

The Roles of Al Muktafi Billah Township in the transformation of Rural Community Living in the KETENGAH Central

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Abstract

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Over the last few decades, rural development in Malaysia has undergone several stages of transformation which were parallel with the aims of national and regional development policies and strategies. Currently, the rural transformation agenda is up to the next crucial step which is enhancing the prosperity and well-being of rural communities. This paper attempts to examine the roles of Al Muktafi Billah Shah in terms of providing services for local people to fulfil their inspirations and needs. The analysis is supported by household survey data to provide current demographic and socioeconomic characteristics as well as the standard of living of rural communities in the region. Finally, this paper concludes with the future pathways for rural development planning to catapult the national inspiration towards a resilient rural community. A high strategic content plan has been adopted to enable it to grow progressively. It also has to serve the people as what they need and demand without compromising the quality of living conditions environment and resources.

Keywords

Al Muktafi Billah Shah, standard of living, rural development planning, rural community and living conditions environment.

1. Introduction

This study is aimed at enhancing the function of the Muktafi Billah Shah Township – a capital township of the Central Terengganu Development Authority (KETENGAH) region - in boosting the spatial-economic development and improving the quality of living of the rural communities. A similar study done by Salleh (2000) on the impact of new towns in the KETENGAH region on the residents in the region. This study attempts to cast some light on the roles of the Muktafi Billah Shah and assess its relationship with the other two towns of the KETENGAH Central (Ketengah Jaya and Bukit Besi) in fulfilling the desires of the residents living within the areas and to those in the surrounding villages.

This study parallels with the main aim of the frontier development of KETENGAH Central to provide urban services such as quality public infrastructures and amenities with greater network and linkages in primarily agricultural hinterlands and to promote the urbanisation of

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the rural areas. That is a part of the efforts to realize the New Economic Model (NEM) at promoting higher income, sustainability and inclusivity (Haron, 2014).

The rationale behind the development of new towns is varied from one country to another, depending on the nature of the problems faced in the country. Nevertheless, in most developing countries like Malaysia, there is unequal development between urban and rural areas especially in the regional context. As such, Al Muktafi Billah Shah has been developed under the 'centralised township' concept (Ghani, 2000) where the settlers and workers in the agricultural hinterlands are required to live in the new towns provided with urban facilities comparable to other urban areas. With this concept, it is expected that Muktafi Billah Shah and the other two towns in the KETENGAH Central can trigger their own growth based initially on the primary sector (agricultural i.e. rubber and oil palm plantations), then later on secondary and tertiary sectors. This growth would spread to the surrounding villages. Further discussion on these townships will be presented later.

The question is, does the creation of the new towns in the KETENGAH Central achieved its objective? Thus, this study to discusses the roles and impact of the new towns particularly the Muktafi Billah Shah Township on its residents.

2. Township Development in the Rural Transformation Agenda

The rural transformation agenda through urbanisation has long been a development agenda since the 1970s – under the New Economic Policy (the NEP). At that time, rural urbanisation is one of the key roles of Regional Development Authorities (RDAs) to urbanise rural agricultural regions by creating new townships with the following underlying purposes (a) to introduce an urban environment, facilities and services into agricultural and rural areas, (b) to foster the development of commercial and industrial activities in rural areas particularly in designated 'new growth centres', and (c) to induce active participation of Malays in commercial and industrial activities. See Ngah (2011) for further discussion on this matter.

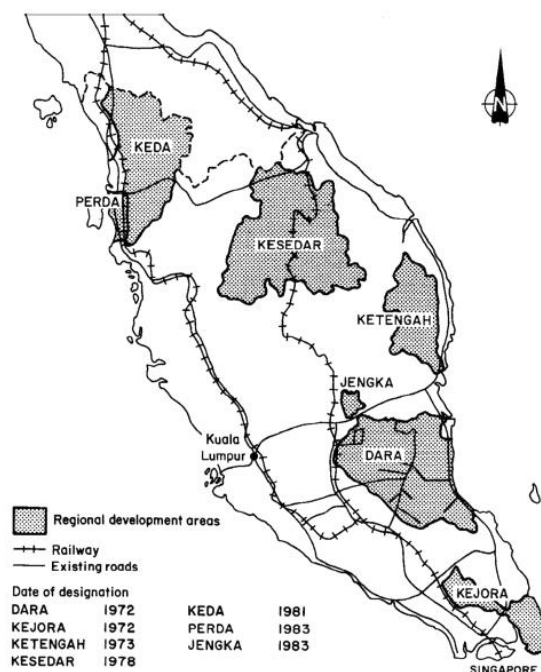


Fig. 1 Distribution of regional development areas

In order to realise the rural transformation agenda, about 7 RDAs were established throughout the country. It started with the Pahang Tenggara Development Authority (DARA) in 1972, the Johor Tenggara Development Authority (KEJORA) also in 1972 (see Fig. 1 for the complete list). Most of them were incorporated with a township development as catalyst project except the Kedah Regional Development Authority (KEDA) and the Penang Regional Development Authority (PERDA) which adopted as in-situ development strategy. Accordingly, more than 40 townships have been developed during the NEP period (1971-1990) and six of them are in KETENGAH.

The township development strategy has been attracting many researchers to study it, particularly its roles in transforming the rural environment into an urban way of life, economically, socially, demographically, and physically. However, the studies found that the development progressed under this strategy only had limited success owing to multiple factors. They are the failure of the new towns to attract secondary and tertiary employment, i.e. industrial and commercial sectors due to infrastructural deficiencies, the slow population build up, less competitiveness compared to outside established industrial areas; limited material inputs, services and markets; locationally disadvantaged; and stand-alone town (Nghah, 2011; Choguill, 1985).

Instead of being stand-alone, the town should be equipped with a number of centres in which the service areas are integrated between them (Lynch, 1996). That is, the town no longer weighs on a centre, but on a central pattern connected to each other to form a polycentric development concept - demonstrates a strong relationship between the core and satellite cities or other cities within the region, promoting a spatially balanced growth with specific functions (see Sýkora et al., 2009). In other words, all towns should be functional in a specialisation-complementary relationship (Alessandro, 2016) which the model city is built on the urban centralities that bring the people to live their space. Further, it seeks the well-being of residents through quality living.

In addition to the above results, the development of new towns has also not boosted Malay urbanization, nor has it reduced regional disparity to any significant extent (Nghah, 2011). Nghah (2011) adds that the agriculture and resource-based activities in the new towns have only limited propulsive force to boost the economic base of the towns because they did not purchase inputs from local small businesses and their products are not for domestic use but primarily for export.

In terms of the National Vision Policy (NVP) 2001-2010, the government again brings attention to regional balanced development strategy through the regional economic growth corridors (RMKe-9, 2006-2010). This development corridor concept is aimed at raising the standard of living, particularly rural community and attaining a balanced socio-economic development across regions and states. It also involves the development of growth centres (inclusive of existing townships) and growth corridors that transcend state boundaries, modernization and diversification of the economy based on less developed states thus reducing the urban-rural digital divide (Government of Malaysia, 2008: 65). The NVP is followed by the National Transformation Policy (NTP) 2011-2020 which emphasis mainly on human development and maintains people-centric focus through the NEM and emphasis the achievement of the economic development corridor strategy (RMKe-10, 2011-2015).

In the NTP phase, Malaysia set an overall goal to be a high-income economic country that is both inclusive and sustainable. True to its inclusive and sustainable development concept, the NEM aims to ensure poverty eradication and a more equitable distribution across regions. Inclusiveness programmes will seek to enhance the income levels of low-and-medium

income households with commitment to achieve a developed nation by 2020 (Elhadary & Samat, 2015).

3. Data and Methods

The study deploys two approaches of data collection, namely site inventory and household survey. The site inventory is aimed to gather information about the urban facilities or services that are offered by the towns and to measure the simple index of availability of urban services based on the urban hierarchy level proposed by JPBD Malaysia (Currently the so-called Plan Malaysia). This analysis includes the roles of Al Muktafi Billah Shah for the overall development of KETENGAH Central.

Meanwhile, the household survey involves a questionnaire using face to face interview. There were 114 respondents obtained in the survey. The samples were chosen using a convenience sampling technique in all three areas of KETENGAH Central, namely Al Muktafi Billah Shah - the main urban commercial centre in KETENGAH region - Ketengah Jaya Town, and Bukit Besi Town. The main objective of this survey is to obtain current information about the demographic and socio-economics of the population, and to measure the current living standard impacted by the development progress in the region.

A triangulation method and cross analysis between the results and the literature review is applied to provide a better understanding of the roles of Al Muktafi Billah Shah towards the overall development of KETENGAH Central and its rural communities surrounding the region.

4. Introduction to KETENGAH Central

KETENGAH Central comprises three townships in the KETENGAH region namely, Al Muktafi Billah Shah with a population of 14,032 in 2010, Ketengah Jaya (25,117) and Bukit Besi (8,665) which are situated in the middle part of Terengganu (Fig. 2). This area is occupied mainly by Malays.

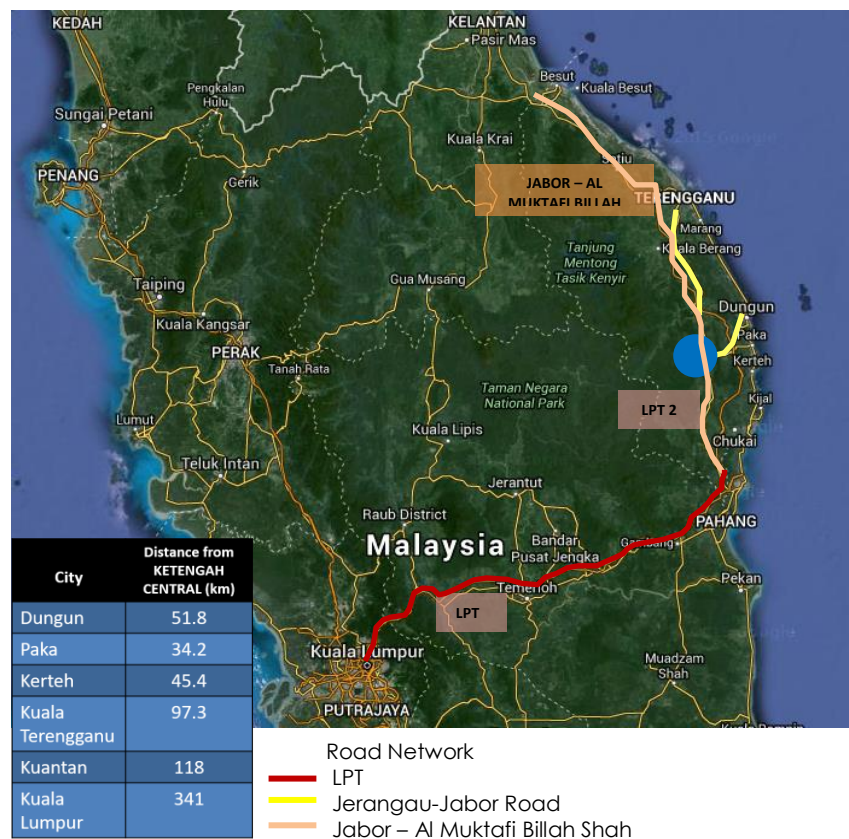


Fig. 2 Location of KETENGAH accessibility

Similar to other RDAs, KETENGAH aims to promote the urban growth in the frontier areas for the benefit of the rural community living within the areas, and generally for the nation as a whole. For this purpose, the main strategy in the planning of the KETENGAH region includes developing an agricultural sector as the main employment generation to eradicate poverty and at the same time to create an urban living environment through the provision of a wide range of urban facilities and services for the people living within the area. It has been noted in the Hunting Report of KETENGAH in 1974 (Ghani, 2000).

The area is connected by a good network of road systems linkages (via LPT 2: Kuantan to Kuala Terengganu, Federal Road of Bukit Besi – Dungun, and Federal Road of Muktafi Billah Shah – Paka). More importantly, this area is a part of the Special Economic Zone of the East-Coast Economic Region as catalyst developments and impetus to the surrounding areas.

Al Muktafi Billah Shah was targeted to be a catalyst for development as well as a stimulus for economic growth and to supply a higher level of goods and services for KETENGAH and its adjoining areas. Ketengah Jaya Town and Bukit Besi Town function as commercial centres for their catchment areas. This is to serve and accommodate the people there with appropriate public facilities and urban services. In the planning, they are among the most important towns that should inter-link and complement one another to provide better functions to the whole population in the region.

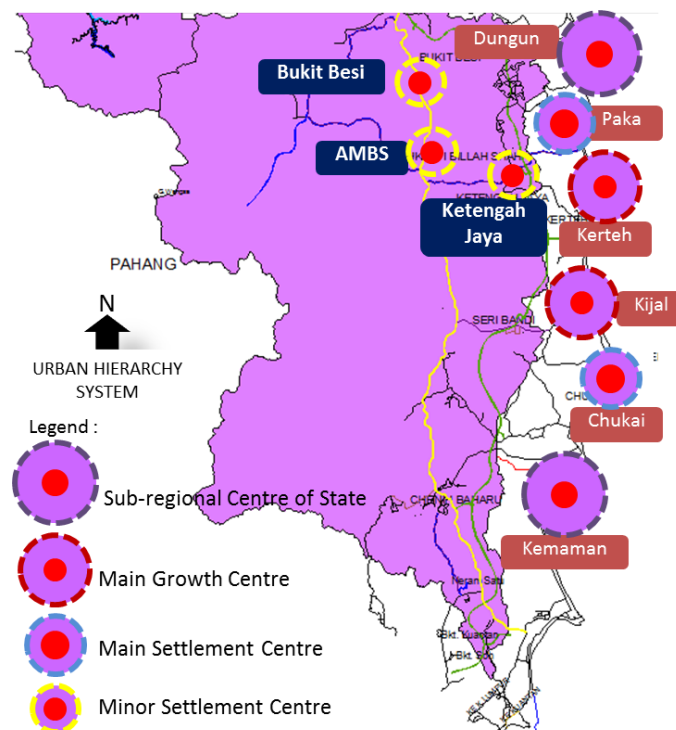


Fig. 3 Three townships in the KETENGAH Central as minor settlement centres

According to the JBPD urban hierarchy system, these towns are under the category of minor settlement centres because their population is less than 30,000 people. As aforementioned, they are located in the strategic area neighbouring Dungun on the Northern-East and Kemaman on the Southern-East which both substitute as a Sub-Regional Centre of Terengganu State (Fig. 3). Other than that, they are in competition with Chukai, Kijal, Kerteh and Paka to accommodate better services for the surrounding population. Thus, these three towns are supposed to gain opportunities from their strategic locations and at the same time offer competitive functions for their population.

5. Results and Discussions

5.1 Demographic and Living Standards

There were 114 respondents were involved in the household survey from three areas of KETENGAH Central, namely Al Muktafi Billah Shah, Ketengah Jaya and Bukit Besi. 96.5% of the respondents are residents who lived in KETENGAH Central for more than 5 years. A majority of them come from the KETENGAH region approximately 79.8 %, followed by 11.4% are from outside Terengganu in adjoining states such as Pahang and Kelantan and a small number from Perak. While respondents from other districts of Terengganu recorded only 8.8%.

The average household size is 4.3 which outnumbers the national household size recorded of 4.1 in 2016. More than 75% of the household members are from the working age population (15-64 years) so there is potential to gain opportunities especially in terms of economic growth and human development (Ross, 2004). Further, a higher working-age population contributes to improvements in healthcare, nutrition, and living standards and increasing the survival rate of infants and children (Shibin et al., 2011).

The living standard of the residents is generally better in terms of residence ownership status, income levels and the availability of public facilities and services as compared to those in the surrounding villages. It is found that only 10.5% of the respondents occupy rental houses, while another 89.5% live in their own houses, either bought or inherited. Moreover, the average income of the residents is above the poor relative rate which is RM2000 per month. However, this income level is still far from the target of RM4000 per month for the B40% (RMKe-11 2016-2020), and under the national average income which is more than RM2300 per month. This is because about 10% of them are farmers - participation in the oil palm plantation as FELDA settlers in Ketengah Jaya – and only 7.1% work with the governments and private firms.

With an overall improvement in the living conditions, a large majority of them (85%) are satisfied and intend to remain in KETENGAH Central. However, there are things that many people in KETENGAH Central are not satisfied with. It includes inadequate urban facilities and services to fulfil their necessities for daily life (Table 1). For example, a commercial business centre and bank services are only available in Al Muktafi Billah Shah and not for Ketengah Jaya and Bukit Besi. The distance between these three towns is far. So, many people from Ketengah Jaya prefer to go outside KETENGAH Central such as Paka and Dungun towns rather to the Muktafi Billah Shah due to its distance and limited services. In addition, there are many abandoned or dilapidated commercial buildings with no business activities, an indication of lagging growth in economic development.

Table 1. Existing commercial activities

Al-Muktafi Billah Shah		Ketengah Jaya		Bukit Besi	
Commercial activities	Unit	Commercial activities	Unit	Commercial activities	Unit
Rural Transformation Center (RTC)	31	Free Standing Building:		Free Standing Building:	6
❖ Government Agencies		❖ Post Office	1	❖ Telecommunication	
❖ Restaurant				❖ Utility	
❖ Health				❖ Motel	
❖ Educational				Retail Shop	4
❖ Petrol Station				Wet Market	1
Other Buildings:					
Retail Shop	6	Shop Houses:	6	Shop Houses:	5
Restaurant	2	❖ Food and Drink		❖ Food and Drink	
Wet Market	1	❖ Telecommunication		❖ Telecommunication	
Shop Houses:	29	❖ Stationary		❖ Stationary	
❖ Food and Drink		❖ Utility		❖ Trade and Distributions	
❖ Telecommunication		❖ Trade and Distributions		❖ Work shop	
❖ Stationary		❖ Work shop			
❖ Utility					
❖ Trade and Distributions					
❖ Work shop					
Universitas Mahasarakwati Denpasar, July 6-8, 2018, Bali-Indonesia	4	Retail Shop	3	Retail Shop	1
		Restaurant	3	Restaurant	2
		Residential	2	Abandoned Shop	4
Retail Shop	12	Office	2		
Restaurant	3	Abandoned Shop	20		
Abandoned Shop	7	Total	38	Total	23
Total	91				

Finally, the general opinion, is that ask for more job opportunities, especially from the manufacturing sectors and better urban facilities and services as provided in larger towns.

5.2 Availability of Urban Services Index

In order to provide evidence-based input, this section discusses the results of inventory for the availability of urban services index. From the results, the current roles of Al Muktafi Billah Shah and two townships – Ketengah Jaya and Bukit Besi – especially in providing their services or accommodating the people’s inspiration and need could be clearly examined. Aforementioned, this index is derived on the basis of the criteria formulated by the Plan Malaysia for a minor settlement centre. It is found that Al Muktafi Billah Shah has provided better public facilities and services compared to Ketengah Jaya and Bukit Besi (which is 0.63 against 0.50 and 0.53 index, respectively), but is still not compliant with the requirements of a Minor Settlement Centre as proposed by the Plan Malaysia under the urban hierarchy level (Table 2).

Table 2. Overall availability of urban services index based on a hierarchy of minor settlement centre (Plan Malaysia)

		AMBS	KJ	BB			AMBS	KJ	BB
Population Range	10 000 – 30 000	✓	✓	-	MICE	2 star and budget hotel	✓	-	✓
Administration	District Council	-	-	-		Guest house	-	-	✓
	Government Institution	✓	✓	✓	Industry	Cluster based on local product	✓	✓	✓
	Local Bank (Branch)	✓	-	✓		Food Cluster and SME	✓	-	-
Financial service	Insurans (agent)	-	-	-		Manufacture and Local General Assembly	✓	-	-
	Syarikat Stok / Sekuriti Tempatan (kiosk)	-	-	-		Mobile Library (Perpustakaan Bergerak)	-	-	-
	Local financial service (agent)	-	-	-	Social and Public Facilities	Primary and Secondary School	✓	✓	✓
	Local Office (branch)	-	-	-		Clinic	✓	✓	✓
	Local Office (main office and branch)	-	-	-		Private Clinic	✓	✓	✓
	- selected service	-	-	-		Multipurpose Hall	✓	✓	✓
	Local Supermarket	-	-	-		Field	✓	✓	✓
Business and Trade	Local Retail Shop	✓	✓	✓		Local Park (Active and Passive Recreation Area)	✓	✓	✓
	Jual Runcit Barangan Terpakai Tempatan	✓	✓	✓		Religion	Mosque	✓	✓
	Local retail (Informal)	✓	✓	✓	Other place of worship		-	-	-
	Local Service repairing individual goods	✓	✓	✓	Total	30	19/30	15/30	16/30
	Direct Selling (international and local)	-	-	-	Availability of Urban Services Index	0.63	0.50	0.53	
	Fuel sell (petrol station, LPG, NGV)	✓	✓	✓	OVERALL INDEX		0.55		

Note: AMBS=Al-Muktafi Billah Shah, KJ=Ketengah Jaya, and BB=Bukit Besi

The overall index with 0.55 index out of 1 indicates just a marginal passing from unsatisfactory to moderate. From Table 2, it clearly shows that Al Muktafi Billah Shah particularly is not compliant with its required roles in providing financial services, businesses

and trade. There is no local supermarket, for example, that could accommodate what the people need in their daily life and at the same time to circulate micro or local economic growth. This matter is open for further studies.

On the basis of inventory, only a few firms are attracted to operate their factories in Muktafi Billah Shah and they are from the processing of raw materials type of industry for export like furniture factory. This is because of the availability of raw materials in the region such as forests and oil palm. In addition, Al Muktafi Billah Shah has opened up as an educational-hub with educational institutions such as Kolej Ketengah, MARA KETENGAH International College (MKIC) and Pusat Giatmara KETENGAH. The educational institution in KETENGAH Central is a UiTM Branch Campus in Bukit Besi town. This will bring more visitors to the areas and is a catalyst for the economic development in the future.

However, there is no evidence of intra-linkages of urban services as specialisation-complementary relationships among the towns in KETENGAH Central, therefore, it leads to difficulty of the towns to satisfy people and fulfil their needs or demands. Nevertheless, it is found that each town has its own identity or specialisation where Al Muktafi Billah Shah is an administrative centre and a multi-resource-based centre for the KETENGAH region, while Ketengah Jaya known as a FELDA settlement centre, and Bukit Besi is for historical tourism centre based on cold mining artifact sites.

As supported from the questionnaire survey, Al Muktafi Billah Shah, and KETENGAH Central towns have not been able to provide higher necessity goods and services for their residents and the people in the surrounding villages. It is found that only 24% of the respondents have obtained their higher goods and services in KETENGAH Central. The lack of higher goods and services has encouraged the people in the region to patronise the commercial shops in the border towns outside KETENGAH Central e.g. Paka, Kertih and Kemaman. This scenario leads to the slow growth of secondary and tertiary sectors which are very significant for the growth of the region. In turn, this has caused a low population growth rate in the region. This is the answer to why the current level of development in KETENGAH Central is not in line with its earlier projections in terms of population size and urban functions. Even, the achievement of population size is only at 40% of the projected size in 1990 which is 33,500 (Ghani, 2000). Therefore, what are supposedly Al Muktafi Billah Shah functions as a capital township for KETENGAH Central?

6. Recommendations and Conclusions

This paper indicates that Al Muktafi Billah Shah is incapable to attract more in-migration to the areas so the low population size causes low economic development. The population build-up is affected by the facilities, services and employment opportunities in the areas. What has happened in KETENGAH Central is that the development progress has moved to bigger and more established towns outside the area such as Paka, Kertih, Chukai and Kemaman. Internal economic activities in KETENGAH Central are also not circulated well; the commercial centres have failed to offer the most preferred goods and services to the local people. This has inevitably led to the lack of economic prosperity for the local residents.

Therefore, the strategy of the future development over time, is to enhance the rural transformation towards a resilient community. A high strategic content plan has been adopted to enable it to grow progressively. It has to serve the people as what they need and demand without compromising the quality of living conditions environment and resources. It includes

concentrating on building capacity, upgrade average income, improving productivity and quality of life, and at the same time upgrading linkages between core (Al Muktafi Billah Shah) and periphery towns (Ketengah Jaya and Bukit Besi) by adopting the polycentric development concept to ensure sustainability and inclusivity. Al Muktafi Billah Shah particularly should be a capital town that provides opportunities and support mechanisms that allow other townships and the residents to develop their full potential and achieve the benefits from urban development.

Finally, there are some issues that have not been directly looked at this study and they are suggested for further research.

- On market demand for goods and services which can influence the trend and development progress of the towns. In reality, demand can be shaped and changed, instead of as a referable town but as more compact or dense area.

- The discussion on the involvement of social actors or stakeholders in the development implementation as they play very important roles in the resolution of uneven development of the existing towns or cities.

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