



FRAMING THE ‘SOFT PART’ IN LIVEABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD: A PERSPECTIVE FROM MALAYSIA

Nabiha Mohd Khusairy¹, Siti Hajar Misnan²

*^{1,2}Faculty of Built Environment and Surveying,
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA*

Abstract

A socially cohesive society is widely recognised as a vital component of the "soft part" of liveability in neighbourhoods, fostering a sense of belonging through active engagement, mutual respect, and strong community interactions. This intangible dimension significantly influences residents' community experience and participation within their living environments. This study aims to identify the social dimension aspect and attributes that contribute to the development of liveable neighbourhoods within Malaysia's housing sector. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates qualitative insights obtained through the Fuzzy Delphi technique, which was used to achieve expert consensus among 14 selected professionals and quantitative data derived from community perceptions in 10 neighborhoods identified by local authorities as high in liveability. The experts were selected based on criteria including academic publications in urban planning and housing, professional experience in town planning and development, and recognition for cities with high liveability ratings in Malaysia. Community perceptions were gathered from residents in neighborhoods with the highest liveability indices. The findings validate key social aspects such as density, demographic structure, lifestyle, social, local preferences, and cultural identity as critical features of liveable neighborhoods. This research provides valuable insights to inform future planning, development, and policy initiatives aimed at enhancing the social dimension of liveability in Malaysian urban environments.

Keywords: Social Dimension, Liveable, Neighbourhood

¹ Corresponding author. Email: nabihamdkhusairy@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, liveability has been a topic of discussion and is becoming more significant as cities need to change their growth patterns from the declining urban centres to the rapidly growing suburban areas. However, there is no clear definition of liveable as it depends on what the local population desires in their neighbourhood. To create a liveable environment, the social dimension is essential. Community's quality of life is greatly enhanced by opportunities for engagement, inclusive social dimension, and a strong feeling of community. As a result, encouraging social dimension is crucial to making sure that a location is both practical and liveable for all.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Characteristic of Neighbourhood

A neighbourhood is a physical area with houses where people can reside and manage their own lives (Power, 2004). According to Hosseini (2016), a neighbourhood is an integrated city unit that includes social, physical, and environmental elements. A desirable neighbourhood, as defined by Hashim (2005), comprises a place where people may live, work, and engage in social and commercial activities. While Ghani (2012) stated neighbourhood is a cluster of houses in connection to other land uses and amenities. In the other hand, a neighbourhood is larger than a residential area, which is made up of houses. A liveable lifestyle and development are achieved in large part through neighbourhood involvement (Hathaway, 2013). Quality of life is one of the finest measures of the social dimension of a neighbourhood (Karuppannan and Sivam, 2011). According to PLANMalaysia's housing criteria, the neighbourhood in this study is classified to as a 'neighbourhood unit' which within 50 acres, has 400 units, and has 2000 residents. Additionally, the neighbourhood has the necessities like a school, a community centre, a prayer hall, a kindergarten, and a playground. As everyone lives close to one another and the community in this instance typically engages in social interactions and it can lead to the liveability.

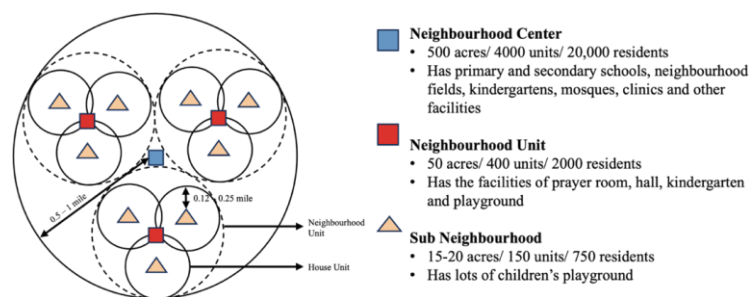


Figure 1: Characteristic of neighbourhood in perspective of Malaysia
(Department of Town and Country Planning (PLANMalaysia), 2016)

Liveable Neighbourhood Through Community

A study by Vergunst (2003), liveability is a subset of sustainability outcomes that have a direct impact on community members, including social equity, public health, economic growth, and pollution exposure. Castillo et al. (2016) highlight the social components of communities, such as who residents live with, how they live, and how they share space. According to Khorsani and Zarghamfard (2018), liveability is not merely determined by a city's purely objective measurements, but it is also a complex social structure composed of the relationships that its residents have built and governed by possibility and unpredictability. A 'spirit of belonging together', trust in a stable power structure, an understanding that collaboration results in trade and mutual benefit, and a spirit generated from shared experiences that are commemorated in art are all more specific definitions of a sense of community. The social construct known as sense of community has been connected, for example, to neighbourhood trust (Perkin and Long, 2002). Communities' satisfaction and quality of life may be enhanced by a stronger feeling of community (Elvas and Moniz, 2012).

Social Dimension of Sustainable Neighbourhood

The social dimension is a crucial aspect of developing liveable neighbourhoods, emphasising how residents interact, build relationships, and foster a sense of community. Bacon et al. (2014) emphasise that the social dimension involves designing physical environments that encourage social use and community engagement, with a recent focus on sustainability efforts (Ghahramanpouri et al., 2015). Additionally, social interactions, formal and informal engagement, and diversity are vital for creating vibrant, culturally rich communities that foster collaboration and social cohesion (Dempsey et al., 2011; Neamtu, 2012; Woodcraft et al., 2012). However, participation remains a challenge for many residents despite the clear benefits of social activity.

Furthermore, fostering a sense of belonging and community pride is central to the social dimension of sustainability. These elements contribute to creating lively, inclusive neighbourhoods by encouraging interactions across diverse backgrounds and values, ultimately strengthening community bonds (Woodcraft et al., 2012). Nonetheless, barriers such as a lack of participation opportunities still hinder full engagement, underscoring the importance of deliberate planning to enhance the social fabric of neighbourhoods.

However, Mary et al. (2019) believed in seven domains as shown in Figure 2. The model outlines the key domains necessary to comprehend community well-being. These interconnected domains are crucial for shaping a liveable neighbourhood, as they collectively enhance residents' quality of life, sense of belonging, and equitable access to opportunities and resources.



Figure 2: Conceptual model for communities and neighbourhood research
(Mary et al., 2019)

Reaching a high standard of quality of life is challenging, particularly in developing countries like Malaysia (Alias et al., 2025). Considering these factors directly affect residents' well-being and liveability, the literature review emphasises the significance of addressing the ‘soft part’ of liveable communities, which includes density, demographic structure, lifestyle, social, and local preferences. These components emphasise community involvement, inclusion, safety, and access to opportunities and services rather than just physical infrastructure. As illustrated in Figure 3, the conceptual framework of ‘soft part’ components synthesises into a cohesive structure that guides both researchers and practitioners to comprehend and improve liveability from a more comprehensive and people-centred perspective. These components will serve as the basis for the research instrument used in the in-depth interviews.

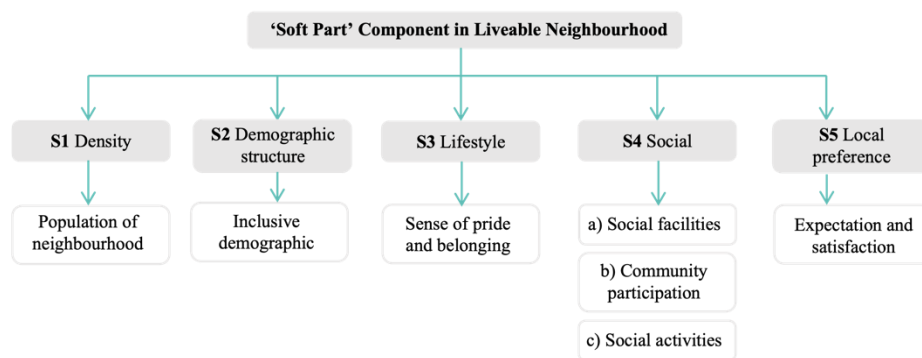


Figure 3: Conceptual framework of ‘soft part’ components liveable neighbourhood

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Figure 4 shows the data gathering procedure, which includes choosing sampling frames and case study criteria. In stage 1, information and in-depth knowledge are gathered for the research through the literature review method. This literary reading was compiled from a variety of sources, including books, journals and scholarly articles. The results of the review will indicate the ‘soft part’ aspects and attributes to examine liveability, as considered and adapted by the experts.

Next, in Stage 2, this study employs a qualitative methodological technique using a Fuzzy Delphi approach to collect agreement from a group of experts, ensuring that all their viewpoints are included. The Delphi questionnaire was developed using the aspect and attribute constructs from the literature review. Moreover, this study conducted with sample size of field experts with consideration; (1) academia has extensive experience and publish material in urban planning, housing development or liveable; (2) town planner officers with 5 years’ experience or managing project and government initiatives regarding liveable and housing projects; (3) town planner from private firm or developer with 5 years’ experience; and (4) community leader in neighbourhood awarded highest liveable award in Malaysia. Based on these considerations, 14 experts were selected for this study using a purposive and snowball sampling technique.

Table 1: Sample size

No.	Local Authority	Sampled Neighbourhood	Number of Residents	Number of Households	Size (1%)
1	Perbadanan Putrajaya	Kompleks Kejiranan Presint 9	23,249	5,961	60
2	Majlis Bandaraya Iskandar Puteri (MBIP)	Taman Bukit Indah 1	42,814	10,978	110
3	Majlis Bandaraya Melaka Bersejarah (MBMB)	One Krubong	7,238	1856	19
4	Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya (MBPJ)	Bayu Damansara	1,447	371	3
5	Majlis Bandaraya Subang Jaya (MBSJ)	USJ 9	4,902	1,257	13
6	Majlis Perbandaran Hang Tuah Jaya (MPHTJ)	Taman Anjung Gapam	8,814	2,260	23
7	Majlis Perbandaran Kajang (MPK)	Setia Ecohill 2	39,893	10,229	102
8	Majlis Daerah Kerian (MDK)	Taman Serai Perdana	3,994	1,024	10

No.	Local Authority	Sampled Neighbourhood	Number of Residents	Number of Households	Size (1%)
9	Majlis Daerah Kampar (MDK)	Taman Bandar Baru Kampar	7,933	2,034	20
10	Majlis Daerah Rembau (MDR)	Taman Rembau Utama	1,669	428	4
Total			137,959	36,398	364

While stage 3 conducts a survey through local communities based on the residents of the city, which is awarded as the highest liveable city index by PLANMalaysia and is identified by local authorities. According to Neuman's (1994) three-stage sampling technique, larger populations require lower sampling ratios to ensure accuracy. For populations over 100,000, even a 1% ratio or 1,000 samples can yield reliable results. Therefore, this study applies a 1% sampling ratio. Table 1 shows that the sample size needed is 364. The fuzzy scores acquired can be used to appropriately rank the influential aspect and attribute identified for the 'soft part' in the liveable neighbourhood framework. Other than that, thematic analysis is employed to categorise and generate themes that correspond to the in-depth interview. The research aim will be achieved with the support of the analysis techniques to construct the 'soft part' components in a liveable neighbourhood for the Malaysian housing scheme.

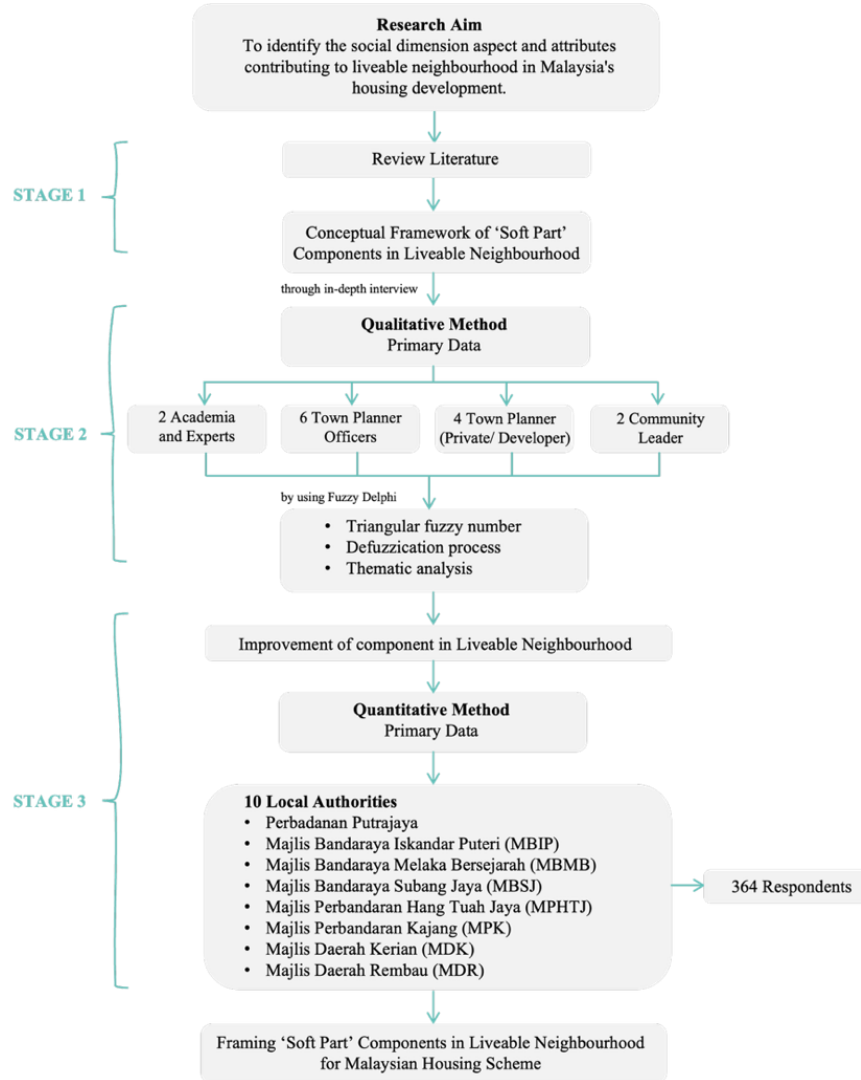


Figure 4: Research flowchart

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The 'soft part' of liveable neighbourhood includes influential aspects and attributes that are essential for neighbourhood adaptation. Five aspects and seven attributes constitute the soft part element. According to Table 2, the expert consensus percentage is greater than 75% and the threshold value (d) is less than 0.2. The influential attributes S4a (social facilities) and S5a (expectation and

satisfaction) get 100% consensus, meaning the attributes are most influential in creating a liveable neighbourhood.

Table 2: First condition of item acceptance for 'soft part' liveable neighbourhood:
 Triangular fuzzy numbers

Item Code	Influential Aspects	Influential Attributes	Threshold value (<i>d</i>)	Percentage of Expert Consensus (%)	Fulfilment of Condition
S1	Density	Population of neighbourhood	0.141	87	Fulfilled
S2	Demographic structure	Inclusive demographic	0.071	87	Fulfilled
S3	Lifestyle	Sense of pride and belonging	0.071	87	Fulfilled
S4	Social	a) Social facilities	0.000	100	Fulfilled
		b) Social activities	0.071	87	Fulfilled
		c) Community participation	0.038	93	Fulfilled
S5	Local preference	Expectation and satisfaction	0.000	100	Fulfilled

Table 3 displays the fuzzy value for the second condition of the item acceptance during the defuzzification process. Experts agreed that all seven items met the conditions of having fuzzy scores greater than or equal to the α -cut value of 0.5. The ranking of the items for the 'soft part' in a liveable neighbourhood is displayed in Table 4, with reference to the fuzzy score. The greatest fuzzy score of 0.7, most experts agreed with items on social facilities, expectation and satisfaction.

Table 3: Second condition of item acceptance for ‘soft part’ liveable neighbourhood:
Defuzzification process

Item Code	Influential Aspects	Influential Attributes	m1	m2	m3	Fuzzy Score (A)	Condition of Fuzzy Score ^a - cut value of 0.5
S1	Density	Population of neighbourhood	0.847	0.647	0.447	0.647	Fulfilled
S2	Demographic structure	Inclusive demographic	0.873	0.673	0.473	0.673	Fulfilled
S3	Lifestyle	Sense of pride and belonging	0.873	0.673	0.473	0.673	Fulfilled
S4	Social	a) Social facilities	0.900	0.700	0.500	0.700	Fulfilled
		b) Social activities	0.873	0.673	0.473	0.673	Fulfilled
		c) Community participation	0.887	0.687	0.487	0.687	Fulfilled
S5	Local preference	Expectation and satisfaction	0.900	0.700	0.500	0.700	Fulfilled

Table 4: Ranking influential attributes of ‘soft part’ in liveable neighbourhood

Ranking No.	Influential Attributes	Fuzzy Score (A)
1	Social facilities	0.700
2	Expectation and satisfaction	0.700
3	Community participation	0.687
4	Inclusive Demographic	0.673
5	Sense of pride and belonging	0.673
6	Social activities	0.673
7	Population of neighbourhood	0.647

By encouraging a social dimension, not only is safety and resilience increased, but thriving community life also promotes the general well-being of communities. This element is necessary to transform a neighbourhood into a thriving living space where residents have a sense of belonging and empowerment. It is still necessary to make sure the neighbourhood is not overpopulated, even though the population of the neighbourhood is the least influential neighbourhood based on the fuzzy score. Liveability is influenced by more than just population density. When integrated with public spaces, amenities, and infrastructure, a well-designed high-density community may offer a vibrant,

walkable, and connected environment. As the respondent indicates, density should be at its ideal level. Too high or too low can cause a few problems. While low density may lead to underutilised commercial areas and poor community interaction, high density may result in overcrowding and strain on infrastructure. Intergenerational communication promotes mutual aid, social learning, and a more welcoming community.

Having a diverse range of ages, genders, and cultural backgrounds in a neighbourhood can promote resilience and liveliness. Intergenerational communication promotes mutual support, social learning, and a more welcoming community. At this level, community associations must fulfil their roles. One of the community leader respondents emphasised that the association of residents is crucial in bridging the gap between various age groups and ethnic backgrounds, where tolerance becomes an essential principle. Living in a shared neighbourhood fosters a 'give and take' approach among neighbours and requires tolerance, understanding, and respect for one another. The association also ensures that the community has an opportunity to freely and constructively express their concerns.

Nowadays, beyond just the housing, people are searching for amenities that support pleasure, convenience, and wellbeing, such as jogging routes, public parks, shopping centres, cafes, or cultural events. Lifestyle choices also have a big impact on the social dimension. A growing number of current homebuyers are attracted to lifestyle-oriented amenities like gyms, swimming pools, clubhouses, and co-working spaces, especially those who are younger and wealthier. These facilities enhance liveability while providing comfort and convenience. Additionally, being close to recreational and shopping amenities is often regarded as a significant value-added feature. In the long run, these lifestyle aspects make the neighbourhood more appealing, liveable, and sustainable by enhancing the general quality of life in the community and helping to define its identity.

In a basic neighbourhood unit, provide basic amenities such as a playground, a prayer hall, and a community hall. These areas serve as hubs for community engagement and meetings, offering opportunities for social interaction. However, having excellent facilities alone is not enough. Organising social events, such as gatherings, festive celebrations, and 'gotong-royong' programs, is also essential for bringing these neighbourhoods to life and giving them purpose. Even the best facilities and events cannot fully accomplish their social goals without active community involvement. Most respondents stated that active participation is essential to a livable community. They also discuss the importance of quantity over quality activities based on the in-depth interview. To show that informal public spaces can effectively replace formal halls and become essential centres for social interaction, communities came together to create community gardens and community spaces for gatherings in the neighbourhood.

The respondents brought up the advantages of community gardening in fostering a livable neighbourhood. These initiatives directly support food sustainability and economic resilience, while also fostering interpersonal relationships and community cohesion. However, the respondents also underlined how local governments may support community initiatives.

Aside from that, respondents elaborate due to the increased investment made in home ownership, communities in urban areas have higher expectations for amenities, community experience, and service quality. This is mainly because homeowners often incur substantial financial expenditures for both the initial purchase of a property at a premium price and ongoing maintenance or service charges. Their demands for improved infrastructure, well-kept facilities, effective security measures, easily accessible parks, and active community initiatives are understandable. In order to guarantee long-term happiness and the survival of liveable neighbourhoods, developers and local authorities must recognise and satisfy these growing expectations.

Additionally, the respondent highlighted three attributes, which are trust, *maqasid syariah*, and art and culture, that should be considered. Trust will influence how individuals communicate, work together, and help one another. A community that has mutual trust is safer, more cohesive, and more lively. In particular, the viewpoint of *maqasid syariah*, a fundamental Islamic paradigm that prioritises the protection of life, wealth, lineage, intellect, and religion, was employed to underscore the importance of fostering social interaction and community engagement. This offers a thorough perspective for creating liveable neighbourhoods that go beyond the physical environment. While art and culture are in defining a neighborhood's character, liveliness, and soul. Cultural events, such as those offered by the local government in specific venues, encourage the community to come together, socialise, and celebrate. These shared experiences foster stronger ties throughout the community. In other words, cultural activities frequently create chances for artists, entrepreneurs, and small companies. A neighbourhood that values the arts and culture may draw tourists, support local artists, and stimulate the economy.

The social component has the most significant influence on the idea of a liveable neighbourhood as it is what truly makes a place come to life and drive it forward. Social interaction, a sense of belonging, and community networks create a welcoming, comfortable, and safe environment. In the absence of a constructive social component, a neighbourhood may be physically complete but emotionally and communally lacking. As a result, the social component should be given top priority when planning and assessing a neighbourhood's liveability. Figure 5 shows the framing 'soft part' components of a liveable neighbourhood for a Malaysian housing scheme. By using the fuzzy score, the component below is ranked from most influential to least influential.

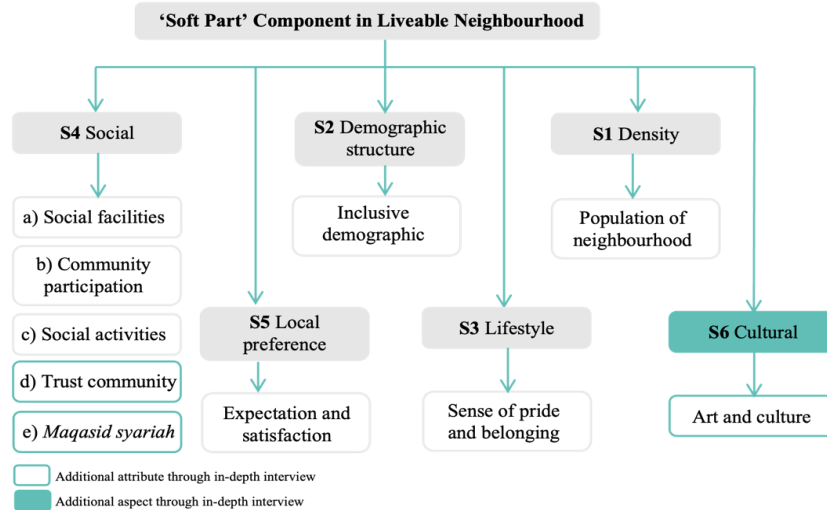


Figure 5: Framing 'soft part' components liveable neighbourhood based on experts' perception

While Table 5 shows the result of a survey the residents' satisfaction experience. Moderate to high levels of liveability are indicated by the overall mean score. People feel comfortable and trusted in their communities, as evidenced by the highest level of satisfaction with the neighbourhood among all attributes ($\bar{x} = 3.99$), followed by neighbourly manners ($\bar{x} = 3.94$), and community trust ($\bar{x} = 3.60$). Nonetheless, community participation in social activities ($\bar{x} = 3.47$) and social activity facilities ($\bar{x} = 3.48$) scored lower, which may indicate a lack of accessible or well-maintained communal areas or a lack of opportunities and incentives for locals to take part in planned events. Poor social connections, hectic schedules, and a lack of community resources or activities may discourage involvement. However, by improving these aspects can foster cohesion and enhance neighbourhood liveability.

N6 scores highly in comfort and population density ($\bar{x} = 4.48$), reflecting a thoughtful layout, sufficient amenities, safety, and supportive infrastructure that promote community trust and engagement. On the other hand, N3 and N5 record lower values in social participation and neighbours' behaviour, which may be the result of weakened social links, poor communication, or a lack of community efforts. This suggests that improving social infrastructure and participation could further improve liveability. Figure 6 highlights the components ranked according to the mean satisfaction scores of the residents. This ranking provides valuable insights into residents' priorities and helps identify aspects that require further improvement.

Table 5: Level of residents' satisfaction in 'soft part' components liveable neighbourhood

Attributes of Liveable Neighbourhood	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	N6	N7	N8	N9	N10	Total Mean
	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{x}$	
Population density in neighbourhood	4.00	3.55	3.10	4.33	3.00	4.48	3.03	4.18	3.76	4.00	3.55
Comfort in neighbourhood	3.90	4.20	4.15	4.00	3.59	4.48	3.61	4.45	4.14	4.33	3.99
Neighbours' manner (<i>Maqasid Syariah</i>)	3.83	4.21	3.00	3.83	3.82	3.80	3.88	4.64	4.00	3.89	3.94
Social activities carried out	3.68	3.83	3.25	3.83	3.88	4.00	3.92	4.27	3.38	4.11	3.81
Facilities for social activities	3.63	3.73	4.60	3.67	2.82	4.16	2.80	3.45	3.67	3.56	3.48
Community participation in social activities	3.13	3.55	3.70	3.33	3.47	3.72	3.42	3.91	3.19	4.22	3.47
Trust in community	3.68	3.74	2.60	3.83	3.41	3.6	3.44	4.09	3.76	4.56	3.60
Art and culture	3.23	3.11	4.40	3.50	2.88	4.00	2.85	2.73	3.33	3.67	3.20

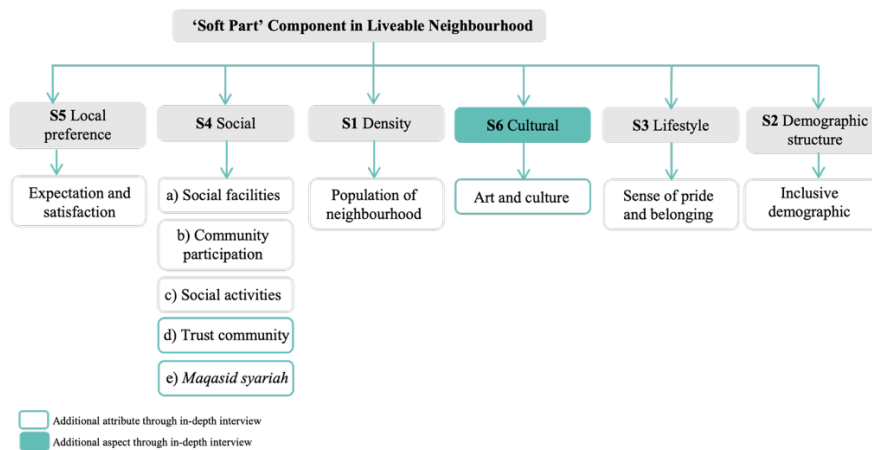


Figure 5: Framing 'soft part' components liveable neighbourhood based on residents' satisfaction

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the social dimension significantly contributes to the creation of liveable neighbourhoods by encouraging social, local preferences, mixed demographic structures, community lifestyles, population density, and cultural diversity. It goes beyond the physical environment to address aspects such as social participation, well-being, and cultural expression. Neighbourhoods can become more resilient, inclusive, and in line with the real meaning of liveability by including these components in planning and construction.

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