

Project Review: Public Park Planning and Design as Contribution from Multidiscipline Fields in Built Environment

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ABSTRACT: *This paper reviews 3 consultancy projects of public parks in nature. The projects were completed within the last 5 years by group of academic staffs in the faculty. Public Parks design can be considered as design in the in-between territories. It hinges on the interdisciplinary relationship between two major fields, architecture and landscape architecture. Landscape architect from department of landscape architecture deals with the park and architect from the department of architecture normally deals with the related buildings. Other consultant from the faculty staff is quantity surveyor from department of quantity surveying. This collaborative effort makes Public Parks as truly the most interdisciplinary project reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of the Faculty of Built Environment. The projects being reviewed here also illustrate how academic staffs in the faculty can contribute to the community through consultancy, and by so doing reflects the good relationship between the university, the city and the public.*

Keywords: Public Parks, Interdisciplinary, Environmental

Introduction

Public Park is basically associated with an open space and recreational activities. Public Parks normally consists of two major components: the park and its amenities, the landscape and the architecture. Park design can be considered as the in-between territory that in most cases also involved urban design and ecology or environmental consideration. It hinges on the interdisciplinary relationship between the two fields of architecture and landscape architecture. This paper reviews 3 consultancy projects of public parks in nature completed within the last 5 years by group of academic staffs in the Faculty of Built Environment, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

Public Parks Design in General

Public park design is not just an open space with green area providing place for leisure but it can also become an important node within the city. It acts as a green lung that provide place for people to meet, relax and enjoy while easing of the urban stress and promote healthy activities. Public parks can be turned into educational place when designers incorporate an element of learning into the design. Similarly public parks can be used as marketing tools promoting healthy community within new housing estate, as many developers have opted to advertise. However, public parks if not planned properly could become a negative place raising social and safety concerns, not to forget the associated cost of maintenance and operation.

Park design involves many professional but the two most prominent design consultants are landscape architect and architect. Landscape architect deals with the park and architect normally deals with the related buildings. Other consultants include from civil, mechanical and electrical engineers, quantity surveyor, theme park designers and lighting specialists, making Public Parks as truly the most interdisciplinary project.

The close collaboration during the design stage produces the final outcome of the project that maintains the physical form but sensibly fades the line between architecture and landscape. It demonstrates the enduring and balance relationship where they both depend on each other to make an impact of careful man-made idea harnessing existing terrain and resources. In most cases the projects draw attention to the design that fit into the tropical environment and natural liaison within existing setting, against the imposing idea of building as object within the park.

The public park projects being reviewed here by the author as design architect (as one of the consultant involved) illustrate this close collaboration between the different professionals within the faculty in public parks design in Johor Bahru under the umbrella of Bureau of Innovation and Consultancy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia or better known as BIP-UTM. The projects were funded by National Landscape Department (Jabatan Landskap Negara).

Taman Tropika and Rumah Tropika, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Skudai, Johor.

(Tropical Park and Tropical House, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Skudai, Johor)

Taman Tropika is a public park serving both the university and the surrounding community. It is at the edge of the lakes fronting UTM thus enhances the main gateway to UTM. Taman Tropika is the first phase of the public park development around the lake and it was completed in 2000. Other park proposed around the lakes includes laman riadah and laman bistari that will offer active recreational activities and house specific educational events.

Taman Tropika is famous for its collection of heliconias and gingers species. It is mainly designed for passive recreational activities, especially for students to refresh and relax after their busy routine schedules. They can also do light evening strolls and exercises apart from watching others take part in the water activities.

There are two major buildings in the park; The Tropical House and The Gallerium (a gallery cum museum for UTM). Both buildings are treated as pavilion buildings to fit easily the site and reduce the footprints. The location of these building later adjusted on site to avoid existing trees being cut. The gallerium, which was added later, formed the west wing and redefined the courtyard from which the majestic view of the UTM's mosque is framed. Rumah Tropika (Tropical House) is a single space timber building functions as information gallery for Taman Tropika (Tropical Park). Both buildings are designed to be responsive to the natural context. They are designed to take advantage of natural environment and compliment to the park/garden setting. The buildings face to the lake with open timber decking and viewing pavilion.

The character and image of the buildings reflect tropical architectural solution, fully shaded, avoiding direct sunlight and maintaining good daylight. The Tropical House is naturally ventilated. The use of timber in the Tropical House compliment the garden setting by incorporating landscape as part of the life of the building. It is recreational as well as educational facility towards understanding tropical building and plants. It is open to university and neighbouring communities. The overall result

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is a signature for tropical architecture and park design as illustrated in the photographs below.



Taman Orkid, Hutan Bandar, Majlis Bandaraya Johor Bahru, Johor Bahru.
(The Orchid Garden, Urban Forest, Johor Bahru City Council, Johor Bahru)

The Orchid Garden is the latest addition to the Urban Forest Public Park development under Johor Bahru City Council. The Urban Forest is a regular and popular spot to the city dwellers for early morning and evening jog. It is also a scenic picnic location especially during weekends. The Urban Forest offers public comprehensive parks suitable for all ages, from varieties of children play areas to urban camping and water activities.

The Orchid Garden is responding to the growing number of orchid enthusiasts in Johor Bahru and also supports the annual international orchid fair organised by Johor
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Bahru City Council. The Orchid Garden here houses many type or species of orchids. The overall master plan takes advantage of the site and it existing natural features. The architecture components include management offices, AV rooms, orchid gallery, jewel house, orchid nursery and maintenance building. The watching tower cum water tank offers majestic view of the orchid garden and to the overall park as well as provides glimpses of the city skyline. The following photographs give us an idea about the overall development of the Orchid Garden.



The orchids here are displayed as natural as possible inside and outside the open gallery, as part of the buildings, along the paths and in the wild environment according to their special unique requirement and needs. The architectural solutions must understand and adhere to these special requirements by careful environmental

consideration as demonstrated in the design of various buildings. The buildings provide comfort for public or visitors and permit suitable daylight/sunlight for orchid to perform photosynthesis. For the sensitive hybrid orchid species, they are housed under the special transparent structure called jewel house. Even though the Jewel House is a simple structure but the resultant environmental condition must provide the compulsory daylight level, shelter from rain, and the indoor temperature equivalent to those experienced outdoor.

Taman Merdeka, Majlis Bandaraya Johor Bahru, Johor Bahru.
(Freedom Park, Johor Bahru City Council, Johor Bahru)

Taman Merdeka is the latest public park initiated by the Johor Bahru City Council. It is situated along Jalan Kolam Ayer and Tasek Utara about 1 km from the Urban Forest. The first phase has just been completed and the next phase will begin soon. Total development Taman Merdeka is about 22 hectares. The Merdeka Park is a themed public park designed to reflect the struggle for independent and promote patriotism among the current generation. The following photos taken from the first phase illustrate the mixture of architectural style of Malay and colonial architecture.

The central idea in this public park is to commemorate the important events leading to the independent of the nation and the state of Johor. The important history of the struggle and challenges towards becoming an independent nation is reflected through historical images, reliefs, notes and symbolic expressions. The overall architecture and landscape design reflects the different era or significant events in Johor, thus creating different themes and experience to the public. The careful consideration on the important of site and natural environment make this park design seem fitting within its context even though the architectural styles changes accordingly.

The different eras or timelines towards independent are put into a sequential zone creating a timeline of architectural illustrations of meaningful and easily appreciated chronological historical information. It is historical gathering expressed physically by the consultant group through architecture and landscape in order to share the

moments leading to the independence and indirectly educate the public pictorially with facts and associated ambience.

Taman Merdeka is currently undergoing its second phase of development. When the project is completed it will become a new attraction for the community in Johor Bahru. The project will be important for the young generation to appreciate the struggle of their elders and forefathers in ensuring their country and state now as truly peaceful developing nation.



Conclusion

The public park projects reviewed above focused only on 3 recently completed projects. There are other public projects that the staffs in the faculty have contributed meaningfully to the community inside Johor Bahru or in other districts within the state of Johor. The author hopes that the other projects can be reviewed in the future. This article has illustrated that public park designs as truly reflecting multidisciplinary fields. The final outcomes are environmentally and contextually fitting fading the line between architecture, landscape and nature.

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