia ‘gotong royong’, which translates to ‘mutual assistance’, is used in a similar fashion as ‘kampung spirit’.
- 4 See for example: <https://www.hdb.gov.sg/cs/infoweb/community/care-for-your-neighbours/good-neighbours-movement>.

- 5 The Lift Upgrading Program(LUP) was introduced in 2001 to add lifts to each floor; prior to that housing blocks were not designed for lifts to stop on every floor. The LUP was introduced to improve accessibility and mobility particularly for the elderly.
- 6 See Our Singapore Conversation Survey Findings (accessed December 3rd, 2020). <https://www.reach.gov.sg/-/media/reach/old-reach/oursingaporeconversation/12perspectivesarisingfromoursingaporeconversations ofar.ashx>

References

- Addams H, Proops JLR (2000) *Social Discourse and Environmental Policy: An Application of Q Methodology*. Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham and Northampton.
- Alhabshi SM (2010) Urban renewal of traditional settlements in Singapore and Malaysia: the cases of Geylang Serai and Kampung Bharu. *Asian Survey* **50**, 1135–61.
- Anthias F (2013) Moving beyond the Janus Face of integration and diversity discourses: towards an intersectional framing. *The Sociological Review* **61**, 323–43.
- Barker JH (2008) Q-methodology: an alternative approach to research in nurse education. *Nurse Education Today* **28**, 917–25.
- Barnes K, Waitt G, Gill N, Gibson C (2006) Community and nostalgia in urban revitalisation: a critique of urban village and creative class strategies as remedies for social “problems”. *Australian Geographer* **37**, 335–54.
- Biddulph M, Franklin B, Tait M (2003) From concept to completion: a critical analysis of the urban village. *Town Planning Review* **74**, 165–93.
- Boym S (2007) Nostalgia and its discontents. *Hedgehog Review* **9**, 7–18.
- Brown SR (1980) *Political Subjectivity: Applications of Q Methodology in Political Science*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Bunnel T (2002) Kampung rules: landscape and the contested government of urban(e) Malayness. *Urban Studies* **39**, 1685–701.
- Chang S (2000) A high-rise vernacular in Singapore’s Housing Development Board housing. *Berkeley Planning Journal* **14** (1), 97–116.
- Cheong PH, Edwards R, Goulbourne H, Solomos J (2007) Immigration, social cohesion and social capital: a critical review. *Critical Social Policy* **27**, 24–49.
- Chua BH (1997) *Political Legitimacy and Housing Stakeholding in Singapore*. Routledge, London and New York.
- Deloitte (2016) Global mobile consumer trends: 1st Edition Mobile proves to be indispensable in an always-connected world. Available at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/technology-media-telecommunications/us-tmt-global-mobile-consumer-trends-first-edition-2016.pdf> (accessed 24 June 2021).

- Dempsey L, Murphy K, Cooney A *et al.* (2014) Reminiscence in dementia: a concept analysis. *Dementia* **13**, 176–92.
- Fu G (2018) Nurturing a society of caring people. Available at: <https://www.mccy.gov.sg/about-us/news-and-resources/speeches/2018/mar/nurturing-a-society-of-caring-people> (accessed [date]).
- Gonzaga E (2019) Precarious nostalgia in the tropical smart city: transmedia memory, urban informatics, and the Singapore Golden Jubilee. *Cultural Studies* **33**, 147–69.
- Gopalakrishnan S, Chong KH (2020) The prospect of community-led place-keeping as urban commons in public residential estates in Singapore. *Built Environment* **46** (1), 115–38.
- Han, H., 2017. Singapore, a garden city: Authoritarian environmentalism in a developmental state. *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 26(1), pp.3-24.
- Heng CK (2017) *50 Years of Urban Planning in Singapore*. World Scientific Publishing Company, Singapore.
- Heng SK (2018) Speech by Minister for Finance Heng Swee Keat at Champions of Good 2018 conferment luncheon. Available at: <https://www.mof.gov.sg/news-publications/speeches/speech-by-minister-for-finance-heng-swee-keat-at-champions-of-good-2018-conferment-luncheon-on-friday-16-november-2018-11.50am-at-the-ritz-carlton-singapore> (accessed on [date]).
- Kong, L. and Woods, O., 2018. The ideological alignment of smart urbanism in Singapore: Critical reflections on a political paradox. *Urban Studies*, 55(4), pp.679-701.
- Loh KS (2009) Kampong, fire, nation: towards a social history of postwar Singapore. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* **40**, 613–43.
- McGee, T. G. (1991), 'The emergence of desakota regions in Asia: expanding a hypothesis' in N. Ginsburg, B. Koppel and T. G. McGee (eds), *The Extended Metropolis: Settlement Transition in Asia*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 3–26
- Newberry, J., 2008. Double spaced: Abstract labour in urban kampung. *Anthropologica*, pp.241-253.
- NewNaratif (2017) Rethinking race: beyond the CMIO categorisations. Kathiravelu L, 9 September. Available at: <https://newnaratif.com/research/rethinking-race-beyond-the-cmio-categorisations/> (accessed November 2019).
- Nost E, Robertson M, Lave R (2019) Q-method and the performance of subjectivity: reflections from a survey of US stream restoration practitioners. *Geoforum* **105**, 23–31.
- Perkins, H.C., 2006. Commodification: re-resourcing rural areas. *Handbook of rural studies*, pp.243-257.
- Rahmat H (2008) Portraits of a nation. *Indonesia and the Malay World* **36**, 359–74.

RICE (2018) Can we just let the kampung spirit die in peace? Jie P, 8 April. Available at: <https://www.ricemedia.co/rice-media-can-we-let-kampung-spirit-die-in-peace/> (accessed August 2019).

Rigg J (1994) Redefining the village and rural life: lessons from South East Asia. *The Geographical Journal* **160**, 123–35.

Tan C, Tan CS (2014) Fostering social cohesion and cultural sustainability: character and citizenship education in Singapore. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* **8**, 191–206.

Tan LHH, Neo H (2009) “Community in Bloom”: local participation of community gardens in urban Singapore. *Local Environment* **14**, 529–39.

Thompson EC (2004) Rural villages as socially urban spaces in Malaysia. *Urban Studies* **41**, 2357–76.

Thompson EC (2020) Urban annexation of the rural: kebun culture in Malaysia. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* **41**, 136–53.

Turnbull CM (2009) *A History of Modern Singapore, 1819–2005*. NUS Press, Singapore.

Walter MAHB (1978) The territorial and the social: perspectives on the lack of community in high-rise/high-density living in Singapore. *Ekistics* **45**, 236–242.

Watts S, Stenner P (2012) *Doing Q Methodological Research: Theory, Method & Interpretation*. SAGE, London.

Wise A, Velayutham S (2014) Conviviality in everyday multiculturalism: some brief comparisons between Singapore and Sydney. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* **17**, 406–30.

Yeo S-J, Ho KC, Heng CK (2016) Rethinking spatial planning for urban conviviality and social diversity: a study of nightlife in a Singapore public housing estate neighbourhood. *TPR: Town Planning Review* **87**, 379–99.

Yeoh BSA (2004) *Cosmopolitanism and its exclusions in Singapore*. *Urban Studies* **41**, 2431–45.

Zabala A (2014) qmethod: a package to explore human perspectives using Q methodology. *The R Journal* **6**, 163–73.

Figures

Figure 1. *A summary of Q-Methodology as applied to studying different perspectives on the kampung.*

Figure 2. *A summary of all statements used and their loading on each of the 5 factors. +6 indicates most agreement with a statement and -6 indicates least agreement with a statement.*

Tables

Table 1. Overview of different perspectives on the kampung.

Perspective	Central Theme	Current Relevance	Current Experience	Racial Harmony	Role of Place	Institutional role/Personal Agency
1. Kampung as unity	Kampung unites people across races with a 'shared sense of identity'	A key concept and an important way to foster community	Does not experience kampung with neighbours, at workplace or community events	Key to bringing ethnicities together through 'shared identity'	Modern HDBs have decreased opportunities for kampung spirit	Government and citizens both need to play a role. Interested in putting in personal effort.
2. Kampung as diversity	Kampung is reimagined around diversity and plurality of voices	A key concept that needs to be re-anchored taking into account today's greater plurality	Does not experience kampung with neighbours, at workplace or community events	Key to live together with difference	Place is less important than social policies	Need for inclusive processes. Not interested in putting in personal effort.
3. Kampung nostalgia	A desire to relive the past kampung in present day	A key concept that's rooted in memories and nostalgia of the past kampung	Does not experience kampung with neighbours, at workplace or community events	Key to bringing ethnicities together through 'shared identity'	A creative recreation of the past kampung can aid in fostering kampung spirit	Needs to be driven by government efforts and a few key individuals. Not interested in putting in personal effort.
4. Family is kampung	Kampung is only viable within familial units, not within broader communities	Not relevant to everyday life beyond familial units	Does not experience kampung with neighbours, at workplace or community events	NA	Place does not play an important role	Not relevant as a concept for the government. Not interested in putting in personal effort.
5. New Urban Kampung: Not Possible	Idealized view of the kampung, which is threatened by and no longer possible in modern times	Strongly rejects the construct of the kampung as viable in the present or future	Does experience kampung now, but it cannot be sustained in current and future society	NA	Place does not play an important role	Kampung has been co-opted by the government to foster social cohesion. Not interested in putting in personal effort.