Kamunting Park as Green Magnet: Engaging Nature Through Park Activities

Noorizan Mohamed, Suhardi Maulan & Asraf Abdul Rahman

(Student: Alex Tan Chee Cheat, Bong Pei Jun, Chong Fei Pon & Syarifah 'Ainan Al Qadree)

Introduction

It is acknowledged that public parks offer countless value to the people and to the country. Exposure to nature in parks, gardens and natural areas is said to improve psychological and social health through rapid recovery for patients, better concentration on school work for children who suffer from attention deficit disorder (ADD), as well as reduction in mental fatigue for residents in housing projects with views of trees (Gies, Erica, 2006). Parks and green spaces help to provide numerous direct and indirect contributions to people's prosperity, well-being, social relations, and daily life experience (Abdul Aziz, N.A., 2012). However, despite the many uncounted benefits of parks and green spaces, we sometimes may take this for granted and thus resulting in many parks being underutilized or being abandoned and victimized through vandalism. It is therefore pertinent for park managers to understand factors that constraint people's use of park amenities in order to manage the parks well and subsequently to increase participation or visitation.

Currently, there is a fairly large body of research about the factors that constraint people's use of park amenities (Crompton & Kim, 2004; Mowen, Payne, and Scott, 2005; Scott, 2002). Nevertheless it is also important and crucial for park managers and designers especially landscape architects to understand the site or the natural environment structural constraints, as termed by White and Bustam (2010). The need to link these constraints during designing and implementation stage is crucial in order to ensure the parks will be constantly used and visited by the people or the surrounding communities.

It is a tall order for designers especially landscape architects to apply a multidisciplinary knowledge and expertise in mitigating the constraints of a park socially and physically. This is because parks have values which are based on a transactional concept of human-landscape relationships (Zube, 1987), where in a landscape humans are the main active participants who attribute values to specific places. Among the important values of park identified by Brown (2008) are scenic quality, recreation, natural, development/economic, social/cultural, wildlife, environmental quality, and future. Ideally a park should be developed based on these eight values identified. Certain features of parks including accessibility, proximity, well-designed and well maintained parks foresee greater attraction and use for physical activities (Frumkin, 2003).

The theory of island biogeography stated by Brown (2008) emphasizes that the size of parks and distance from human habitats influence the distribution of human values associated with urban parks particularly on the diversity of plant and animal species. Therefore in order to attract people and encourage visits to park, the location must be strategic and closer to the people/ communities, on the condition that the park should be facilitated with natural setting with high diversity of plant and animal species. Incorporating natural elements (as a strategy) into a park or recreational environment is fundamental. This is due to their restorative character as well as other important benefits related to natural landscapes as discussed

by many researchers dealing with health and psychological well-being of human (Cooper Marcus & Barnes, 1999; Ulrich, Roger S., 1981; Chang et al., 2007; Lee, K.F., 2011). It is therefore pertinent that designers, landscape architects, and park managers to go to a great length to make sure that the park they developed and maintained is welcoming and inspiring to the broadest range of people.

Project brief / Client requirement

Taman Awam Kamunting Fasa 2 (Kamunting Public Park Phase 2) funded by *Jabatan Landskap Negara* (JLN) is the latest edition of public/community park in Taiping-Larut Matang District of Perak. This allocated recreational area is to be well-equipped with facilities and amenities targeted to attract more people to Kamunting District. In doing so, it could ease congestion and overcrowding in the Taman Tasik Taiping, a well-known and popular destination for both locals and tourists.

A former tin mining site, Taman Awam Kamunting is an ideal park due to its location and accessibility from various important points of Taiping such as Taman Tasik Taiping, the Town Center, historical buildings, as well as the surrounding amenities including Kompleks Rakan Muda and Bukit Jana Golf and Country Club. In addition, the development of park is to cater the needs of over 100,000 people living in the vicinity. Despite having good accessibility and attractive scenery (looking towards Bukit Larut), Taman Awam Kamunting has some site constraints and potentials such as flood, high water table and invasive species. The Wetlands are the biggest potential of Taman Awam Kemunting. From a total area of 10.5 hectares (26 acres), 2.8 hectares (7 acres) comprise of water bodies which are unfortunately covered by aquatic plants such as Salvinamolesta and Nelumbonicifera (Figure 1 & 2).

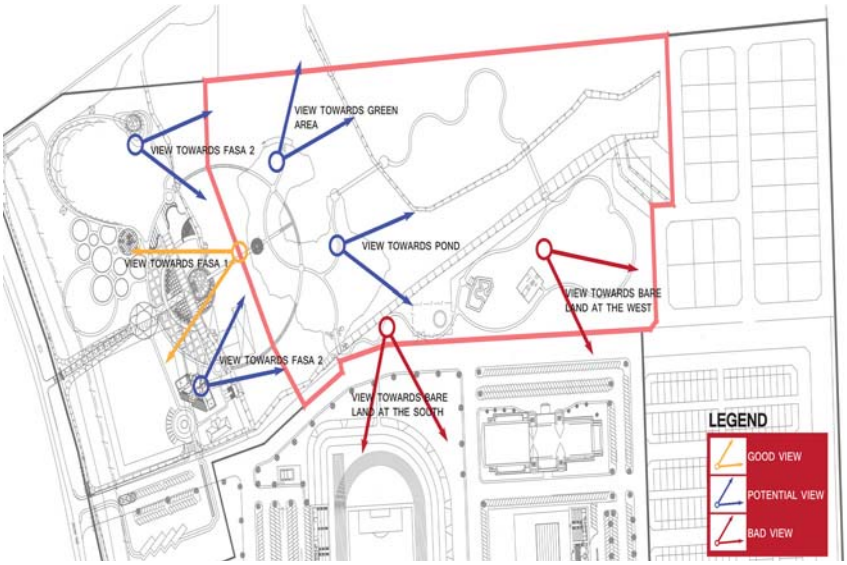

Figure 1: Visual Analysis of the site.

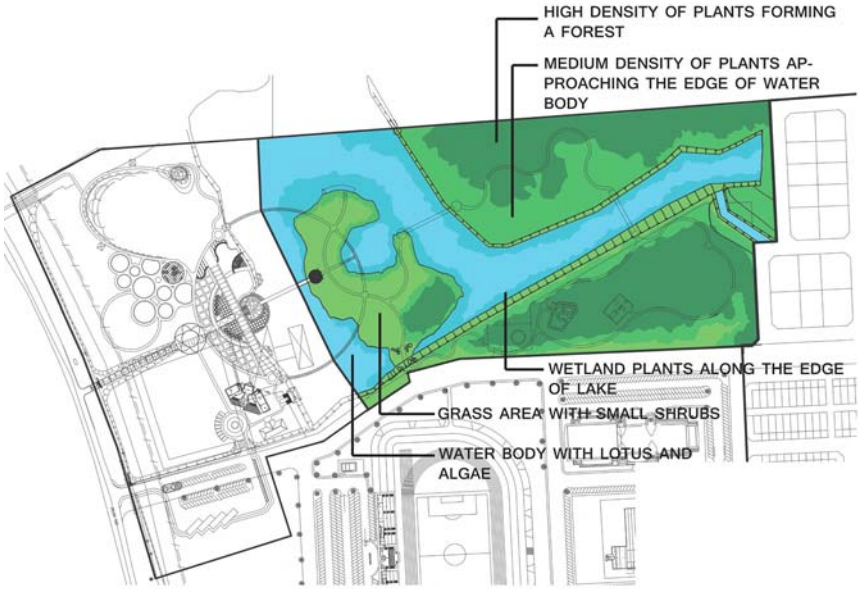

Figure 2: Vegetation analysis.

This uncontrolled growth of aquatic plants caused negative effects to the water quality and other aquatic faunas. Besides, the wetland ecosystem that exists on site also attracts many species of migratory birds to the area. Thus the development of Taman Awam Kamunting needs to be handled with great sensitivity and care so as to protect the flora and fauna that are already exist on site. At the same time, the development should meet the public demand for recreation that fulfils social, psychological and physical benefits (Figure 3).

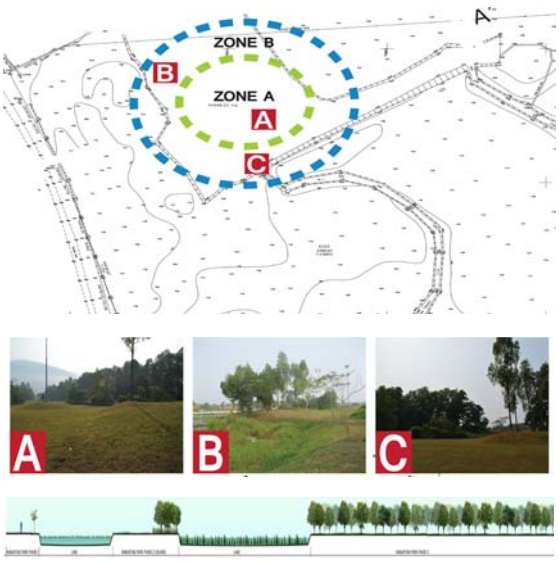

Figure 3: Land profile analysis.

Background

The course involves medium scale landscape projects for various public uses emphasizing on site planning for institutional areas, public parks and resorts. The objectives focus on analysis and planning and design of landscaped spaces in order to solve site planning problems as well as to train students to present and communicate their ideas professionally.

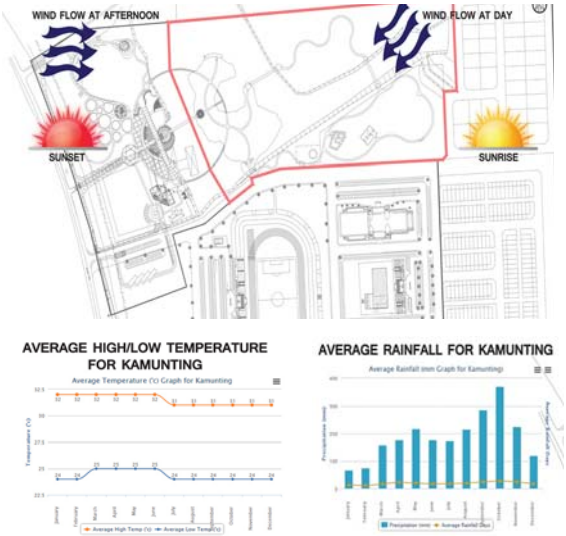

Figure 4: Microclimate analysis

A site visit to Taiping was conducted and the students visited the project site to carry out site reconnaissance and interview the park users. A briefing from two officers from *Majlis Perbandaran Taiping* was held on site in order to get clearer understanding about the project and requirement by the client. Inventory and analysis plans were produced as group effort while the rest of the plans (synthesis, conceptual, and master plan) were individually prepared according to the student's own idea and creativity. Finally, plan for selected detail area was also presented (Figure 4 & 5).

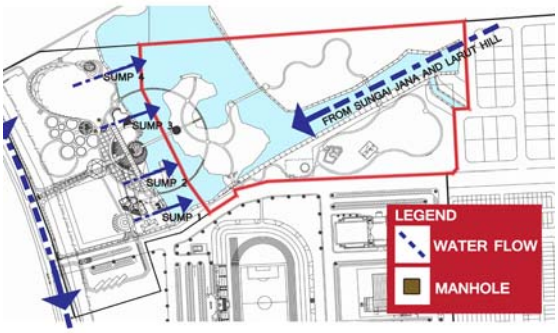

Figure 5: Hydrology system analysis.

Design Solution

Four artefacts for the development of Kamunting Park, Taiping (Phase 2) were chosen as case studies. They are the works on:-

i) Rejuvenating Through Senses (by Alex Tan Chee Cheat)

From the concept Rejuvenating Through Senses Alex past his idea on enhancing activities through elements from 5 different senses i.e. visual, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. The design's objectives emphasizes to emphasize on the rehabilitation, restoration and revitalization of environment using organic forms and shapes in order to create a natural ambience while improving quality of life for the communities surrounding the park (Figure 6-8).

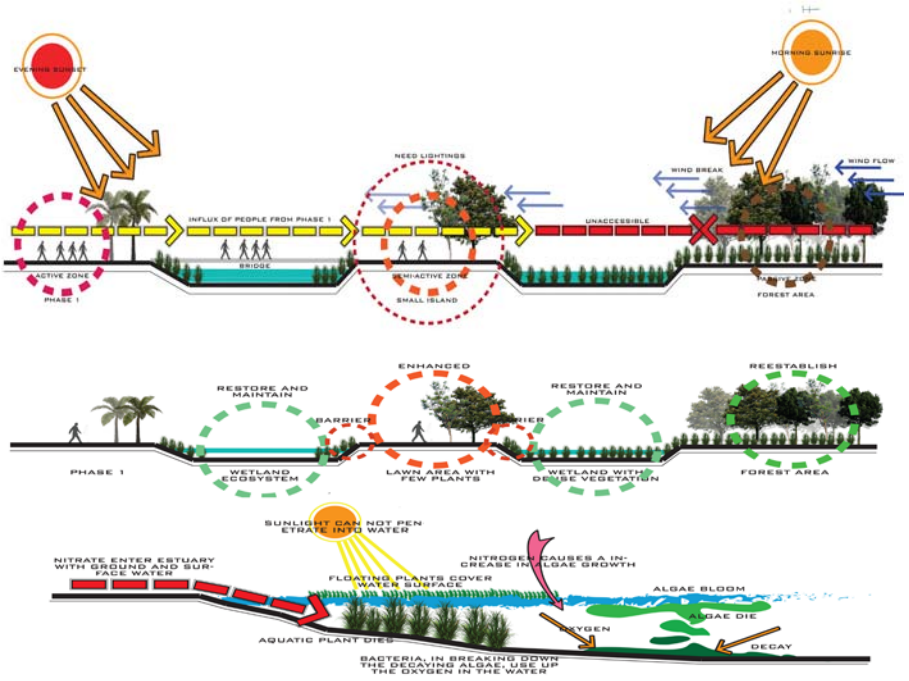

Figure 6: Detail analysis by Alex Tan Chee Cheat.

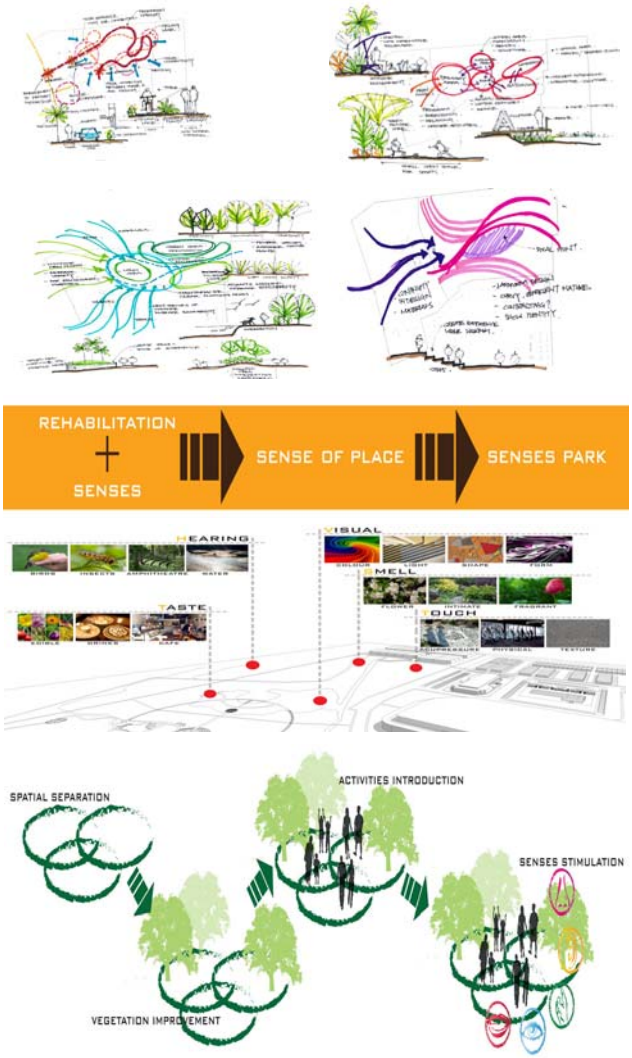

Figure 7: Idea Development by Alex Tan Chee Cheat.

Figure 8: Master Plan by Alex Tan Chee Cheat.

ii) Replica of Nature (by Bong Pei Jun)
Meanwhile Replica of Nature proposed by Pei Jun emphasizes on the use of green infrastructure and green technology in creating and providing activities for families and community at large. It is the student's intention to enhance the naturalistic style community park for the people to appreciate nature and green environment while enjoying their activities (FIgure 9-10)

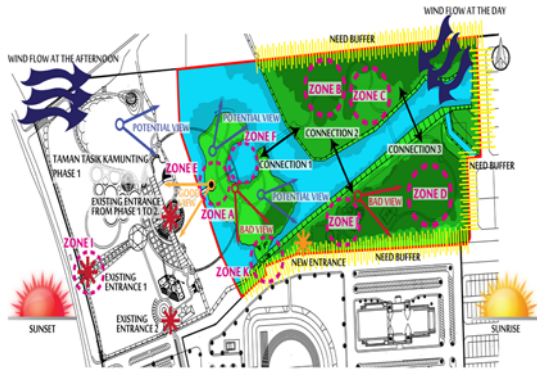

Figure 9: Detail site analysis by Bong Pei Jun

Figure 10: Master Plan by Bong Pei Jun

iii)**Seamless Integration** (by Chong Fei Po w)
Using the concept Seamless Integration Fei Pow's proposal tried to bring together principles of holism, continuity and variety with low impact to the environment. Her design emphasizes on engaging variety of activities, uniting ecological and human needs as well as creating a continuous visual and natural experience through restoration of the wetland system. It also focuses on strengthening the connections between the park, the surrounding environment and the community (Figure 11-13).

Figure 11: Idea and Concept by Chong Fei Pow

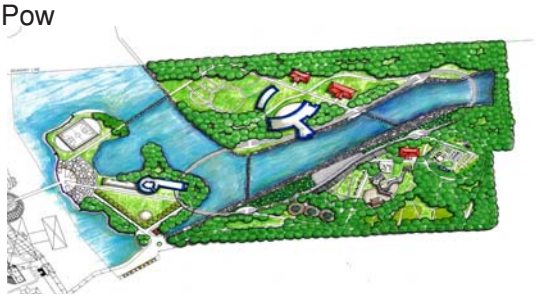

Figure 12. Master plan by Chong Fei Pow

Figure 13: Sections by Chong Fei Pow

iv) **Retreat** (by Sharifah Ainan AlQadree)
The idea from Retreat proposed by Ainan was to portray the multifunctional potential of spaces at Kamunting Park for human activities and outdoor living areas. The division of spaces created should serve as an antidote for decreasing anxiety and personal daily life stress of the users by means of peaceful, tranquil and scenic nature environment (Figure 14-16).

Figure 14: Master Plan by Sharifah 'Ainan Al Qadree

Figure 15: Landscape visualizations by Sharifah 'Ainan Alqadree

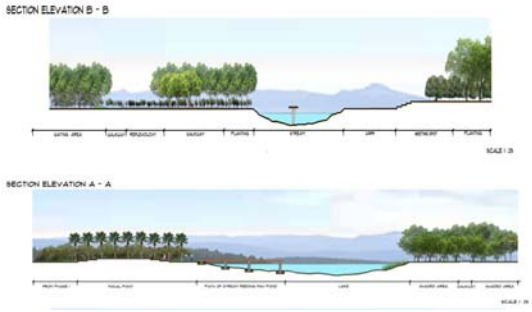

Figure 16: Section elevation by Sharifah 'Ainan Al Qadree

Conclusion

In general, the students have shown good understanding on the site issues and constraints, and each one of them managed to address the problems using different approaches based on his/her sensitivity and creativity. Students have shown attempts to include scenic quality, recreation, natural, development/economic,social/cultural, wildlife, environmental quality, accessibility, proximity, maintenance and use for physical activities as suggested by experts (Brown, 2008 and Frumkin, 2003). The design of Kamunting Park demands greater understanding on the socio-biological and technological factors that require inputs from many sectors of relevant agencies, which could not be fully incorporated in the study. Nevertheless the students have tried their very best to come up with creative solutions thus far using as much natural elements as their main strategies, yet they may not necessarily be practical to be implemented due to weaknesses detected in species selection and other technicalities. The idea of developing Kamunting Park as another equitable attraction to Taiping should be highly commendable and accessibility to the green space helps shape opportunities for use as intended by the project.

References

Abdul Aziz, N.A. (2012). Green Space Use and Management in Malaysia. A Thesis submitted to the University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Brown, Gregory (2008). A Theory of Urban Park Geography. J. of Leisure Research, Fall, Vol.40, No.4.

Chang, C.Y. et al. (2007). Psychological Responses and Restorative Values of Wilderness Environments. USDA Forest Service Proceedings, pg.479-484

Cooper Marcus, C., and M. Barnes (1999). Healing Gardens. New York. John Wiley & Sons.

Crompton, J.L. and S. Kim (2004). Temporal Changes in Perceived Constraints to Visiting State Parks.J. of Leisure Research,36(2):160-182.

Frumkin, Howard (2003). Healthy Places: Exploring the Evidence. Am. Journal of Public Health, Vol. 93, No.9 (Sept).

Gies, Erica (2006). The Health Benefits of Parks. The Trust for Public Land, California.

Jackson, E.L. and E. Dunn (1988).Integrating Ceasing Participation with Other Aspects of Leisure Behaviours.J. of Leisure Research, 20:31-45.

Lee, K.F. (2011). The role of Outdoor Recreation in Promoting Human Health.J. of Park and Recreation Administration, Vol.9, Issue1.

Mowen, A.J., Payne L.L. and Scott D. (2005). Change and Stability in Leisure Constraints Revisited. J. of Leisure Sciences, 27(2), 191-204.

Scott, D. and Munson, W. (1995).Social Roles and Leisure Constraints. Papers presented at the 10th. Canadian Congress on Leisure Research, Canada.

Ulrich, Roger S. (1984). View Through A Window May Influence Recovery From Surgery. Sciences, 224: 420-421.

White, H.R. and Bustam, T.D. (2010).Using Leisure Constraints Research to Inform Outdoor Recreation Research and Natural Resource Management Decisions. Park Break Perspectives,No.5, 1-10.

Zube, E.H. (1987). Perceived Land Use Patterns and Landscape Values. Landscape Ecology, 1, 37-45.