"The Malay Garden" is "The Malaysian Garden (MGC)": The Reality and Challenges of Establishing a National Identity

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Abstract--- *The Malaysian Garden Concept (MGC) is an initiative by the National Landscape Department (NLD) to develop a garden concept that will one day achieve its fame, as the garden concepts are well known today. A comparative study was to determine the level of MGC criteria applies to public parks built by the NLD. The selected case studies were from a public park built after the MGC guidelines established in 2009 (n = 6). 5 MGC experts were interviewed in this study to confirm the issues raised. For the record, planning to create these guidelines took a long time and involved various parties associated with the profession of Landscape Architect. The methodology of the study using observation and interview techniques (selected through criterion sampling method). From the research conducted, researchers have found that the level of compliance with the MGC guidelines is worrisome, and possibly no effort to uphold this concept by the responsible party. There are 3 criteria that hard to be implemented by most of these public parks are Architectural structure & local elements; Culture & Heritage; and High Intrinsic Value. This research has shown that it is not easy to apply a "heritage & culture" principles in landscape design, especially to a multiracial and multicultural country like Malaysia.*

Keywords--- *Malaysian Garden Concept, Public Park, Taman Malaysia, Heritage Design, Sense of Place.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The introduction of MGC guidelines in 2009 has shocked the landscape architecture industry in Malaysia. The industry players still do not understand how to implement such a project. They were more exposed to other popular landscape design concepts of the time. As a result, the concept did not attract designers, and the NLD has no follow-up initiative to develop it. This scenario has been exacerbated by academics who have not sought to study and criticize the MGC guidelines for future benefit. Finally, these MGC guidelines are forgotten, and they are proven by what will be reported in this study. Before we go any further into the problems that led to the MGC's disappearance, the researchers will introduce some of the relevant terms in this study. The unique features of one place make it even more impressive than anywhere else. They are integrating landscape elements such as physical, biological, and sociological, as well as other elements that form an image to a place (NLD, 2012).

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1) Cultural Landscape

According to Plieninger & Bieling (2012), the cultural landscape emphasizes the interaction, with frequent shifts, between nature and human activities. Knowledge of cultural landscape studies is enormous; in the context of this study, a public park design was found to be more responsive to the needs and activities of consumers. Contrary to the meaning of the cultural landscape in general, the landscape in the house compounds displays varying forms of identity, homogeneity, diversity, symbiosis and ethical norms, and thus qualifies as a cultural landscape (Christine, 2007). Today, in many fields/professions, the term cultural landscape was gradually adopted, and the terminology of environmental management was used (Jones, 2003). People do different things to fulfill their needs on the *"physical environment"*. Groups of people change the landscape at different times at various places (Zakaria et al., 2015). From the definitions given by previous researchers, it can be concluded that the construction of a public park that characterizes the way of life of the local community is essential and will be carried out indefinitely.

2) Visual Design

As stated in Bell (2004), people participate in the systematic aesthetic reaction from the first sensory encounters with a new environment and try to understand its structuring and composition as part of it. A public park user will always evaluate something that has been exhibited in various aspects, and it is often a matter of interest. However, it is exceptionally subjective because human desires are different from one another. A rational/typical/modern approach in the landscape aesthetic quality evaluation to the objective-subjective dispute is to appreciate that quality depends on the characteristics and interpretation/experience of the landscape that these features elicit in human viewers (Daniel, 2001). It is a priority for any design of the park to make an impact on various aspects that could eventually provide memories and identity of the place to the users. Referring to Tveit et al. (2006), the visual concept of *"imageability"* is known by various terms such as the Sense of place, Genius loci, Grandness, Place identity, Vividness, and Uniqueness.

3) Genius Loci / Sense of Place

To the majority, the sense of place is precious and distinctive, and the tendency of people to develop close emotional relations with a place is highlighted (William & Steward, 1998). Showcasing something that is out of the ordinary and being able to give a newfound knowledge to outsiders will make that place very special. According to Jorgensen & Stedman (2001), the sense of place as a multidimensional construct consisting of: (1) identity (believes about self-location); (2) Attachment (emotional attachment to place); and (3) Dependency, to what degree the location with other places is viewed as underpinning actions. How to make local people and outsiders more appreciative of the existence and potential of a place is a bit complicated. Hay (2009) stated that in an interpretive approach, sense of place had been explored in order to study how it develops, how it differs culturally among modern and indigenous peoples, and how it evolves across various contexts (home and surrounding areas, family, community and culture).

4) Malaysian Garden and Malay Garden

Conflict with the two concepts never abated, despite the existence of these guidelines. It looks like something similar, but its role is different. The establishment of the Malaysian Garden concept (MGC) is one of the efforts made by the National Landscape Department (NLD) to create a garden concept, which embodies the identity and image of

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Malaysia (NLD, 2009). According to Zakaria et al. (2019a), the Malay Garden identity must be pursued in order to fully grasp the definition of the Malaysian Garden concept (MGC). The vibrant statement by Abu Bakar (2012) telling us that a consensus has been reached where the characteristics/concept of the Malaysian landscape must be based on the parameters of the Malay Landscape definition, and it was accepted in 2007 by the National Landscape Department (NLD). The Malay garden concept is based on the culture of the Malays; however, no consensus has been reached on how making this concept more systematically and practical (Zakaria et al., 2017). Application of the *"Malay Garden"* elements as identity and image is a must in design. The issue is we do not know whether the *"Malay Garden"* concept exists nowadays (Zakaria et al., 2019b). An inability to incorporate the MGC model nowadays triggered using elements of the *"Malay Garden"* concept? The question is often raised because Malaysia is a country populated by multiracial people, and rich in its ethnic culture.

5) Public Park

Referring to Department of Town and Country Planning Peninsular Malaysia (2013), the *"Open spaces"* is a land that has been reserved, in whole or in part, like a garden, public park, sports, and recreational park, leisure, public footpath, or otherwise as a public place. *"Park"* is a term used commonly for open spaces. The specific definition given to open space is that of an area of land set aside for leisure, and the presence of such open areas offers an aesthetic pleasure (Abu Bakar, 2002). *"Public park"* refers to an area or part of an area devoted to public recreational purposes, has been designated by any Federal/state government or local authority, whether or not that usage is limited to specific times or days, including land which has been leased, reserved, or kept open to the public because of that usage (Law Insider, n.d.). Public parks have been used as a tool for the well-being of the people besides health factors. It can be designed with any developmental concept, but a designer should take this opportunity to highlight the uniqueness of the local community with hardscape and softscape elements.

II. METHODOLOGY

The empirical study has been planned and prepared to reach the research objective. The research employed a *"Perception-based approach"*. Perception-based assessments typically reach high-reliability rates. The internal reliability of landscape aesthetic quality measures based on small to moderate groups of observers/judges (5-30 peoples) was consistently very significant, according to visual landscape quality experts (Daniel, 2001). For further research, both basic and applied, the same framework is required. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that fundamental and practical research cannot be isolated, and empirical work should be focused on a clear and logical theory (Zube et al., 1982).

1) Sample

Researchers have selected 6 of the 20 public parks built by the NLD after the existence of MGC guidelines. Interviews were conducted with a "semi-structured in-depth" method, and the questionnaire was "open-ended" in order to give respondents more freedom to answer. The selected respondents were 5 of the 21 experts appointed by the NLD to produce the MGC guidelines. The selection criteria established by the researchers is a public park that was built 5 years before this study. Meaning that all selected public parks are newly built, using NLD allocation funds. For the

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respondents, the researchers take into account the scope of their employment, namely academics, consultants, contractors, and decision-makers. The public parks selected in this study are (1) *Ujana Muallim, Tanjung Malim*, (2) *Ujana Perbandaran Bandar Puteri Jaya, Sungai Petani,* (3) *Taman Tasik Temoh, Tapah,* (4) *Ujana Peremba, Alor Setar,* (5) *Taman Awam Nilai, Negeri Sembilan* dan (6) *Taman Tasik Kamunting, Taiping*.

2) Tool

The data analysis method was created with the help of NVIVO12 software (an application that is commonly used in qualitative research). Researchers have used the Landscape Perception Model (LPM) by Zube et al. (1982) as a guide to obtaining information and analyzing data. The LPM is seen as a method of human and landscape interaction in terms of assumptions regarding and contributions to the 3 elements of the model that are: (i) concepts of the human, (ii) landscape properties, and (iii) interaction outcomes (refer to Figure 1).

III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

There are 6 public parks that researchers have studied. As a result of this study, researchers have reported in 3 stages: observation results, the MGC expert's view, and the relevance of LPM in this study. Information on observational studies can be found in Figure 1. The results show that none of these public parks are fully compliant with MGC criteria. 3 of the public parks are in the *'Neutral'* category. This neutral category does not mean better in design, and this is because it does not indicate the use of MGC criteria. The remaining 3 public parks show the least compliance. Even more shocking was that the *"Ujana Muallim",* which is the public park that completed its project in 2019, was at its lowest. Credit should be given to the *"Taman Tasik Kamunting"* as it has the highest score of 25. The park was at the top of the list, not surprising to researchers as it was built during the peak period of the issuance of MGC guidelines in 2009. Researchers are also not surprised that the *"Ujana Muallim"* became the least public park to meet the criteria as its development is beyond the peak of MGC's implementation. As previously noted, there are 3 most difficult criteria to comply, namely: *"Architectural structure & local elements"; "Culture & Heritage"*; and *"High Intrinsic Value".* From the researchers' point of view, the reason for the 3 criteria cannot be met because they relate to the cultural aspects of the Malay community. It has been previously discussed that Malaysia is a multiracial country. The issue of acceptance of a design that is biased to one race (primarily when associated with the Malay culture) is a significant problem and always exaggerated. Although Malaysian are aware of the status of the Malays are the majority and the natives of this country, but racist attitudes and lack of tolerance among the races have reduced the racial harmony. This negative attitude is still not disposed of by other races in Malaysia (note: not all, some agree but less).

Table 1: The level of compliance with the MGC criteria to NLD-funded public parks

No.	Garden Project (Parks Development after the existence of MGC)	The Malaysian Garden Criteria								Total (Point)	Status
		(1) Genius Loci	(2) Local Plants	(3) Architectural structure & local elements	(4) Culture & Heritage	(5) High Intrinsic Value	(6) Local Weather Compatibility	(7) Elements of Security	(8) Manageable & Comfortable		

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1	Ujana Muallim, Tanjung Malim (2019)	ED (4)	H (3)	X (0)	X (0)	X (0)	ED (5)	H (2)	H (2)	16	Weak
2	Ujana Perbandaran Bandar Puteri Jaya, Sungai Petani (2018)	ED (4)	H (3)	X (0)	X (0)	X (0)	ED (5)	ED (5)	ED (4)	21	Neutral
3	Taman Tasik Temoh, Tapah (2017)	ED (4)	H (3)	X (0)	X (0)	X (0)	ED (5)	H (2)	H (3)	17	Weak
4	Ujana Peremba, Alor Setar (2016)	ED (4)	H (3)	X (0)	X (0)	X (0)	ED (5)	H (3)	H (2)	17	Weak
5	Taman Awam Nilai, Negeri Sembilan (2010)	ED (4)	H (3)	H (1)	X (0)	X (0)	ED (5)	H (3)	ED (4)	20	Neutral
6	Taman Tasik Kamunting, Taiping (2010)	ED (4)	H (3)	H (3)	H (3)	H (2)	ED (5)	H (3)	H (2)	25	Neutral

The scale as shown in Table 2 was used in the above assessments. The researchers developed these indicators, considering the validity of the on-site assessment.

Table 2: Indicators to assess the use of MGC criteria

Point	Level
36 - 40	Follows
32 - 35	A bit follows
20 - 31.6	Neutral
12 - 19	Weak
0 - 11	Not follow

Description	Value	Symbol
It's there and dominant	4-5	ED
It's there, but a bit	1-3	H
None	0	X

Experts have asked to clarify the problem that has been stated in the observation stage. At this stage, researchers have asked questions based on observations made. All respondents gave various reactions. They responded by using their expertise, knowledge, industry experience, and their observations on the current scenario of the landscape industry in Malaysia.

Respondent A pointed out that, *"Indeed, those racial problems are sensitive, since the days before independence and today these are the boiling issues"* (translated). The respondent acknowledged that racism is not something new in Malaysia. It has always been a significant issue that had become a significant issue for Malaysian political parties. It is the saddest thing in building a nation.

Respondent B argues, *"I do not completely agree with these guidelines, because, as I said, we must create a process that everyone should accept. If we look at this country, it has a plurality of people"* (translated). The respondent also recognized that there were issues of equality of rights in Malaysia. The respondent believed that this issue could be resolved if there were guidelines that were not biased toward any race. It should serve as a guideline for the development of public parks for Malaysians as a whole.

Respondent C expresses opinions, *"In my view, our strength is, we can get many ideas from different races. However, the strength we have is also the weakest. It is because, in so many races and lifestyles or religions, we become*

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confused, so confuse how we want to bring out an identity that everyone loves. So, that is the biggest challenge" (translated). Respondent C highlights that our country is multiracial and indirectly, this is its strength. However, that strength can be a weakness if we do not manage it. In design, Respondent C said we could not satisfy everyone and our users. The researchers strongly agree with Respondent C's view, that in order to establish the identity of an area, we need a high degree of focus. Designers cannot design a public park with a mixed element (*'rojak'* in the Malay language), and ultimately cause users to be confused with the design.

Respondent D reminds us, *"We think this way, it is about trust. When we talk about trust, we talk about religion. When a person is different in religion, his or her beliefs will also be different. So, but as we look at the whole thing, what makes us different from the rest of the world is the Malay Garden concept"* (translated). Respondent D stated that the factors of belief and religion make us different. The difference is noticeable. If we want to give the most straightforward example is, the Malays in Malaysia are Muslims, so in landscape design cannot show anything that resembles a sculpture of worship. In contrast, the Malay community in Bali, Indonesia, is a Hindu. The Malay community in Bali uses its religious factor to be part of the landscape elements.

Respondent E consistently indicates, *"Yeah, that is one I get to that. I think that is the thing. Racism is perhaps a thing that we put on one side. Nevertheless, I do not think, as a Malays, we can say it. I do not think it can say it is just wrong or mistaken"* (translated). Respondent E also believes that racism exists, and we must believe it does. As researchers have stated before, it is not easy for us to create a guideline for everyone to use in the name of Malaysia. Various considerations need to be considered, and the firmness of the responsible parties is very desirable, in order to implement the MGC criteria in public parks.

The LPM Model has been the main source of evaluation in these public parks (refer to Figure 1). From the figure, there are 2 paradigms that have been studied in this evaluation; (1) MGC Experts, and (2) Cognitive or researchers. However, according to Zube (1990), there are 4 paradigms namely 'expert', 'psycho-physical', 'cognitive' and 'experiential' [21]. The information to be conveyed through the diagram below is (i) both categories of evaluators have expressed their opinions in different contexts, and (ii) all this information is complementary. From this information, it can be concluded that a good landscape design needs to be translated into what the *'function'* of the park will be. Indirectly, it will create *'meaning (symbol)'* or *'value (quality)'* in the design of the park. Failure to translate the MGC criteria into the design will make a public park worthless to local and consumer alike.
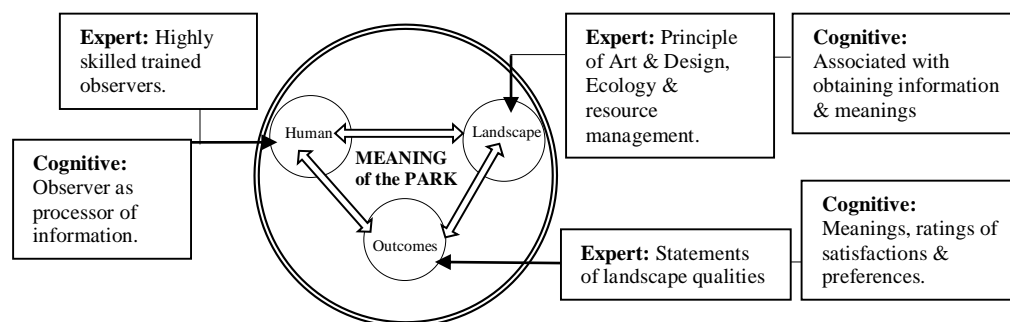
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Figure 1: Model of landscape perception (LPM) adapted from Zube et al. (1982)

IV. DISCUSSION

From the research that has been conducted, the researchers have found that using the LPM Model can help a researcher to explore and evaluate their subject more professionally. As reported by Zakaria et al. (2020), the socially responsible, knowledge, and understanding are the key factors in the assessment using the observation method. In conducting observational studies, a researcher should reduce bias. Biased factors often occur through everyday experiences and workplaces that make them more aware and sensitive to issues. In this study, as discussed in the *Results and Analysis* section, the use of the LPM Model has prompted researchers to use MGC experts to evaluate the reliability of the issues raised from this project. Researchers have used *Cohen Kappa's Analytical Reliability*, and it is intended to determine the degree of agreement analysis unit with the theme being studied.

Based on the discussion, the Cohen Kappa Index analysis can help the authors identify the reliability of the data obtained from the study. A total of 21-unit issues of MGC existence were discussed in each interview. After calculating the levels of agreement for all 5 experts, the researchers obtained a Cohen Kappa coefficient index of *"0.619",* which is on a *"substantial"* scale. The value of the Cohen Kappa coefficient index obtained shows that the issues raised by the researcher are applicable. Although these values do not show very good results (mid-scale: refer to Table 3), it still shows the importance of this study. This result occurred when one of the MGC experts expressed dissatisfaction with the criteria agreed upon and was approved by the NLD. However, four (4) others were found to agree with this criterion, though not wholly.

Table 3: The relative strength of agreement associated with Kappa Statistic (Landis, & Kosh, 1977)

Kappa Statistic	Strength of Agreement
< 0.00	Poor
0.00 – 0.20	Slight
0.21 – 0.40	Fair
0.41 – 0.60	Moderate
0.61 – 0.80	**Substantial**
0.81 – 1.00	Almost Perfect / Perfect

The results of this study are fascinating because they are likened to (the Malay Proverbs*) "Rumah sudah siap, tetapi pahat masih berbunyi"* which means "feeling dissatisfied or complaining after work is done because the work that has completed is not perfect." However, as described in the previous chapter, indeed, the racism factor has been agreed upon by all respondents. Besides, there are other factors such as the influence of the Malay Garden concept in the MGC, the *"Malaysian Garden"* style, advertising, and marketing are essential in introducing a product, and the MGC is an *"issue"* (there are two views both negative and positive). These issues have been discussed in the paper of Mohd Tahir & Kaboudarahangi (2014). The authors conclude *that "Malaysia faces economic, social, cultural, and political challenges in the pursuit of developing its own garden identity."* From the report can be concluded that there was an issue of equality among members of society in Malaysia in the early stages of implementing the MGC. Note: Researchers will not discuss these factors in detail, as they will be discussed in another paper.

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V. CONCLUSION

The importance of this study is to prove the failure of the initiative of the NLD, which started in 1997. The investigation took place smoothly except time-consuming, thus usually restricted to a small number of individuals. All key informants answered questions and provided good cooperation throughout the interview. As stated at the beginning of this article, the researchers used 8 MGC criteria as a guide to the site observations. The researchers found that 3 criteria could not be translated into the landscape design. Subsequently, to gain assurance, the researchers interviewed key informants consisting of MGC experts. From this interview, the researchers raised several issues such as definition, design, jurisdiction (enforcement), current issues, and methods of promoting and marketing. There is new information that needs to be addressed in order to develop the concept of MGC in the future. This issue is related to the questions that were asked to the respondents during the interview. The issue is fundamental to the formation of the MGC concept itself. The basis of this concept is community acceptance (regardless of the general public, researchers, designers, local authorities, and decision-makers). The acceptance of society can be further explained by the factors of 'racism' and 'rights of equality' in Malaysia. This thing has made this concept failed to be implemented, and it has been proven by all 6 public park that has become a case study. Although there are other issues behind the failure in implementing this concept, yet the issue addressed is the beginning of the crisis. However, researchers do not feel that this is a problem caused by the attitude of the Malaysian community. However, it is more of a management problem by those responsible for failing to realize the MGC today.

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