

Sparking new urban space designs

Landscape experts share ideas on creating green areas that connect people and inspire creativity

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IT ALWAYS takes a spark for the best ideas.

Hence, the inaugural Spark – International Landscape Architecture Dialogue, where key leaders from the built environment industry gathered to discuss innovative design solutions in landscape architecture.

It was organised by the Institute of Landscape Architects Malaysia (Ilam) as part of DBKL's Kuala Lumpur Design Month 2017, which started three years ago to celebrate the best of design industry in Malaysia.

The word Spark, in this context, comes from a combination of "Space" and "Park".

Themed "Creating Space, Connecting People", the two-day dialogue focused on how industry stakeholders can create space that is not only aesthetically designed but also multi-functional which brings people together.

As it is, there are limited spaces in urban areas, so it is important to find ways to create and integrate them, said Ilam president Assoc Prof Dr Osman Mohd Tahir.

"We also need to create connectors such as pedestrian and bicycle lanes to connect people from one space to the other," he explained.

Looking at the trend now, Dr Osman said people were no longer talking about just parks and green spaces but place attachments – the emotional bond between a place and the people.

"The green spaces also need to inspire creativity, reduce urban stress, increase people's well-being, be used for community building as well as flourish economically," he stressed, adding that urban farming was also an upcoming trend.

Dr Osman compared the cultural landscape and greeneries of Kuala Lumpur between the 1970s and now, in which the city has grown into a concrete jungle.

"As a result, there will be greater pollution, an increase in climate change, escalating food scarcity and lack of space.

"Therefore, we need to constantly strategise and develop new initiatives, guidelines and policies to ensure a conducive and sustainable living," he said.

He also said Malaysians were more aware and appreciated the importance of having green spaces.

"The next step now is to

address what needs to be done."

Officiating at the opening ceremony held at Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM) Centre was Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) project implementation and building maintenance department deputy director Sharifah Junidah Syed Omar.

"Kuala Lumpur is fast developing and we must set the future plan for our landscape and cityscape together.

"Compared to the past, now most places are bringing nature back into their cities, and thus becoming cities within parks.

"We have to go green for the sake of sustainability, the environment, our health and the future generation.

"Kuala Lumpur City Hall acknowledges this and in fact, requires landscape design plans to be submitted and approved before any development order can be granted," she said.

Sharifah Junidah, who represented Kuala Lumpur mayor Tan Sri Mohd Amin Nordin Abd Aziz, also commended Spark as being the right move and crucial in the development as it was a platform for new ideas and the learning of new practices.

Guests also had the honour of listening to keynote speaker Netherlands ambassador to Malaysia Karin Mossenlechner sharing interesting insights into how the city of Amsterdam became one of the world's most pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly cities.

The Spark dialogue featured sharing sessions and panel discussions with local and international experts, documentary screening as well as a walking tour called "Hipster Walk" which explored trendy spaces designed for urbanites.

The final part of the conference called "Brain Spark Session" saw participants from various professionals discussing challenges in the industry and exploring solutions on making an ideal city of tomorrow.

The session revolved around the 10 strategic focus areas of the Landscape Architecture Agenda (LAA) 2050, including best practice, resource management, experiences and needs, conducive living, economic return, technology and system, and security and safety.

LAA 2050 is a 30-year agenda that aims to be the pillar for the landscape architecture industry in Malaysia as it moves towards becoming a truly sustainable green city.



(From left) Sharifah Junidah, Dr Osman and Mossenlechner officiating at the inaugural Spark - International Landscape Architecture Dialogue.



Dialogue participants viewing one of several trendy spaces designed for urbanites during a walking tour called 'Hipster Walk'.