Future of built environment

RECONNECT AND RECONCILE: An annual event for young aspiring architects helps them deepen their understanding of the discipline, widen their network and prepare for the working world

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FINAL-year Architecture student Chong Chun Jiat had not enjoyed a good night's sleep in days.

As the programme director of the 24th Architectural Workshop — the recent instalment of the most anticipated event among architecture students in Malaysia — Chong was understandably under immense pressure to perform.

"It was not just me. The entire crew had been working hard and skimping on sleep to make this project a success," says the 24-year-old Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) undergraduate.

Indeed, hosting some 800 participants — from 24 tertiary institutions including Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB) and Universitas Katolik Parahyangan (UNPAR) in Indonesia — was a daunting prospect for an organising committee of only 130 students.

Chong admits that it was all worth it when the six-day affair, organised jointly by UPM Architecture and Design Faculty and Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM), ended on a successful note recently.

Themed PADI — an acronym for Passive Active Design Intervention — it had attempted to "reconnect Architecture students to the root of the discipline" and to "reconcile the differences between passive and active elements of the built environment that trigger polarising changes to the study of architecture".

"The word PADI reflects the Malaysian way of life. It is part of our tradition and a source of sustenance," says Chong.

Bridging the conflict between passive and active designs is crucial as present-day architects' obsession with "building iconic imagery" has resulted in "a loss of architectural sensibility and responsibility".

Chong believes the solution is going back to basics and examining the kind of construction that would truly serve mankind.

"It is important to revisit history and draw inspiration from basic designs as everything we see now had evolved from simpler times and ideas," he adds.

Chong Chun Jiat

Chuah Sock Kean

In keeping with the theme, UPM's Architecture and Design Faculty, the venue for the workshop, was transformed into a festive village with participants as the villagers.

The itinerary was filled with activities designed to promote teamwork, put young designers' creativity to the test, hone their soft skills and open their minds.

"We organised a photography contest in two categories — captured moments and monochromatic — because we know many students enjoy it as a hobby. We think photography encourages people to look at things from different angles," says Chong.

Participants also spent a day in Putrajaya putting themselves in the shoes of the disabled.

"Some were blindfolded and others had to walk with their feet tied to their teammates'. We wanted them to experience the difficulties faced by the physically challenged when moving around places that have no facilities for the disabled," he adds.

Contests and talks were interspersed with performances, karaoke sessions and traditional games, which were aimed at discovering hidden talents among the participants.

The message is that architecture students should live balanced lives by having diverse interests.

Chong believes participants came away with not only an enhanced understanding of their discipline but also new friends.

"Networking is important for students. Architects work in teams. The industry in Malaysia is not that big; we will end up collaborating with each other in the future," he adds.

Muhamad Hakim Muhamad Edris, a final-year Diploma in Architecture

University of Malaya will host the 25th

Clement Cheam

Muhammad Hakim

A drawing on display at the workshop

*The six-day event is filled with activities that put **young designers' creativity** to the test*

student from Kolej Kemahiran Tinggi MARA Pasir Mas, Kelantan enjoyed his time at the workshop.

"I was inspired and impressed with the level of work that some of the students had produced — their technical drawings and presentation skills were excellent. It is a project that students should not miss," says the 21-year-old.

Clement Cheam, a third-year student from UPM, agreed adding that "the interaction with peers from other institutions" is the highlight of the event for him.

"This is the time to share ideas and look at what students from other schools are doing," says Cheam, who is part of the organising committee.

Patriot Negri, a final-year student at ITB, Indonesia was happy to be part of the workshop.

"We had no idea that PADI is a big event. We have forums and conferences for practising architects in Indonesia but nothing like this. We would be happy if we get invited again. We will be better prepared next time," says Patriot, who is in Kuala Lumpur on an exchange programme hosted by University of Malaya (UM).

Christian Chia from UNPAR, Indonesia lauded the organising committee for a job well done.

"It is great that all the universities are here and we get to share our ideas. We definitely need a meeting like this for Architecture students in Asean. This will determine the future direction of the discipline in this region," he says.

Chuah Sock Kean, a final-year student from UPM, considered acquiring

*Contest and talks are interspersed with **performances***

leadership skills as reward for the hard work that she had put as a committee member. "Organising this event is much like being in a project at work. The architect is the team leader who guides the engineers and quantity surveyors in his team. I took my responsibilities as a leader seriously by treating the crew well in order to fulfil the participants' expectations," she says.

As for Chong, his biggest challenge as a programme director was keeping his cool. "Although many of us were functioning on little sleep, we had to remain professional when things went wrong. I can take this experience and apply it to times when I am busy juggling projects and deadlines, and have

to maintain my composure," he says.

Chong and his team can get their well-deserved rest now that the event has ended. But his commitment to the project is far from over.

"We will provide the next host (UM) with feedback on the recent workshop and suggestions on how to improve the 25th series, the same way that UTM (host of the 23rd workshop) had helped us last year," he says.

COVER PICTURE: An award-winning installation and exhibition by UCSI University Architecture students. Pictures courtesy of PADI organising committee and UCSI Architecture and Interior Society.

Architectural Workshop

Evolution of the Architectural Workshop

YEAR	HOST	THEME
1987	UTM	(no theme)
1988	ITM	(no theme)
1989	USM	Past, Present, Future
1990	UTM	Warisan Kita
1991	ITM	Square One
1992	USM	Environment
1993	UTM	Legase
1994	ITM	New Horizon
1995	USM	Realizations
1996	UTM	Eco-Tech
1997	ITM	Symbiosis
1998	USM	1, 2, 3 Univers
1999	UM	Restrospective for Perspective
2000	UTM	Alternative Realities
2001	UiTM	Akar Umbi
2002	USM	Convergence
2003	UM	Urban Ubiquity
2004	UIA	S.O.U.L
2005	UPM	Key T.A.R
2006	UTM	Olympiarch
2007	UIA	Beyond Borders
2008	USM	TranXXit
2009	UiTM	RUMI
2010	UKM	Archustic
2011	UTM	Terang
2012	UPM	PADI
2013	UM	Dualisma

A place to learn from each other

THE Architectural Workshop series was first introduced in 1987 and hosted by Malaysia's oldest architectural school in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM).

The idea came about in the early Eighties after Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM) set up an education unit to promote architectural education in local universities.

The formation of the PAM-Education Liaison Committee, which included representatives from UTM, Universiti Teknologi MARA and Universiti Sains Malaysia, further reinforced the venture.

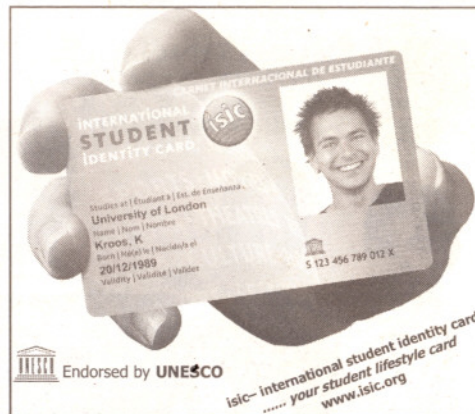The committee met three times a year with each university taking turns to host the meeting.

These then inspired the committee to organise a student jamboree with the aim of fostering closer ties between members of the architectural community.

After holding the first three workshops in six months' intervals, it was made into an annual event which would also become the congregation venue for the PAM-Liaison Committee.

Today, the workshop has been held 24 times and hosted by seven universities, reflecting the rising number of architecture schools nationwide.

Over the past two decades the architectural workshop has evolved into a platform for knowledge exchange; shaping views on various issues; networking between students and industry leaders; and honing soft skills such as nurturing self-confidence, creativity, communication and organisational skills among students before they join the workforce.

Programme director for the recently concluded 24th Architectural Workshop Chong Chun Jiat says: "It is good exposure for the participants as many of them are in their first year. It is a place for them to mingle and see how their peers design or present their works, exhibition and installation. Here, juniors and seniors can learn from each other."