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## **THE IMPACT OF SHARING ECONOMY (AIRBNB) ON HIGH-RISE NEIGHBOURHOODS BASED ON STRA GUIDELINES: URBAN PLANNERS' PERSPECTIVE**

**Suraiyati Rahman\*<sup>1</sup>, Nur Raihana Azahar<sup>2</sup>,  
Abdul Rashid Abdul Aziz<sup>3</sup> and Suziana Mat Yasin<sup>4</sup>**

*<sup>1,2</sup>School of Housing, Building and Planning,  
UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA*

*<sup>3</sup>School of Technology and Engineering Science,  
WAWASAN OPEN UNIVERSITY*

*<sup>4</sup>School of Social Science,  
UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA*

### **Abstract**

This study examines the impact of Airbnb as part of the sharing economy, which has introduced various challenges in high-rise neighbourhoods. It explores how the implementation of Short-Term Residential Accommodation (STRA) guidelines can help regulate short-term rental activities and address emerging issues in high-rise residential areas. Specifically, the research aims to explore the impact of Airbnb from the perspective of urban planners, focussing on how this service affects neighbourhoods and cities. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, and the findings were analysed through thematic analysis. The results reveal both positive and negative implications of Airbnb. On the positive side, Airbnb stimulates the state's economy, particularly through the tourism sector, and provides an alternative source of income for residents. On the downside, the presence of short-term rentals can lead to increased property prices and raise concerns about neighbourhood safety. This research suggests that the STRA guidelines could play a key role in creating a balanced solution for the future of short-term rentals in Malaysia, ensuring that both residents and businesses can benefit from this evolving industry.

**Keywords:** Sharing Economy, Short-Term Residential Accommodation Guidelines, High-Rise Neighbourhood, Airbnb, Planners' Perspective

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author. Email: suraiyati@usm.my

## **INTRODUCTION**

A home-sharing network like Airbnb has gained much attention and is experiencing exponential growth, resulting in regulatory and political battles. However, realising its full potential would necessitate the democratisation of platform ownership and governance. Despite Airbnb's rising popularity, many short-term rental accommodations have caused dissatisfaction among high-rise residents due to noise and the misuse of shared utilities. Guidelines on Short-Term Residential Accommodation (STRA), encompassing Airbnb and other short-term rental accommodations, were introduced in late 2019 to address issues related to short-term rentals in residential areas, especially in a home-sharing economy (Malaysia Productivity Corporation, 2019). According to the guidelines, the parties involved in the operations and enforcement of rules and regulations are the host or homeowner, the guest, and the STRA platform, such as Airbnb, which provides the service of online accommodation booking.

One of the key debates surrounding the permissibility of STRA is whether the nature of the building's use has significantly changed due to the operation of such businesses. This raises the issue of whether planning permission is required, particularly in cases where the building undergoes a "material change of use", as typically mandated under local planning regulations (Chua Abdullah & Ramly, 2024a). Planning permission may be necessary if the use of a property for STRA services constitutes "development" in planning terms, particularly when the scale of the STRA operations becomes commercial in nature.

This study aims to achieve the following research objectives:

1. To examine the impacts of Airbnb accommodation service on neighbourhoods and cities from the perspective of urban planners.
2. To determine the benefits and implications of STRA guidelines for future implementation.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Sharing Economy Concept***

A sharing economy is characterised as a peer-to-peer system for obtaining, providing or sharing access to goods and services, often facilitated by a community that is based on an online platform in the sense of sharing economy (Guttentag, 2013). The term "sharing economy" encompasses various non-ownership modes of consumption, including swapping, bartering, trading, lending, sharing, and exchanging. The duration of the sharing access is for a short period, typically on a daily basis. These online-based products and services often involve the exchange of underutilised assets or services from individuals, either for free or for a fee (Rachel Botsman & Roo Rogers, 2010). Airbnb's so-called

sharing economy is a controversial phenomenon based on the peer-to-peer exchange of products and services created by recent developments in information technology. Opinions about this phenomenon vary, with free-market proponents supporting the sharing economy (Hopkins, 2016), and liberal-progressive defenders viewing it as a means to destabilise market-oriented consumerism and individual ownership (Hoffmann et al., 2016).

### ***Concept and Background of Airbnb***

Airbnb is a website allowing regular individuals to rent their homes as tourist accommodations. It has developed rapidly and currently sells millions of room nights annually due to its focus on cost-cutting, domestic amenities, and the opportunity for more authentic local experiences (Bao & Shah, 2020). The emergence of this sharing economy business model, which includes short-term rentals such as Airbnb, Grab and others, has been extensively practised globally in the tourism and business sectors. Airbnb has become dominant in the short-term rental market in Malaysia, particularly in high-rise accommodations known as strata titles. Airbnb creates innovative solutions to address common travel and accommodation challenges, launching its latest brand positioning through a new logo, website, and a user-friendly mobile application (Hartmans, 2017; King, 2015; Oskam & Boswijk, 2016). The procedure for using Airbnb is straightforward. It operates as an online community marketplace that allows individuals to book short-term accommodations from a list of verified hosts worldwide, without requiring users to own property. Those with a spare room or apartment can register on Airbnb's platform, offering their space for a specified period at a set price (Evans & Evans, 2019; Oskam & Boswijk, 2016; Zervas et al., 2018) To ensure safety and trust, Airbnb implements peer-to-peer interactions and verifies the identities of all users. Before booking or listing accommodations, users are required to provide legitimate phone numbers, photo identification, and links to their Facebook profiles (Cohen & Sundararajan, 2017). Property owners who list their accommodations are known as "hosts", while the individuals who stay in these spaces are called "guests", and the available properties are termed "listings". The process of becoming an Airbnb user or posting a listing is accessible and simple, making Airbnb a cost-effective and user-friendly alternative to traditional hotel bookings and vacation rentals.

### ***Short-Term Rental Accommodation Concept***

Short-term rental accommodations (STRA) are commonly described as dwelling units rented or leased for fewer than 30 days (Lee, 2016). However, state and federal authorities have yet to define them. Short-term rentals are an example of the sharing economy, in which individuals increasingly opt to share access to products and services through lateral or hierarchical trade often involving a

monetary exchange. This trend has been recognised as having positive and negative implications for communities nationwide.

Currently, many practices and regulations have been adopted worldwide to ensure the quality of life for residents and to avoid future problems related to unhealthy competition in industries, such as the hotel industry (Coyle & Yu-Cheong, 2016; Levendis & Dicle, 2017; Richards et al., 2019; Stollery & Jun, 2017; Wegmann & Jiao, 2017; Zamani et al., 2019). One restriction implemented for the short-term rental business is the nightcap, as described in Table 1 below, where entire home rentals are limited from 30 days to 90 days per year, depending on the country’s regulations. Hosts must obtain permits to operate their business and pay taxes accordingly (BBC News, 2018), while the building’s management committee sets the rules and regulations for high-rise buildings.

In Malaysia, the regulation of STRA falls under the jurisdiction of local authorities, as provided by the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172). This act grants local authorities the discretion to either permit or prohibit property owners from engaging in commercial activities such as STRA within residential properties. However, the approach to regulating STRA varies across different local authorities, as each community has distinct needs and priorities, which continue to evolve due to changing societal expectations, the pursuit of an improved quality of life, and considerations of human rights (Lee Lik Meng et al., 2006). Moreover, legal and technical perspectives on STRA within strata premises emphasise the importance of clear regulations to address challenges related to property management, resident welfare, and enforcement mechanisms (Chua Abdullah & Ramly, 2024c).

**Table 1:** Restrictions on Short Term Rental Accommodations across the World

City	Restrictions
Amsterdam	Rentals of entire homes are limited to 60 days per year.
Barcelona	Short-term rentals require a license, but no new ones are being given currently.
Berlin	Landlords must get a permit to rent out 50% or more of their primary house for a certain period.
London	Rentals of entire residences are limited to 90 days per year.
New York City	Renting for an apartment for less than 30 days is usually prohibited unless the host is present.
Paris	Rental for less than a year is limited to 120 days a year.
San Francisco	Hosts are required to register as businesses and obtain short-term rental certifications. Rentals of the entire property are limited to 80 days per year.
Singapore	For public housing six-months minimum rental duration is required.
Tokyo	Home sharing was only permitted in 2017. The number of days each property can be rented is limited to 180 days.

*Source: Gurran & Phibbs (2017); Zervas et al. (2017)*

As shown in Table 1, the practices and restrictions implemented in various countries are designed to protect residents' quality of life while benefiting all stakeholders. In light of these practices, this study aims to explore the potential impact of STRA guidelines that are expected to be introduced in the near future. The viewpoints of town planners are crucial, as they serve as key decision-makers in managing both urban and rural areas.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The data for this research were collected using a qualitative research method, designed to address issues related to social structures or individual experiences (Hilary P. M. Winchester & Matthew W. Rofe, 2010). The data gathering process involved a combination of public reports, credible supporting documents, and interviews with relevant stakeholders. In addition to secondary data, primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with town planners and planning officers. Semi-structured interviews are known for providing in-depth responses, enabling researchers to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, views, feelings, and knowledge (Patton. M. Q., 2002).

This study involved a range of significant stakeholders, including local government officials and representatives from government-linked companies. The participants were provided with a topic guide in advance to prepare comprehensive and informed responses to the discussion points. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with specific characteristics that aligned with the study's objectives. Additionally, snowball sampling was used, where initial participants recommended other individuals who met the selection criteria. The final sample consisted of eight respondents, all of whom had a minimum of five years of experience in the planning industry. This selection was based on their expertise in urban planning and their academic background, ensuring that the views shared were informed by both professional experience and academic knowledge. Thematic analysis, an iterative process that simultaneously involves data collection and analysis (Cassell & Symon, 1994), was employed to analyse the data from the semi-structured interviews. The findings from these interviews will be presented and analysed in the sections that follow.

## **FINDINGS**

The findings in this section are based on a semi-structured interview with eight respondents who were recognised as being actively involved in the planning profession. The interview was then transcribed and thematically analysed based on the themes that emerged. Codes, or labels, were assigned to specific parts of the data that contributed to the themes. Table 3 shows the codes, categories, and themes from the interview sessions.

**Table 2: Key Themes and Codes**

Category	Themes	Codes
Impacts of STRA on neighbourhoods and cities	Increase in property value in the neighbourhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rezoning the housing to commercial use</li> <li>• More short-term rental owners in high-rise buildings</li> <li>• Cater for short-term service apartments</li> <li>• Revenue for developers</li> </ul>
	Diversity in tourism accommodation options and staycation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheaper prices for accommodations</li> </ul>
	Safety and quality of strata title management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cleanliness of the accommodations</li> <li>• More outsiders stay in the neighbourhood</li> <li>• Procedures for guests</li> </ul>
Benefits and implications of STRA guidelines from planners' perspective	Guidance for local authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning control: Control the zoning for commercial use</li> </ul>
	Management operations of high-rise accommodations (strata title)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proper SOP for managing guests, owners, and the management of high-rise accommodations</li> </ul>

*Source: Codes from the interview*

This study has identified several impacts of Airbnb, such as stimulating the state's economy through the tourism sector and serving as an alternative business for the residents to generate income. The second objective is to determine the benefits and implications of STRA guidelines to be implemented in future. STRA guidelines can be used to streamline regulations and businesses that are related to the sharing economy in residential areas. The existence of STRA guidelines helps ease the process and address key issues that need to be tackled in order to reduce the impact on residents and create a harmonious strata neighbourhood.

***Impacts of STRA on Neighbourhoods and Cities***

***Theme 1: Increase in property value in the neighbourhood***

The implications of STRA like Airbnb can have a double-edged impact, affecting different stakeholders in various ways. On the one hand, the rise of STRA creates opportunities for investors and property buyers who can afford to purchase units for investment purposes. This demand boosts revenue for developers, as they can sell units at higher prices to potential investors. Homeowners who wish to sell their property to an investor can expect a better return, as the property may be seen as more valuable due to its potential for short-term rental income. However,

the negative side is that homeowners looking to sell to a regular buyer who may not wish to operate an Airbnb unit may not receive as high a return.

“...The implication will surely affect the housing price where the price will increase because of rezoning from residential to commercial.” (R2)

“...The housing prices will increase due to rezoning from residential to commercial use which is also good for the investor for its house selling price because of its higher value...” (R6)

“...For homeowners of strata housing schemes, on the other hand, the implications can be both positive and negative. Ownership of high-rise buildings, especially with great amenities, will be targeted more for short-term rental rather than for owners residing in the unit/premise.” (R5)

Furthermore, the proliferation of STRA in certain neighbourhoods can provide financial benefits to developers and building owners. Unsold units in apartment complexes can be converted into Airbnb units, generating additional revenue. As one respondent said: “...But there is also a positive impact on the neighbourhood unit where the unsold units in the apartment can turn into Airbnb units, and it can give revenue to the developer or building owner.” (R1)

This phenomenon is supported by the findings of studies conducted in the U.S. The research suggests that the growth of Airbnb listings in Boston was associated with increased rental prices, particularly in neighbourhoods with a high concentration of short-term rentals, contributing to rent inflation in urban areas. The rise of home-sharing platforms, such as Airbnb, results in a decrease in the availability of long-term rental units (Bao & Shah, 2020; Karen Horn & Mark Merante, 2017). As property owners increasingly convert their properties to short-term rentals, the supply of long-term rental housing shrinks, exacerbating housing shortages. Additionally, both studies suggest that the proliferation of short-term rentals can accelerate gentrification and displacement. In areas with high concentrations of Airbnb listings, rising rents make it increasingly difficult for long-term residents to afford housing.

### ***Theme 2: Diversity of tourism accommodation options or staycation***

The conversion of permanent homes to tourism, especially in suburban areas, appears to be highest when the supply of tourist accommodation is constrained, and a high proportion of the rental stock is available for tourists rather than residents due to an increase in demand for Airbnb outside of city areas. This reduces the affordable rental market.

According to R1, “.... Airbnb could stimulate the tourism sector by encouraging tourists to stay longer at affordable prices. Most tourists are with families, so selecting Airbnb is the best choice with abundant facilities and discount prices if staying longer”. Additionally, R8 mentioned that “.... Short-term rentals have been accepted for big families for staycations and are also an alternative option for international and domestic tourists. The spacious and homey environment in short-stay rental accommodation like Airbnb has boosted the local economy and generated income for investors.”

The rise of Airbnb has created a shift in the tourism accommodation landscape, providing tourists with affordable, flexible, and convenient lodging options. According to Gurrán & Phibbs (2017), Airbnb offers a viable alternative for families and longer-staying tourists, with the platform’s lower prices and diverse accommodation types enabling tourists to access budget-friendly options that were previously unavailable in traditional hotels. Furthermore, Zervas et al. (2015, 2018) highlighted that Airbnb is particularly attractive for tourists looking for affordable accommodations that offer more space, amenities, and the potential for longer stays. The ability to book entire homes with kitchens, living areas, and multiple bedrooms makes it a popular choice for tourists travelling with families or in groups. Additionally, Evans & Evans (2019), Guttentag (2015), and Guttentag et al. (2018) supported this observation by emphasising how Airbnb’s personalised offerings cater to tourists seeking an experience that is closer to local life. This experience, combined with cost-effective pricing, has made Airbnb a significant player in the accommodation market, especially for those looking for a more "home-like" environment than what traditional hotels provide.

### ***Theme 3: Safety and quality of strata title management***

The respondents emphasised that the impact of Airbnb operations in high-rise or strata-title properties largely depends on how well the property is managed. Proper management is essential for ensuring the safety, cleanliness, and overall well-being of residents, which in turn encourages more positive socio-economic activities in the area.

According to R2, “.... proper management will lead to safety, cleanliness thus allowing more socioeconomic activity upon this activity but if poor management on this Airbnb activity will resulting in more negative impacts such as broken facilities and unhappy residents.” This highlights the importance of experienced property management in maintaining the quality of the living environment.

However, when the property management is inadequate, the negative impacts are more pronounced, affecting the neighbourhood's facilities, amenities, and social dynamics. R3 further explained that “.....if the property management has experience in managing the property, they should not have a lot of negative



impact on the housing in terms of facilities and amenities. If the property management poorly manages the residential, it will also affect the social activity including safety and cleanliness.” This suggests that a lack of effective management can undermine the quality of life for residents and create unsafe or unpleasant environments.

Additionally, R1 drew attention to a concerning trend where Airbnb activities are sometimes operated illegally, bypassing necessary regulations and taxes. R1 noted, “.....Airbnb activity nowadays is illegally operated because they want to avoid paying taxes and avoiding some obligations in Airbnb and this had caused some disturbance to the neighbourhood making local authority cannot detect this kind of illegal activity.” This indicates that unregulated Airbnb activities can create disturbances in the neighbourhood, including issues related to safety, cleanliness, and the overall integrity of the community. The inability of local authorities to detect these illegal operations further exacerbates the problem, making it difficult to enforce proper regulations and ensure the quality of life for permanent residents.

These findings underscore the importance of effective property management and regulatory oversight to mitigate the negative impacts of Airbnb on residential areas. When properly managed and regulated, Airbnb can contribute positively to the local economy, but when left unchecked, it can lead to significant disruptions.

### ***Benefits of STRA Guidelines***

Based on the findings, a theme has emerged to describe the benefits and implications of STRA guidelines in the future.

#### ***Theme 1: Guidance for local authorities***

The respondents (R1, R2, and R3) highlighted the dual impact of STRA guidelines, recognising both their positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, the guidelines offer a structured approach to regulating short-term rental activities, especially for platforms like Airbnb, within residential-zoned areas. This can help streamline business operations and ensure compliance with existing regulations, thus balancing tourism activities with residential concerns.

R1 emphasised the importance of the STRA guidelines in planning control, noting that it can serve as a reference for parties looking to convert residential units into commercial properties for Airbnb. According to the respondent,

“.... STRA guideline will mostly help in planning control other than Strata Titles Act 1985 because it involves Airbnb units in an apartment, so all parties who involved either they want to convert their residential into a commercial for Airbnb will refer to this guideline as an obligation.” (R1). This

shows that the guidelines are essential for ensuring that conversions are regulated and do not disrupt the intended use of residential spaces.

R2 acknowledged that the STRA guidelines can ease regulatory burdens, particularly in high-rise residential areas where tourism-related businesses operate. According to R2, “.....STRA guideline will help in easier regulations, especially in tourism-related businesses which conducted high-rise residential.”

This highlights the role of STRA guidelines in making it easier for both businesses and local authorities to navigate the complexities of short-term rentals. R3 further emphasised the role of STRA guidelines in controlling business activities, especially in residential neighbourhoods. R3 stated, “.... STRA guideline will help in controlling the business activity (Airbnb) which were operating in residential areas. In terms of social aspects, neighbourhood and tourism, STRA helps to control unhealthy competition due to Airbnb in the residential area.”

This statement underscores how the guidelines can mitigate negative social impacts, such as unhealthy competition and the conversion of residential properties into commercial ventures, which may disrupt the local community. These insights suggest that STRA guidelines are a critical tool in balancing the growth of the short-term rental market with the need to protect the integrity of residential communities.

### ***Theme 2: Management operations of high-rise accommodations (strata title)***

It is important for the operation to have comprehensive guidelines to ensure residents’ safety, security, health, public good and welfare. Moreover, these clear guidelines of STRA can also benefit developers, as STRA falls within the commercial sector and fulfils Airbnb’s requirement to reduce issues and problems arising in residential areas. In addition, “.....to help create clearer guidelines for short-term rental activities, the government must engage external professionals to assist in drafting the guidelines. STRA serves as a platform for regulating Airbnb activities in housing zoning and controlling unhealthy competitions resulting from the presence of Airbnb premises in residential buildings” (R7).

“...even though the guideline may lack in many ways because what they provide only covers a small part for short-term rental, but it is still useful for its purpose.” (R8)

Without STRA, residential buildings that are converted without permission to be Airbnb accommodations will cause social disruption to existing residents. However, on the negative side, the guidelines may have significant shortcomings. What they study covers only a small part of Airbnb's operations.

Moreover, the guidelines themselves are not comprehensive enough to cover the operations adequately, benefiting the platform but not the residential community, as agreed by R7 and R8. The Strata Title Act empowers local authorities to oversee and regulate land development to ensure orderly and sustainable urban growth (Chua Abdullah & Ramly, 2024b). Planning permission serves as a crucial mechanism in managing land use and mitigating conflicts between residential and commercial activities, including the regulation of STRA within high-rise developments.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study highlights the implications of Airbnb for high-rise neighbourhoods and cities, including the benefits of STRA guidelines in controlling or managing shared economy activities in the future. Urban planners should approach STRA with a perspective that recognises both the economic benefits and the potential challenges it poses to housing markets. While short-term rentals contribute positively to tourism and local economies and provide flexibility for property owners, urban planners must prioritise the long-term sustainability of residential neighbourhoods. Without proper regulations, the proliferation of STRA listings can lead to a reduction in the availability of affordable long-term housing, driving up rents and displacing vulnerable residents (Gurran & Phibbs, 2017).

To ensure balanced urban development, planners should advocate for clear, well-structured regulations that address the demand for short-term rentals while safeguarding housing affordability, neighbourhood integrity, and social equity. This approach allows cities to harness the positive aspects of platforms like Airbnb while minimising negative impacts such as gentrification and housing shortages (Bao & Shah, 2020; Karen Horn & Mark Merante, 2017). However, policymakers entrusted with regulating the remarkable growth of home-sharing platforms lack sufficient information to make effective policy decisions, as highlighted in recent scholarly studies of Airbnb's influence on the rental market (Karen Horn & Mark Merante, 2017). This demonstrates how scholarly suggestions have frequently been used to limit Airbnb's influence on neighbourhoods while maximising the economic activity it provides (Lee, 2016). It is crucial to emphasise that, if Airbnb's operations are properly regulated, they may benefit some neighbourhoods. Policies should be structured to encourage homeowners to advertise "shared room" or "whole room" listings rather than "entire unit" listings, as these short-term rentals can assist local individuals generate extra money by renting out their excess capacity. Such regulations would align with Airbnb's initial mission and would help in the protection of the local rental market from commercial operators. Therefore, it is essential to implement strict monitoring systems like those used in the hotel industry within the home-sharing economy.

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