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# USERS' FOREST EXPERIENCE AT SUNGAI KANCHING RECREATIONAL FOREST, SELANGOR

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## **Abstract:**

Visiting forest for recreational experiences has risen as one of the most popular tourism activities worldwide. Many scholars make an inference that recreation is an emotionally transforming activity designed to meet personal needs and motivations. Viewing a forest scene has been documented to have a positive effect on psychological healing and well-being in terms of recovering from stress, improving concentration and productivity, cultivating the psychological state, especially for urbanites. Nevertheless, occasionally there are several factors that contribute to the unsuccessful achievements of the superlative experience such as natural threat, damaged, inadequate facilities and unpleasant environment at the recreational forest. This study is a concept paper that aims to identify users' forest experience at Sungai Kanching Recreational Forest, Selangor. The findings of this study have identified three elements of forest experience which are transcendent experience, restorative experience and flow experience that can be achieved by the users. Consequently, this study will help stakeholders to provide proper management in order for recreational user's to gain preminent experience at the recreational forest in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** *Recreational Forest; Forest Experience; Recreation Activities; Users.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

A Forest Recreational Area (FRA) is a forest reserve nominated for public recreational use in an outdoor setting which is suitable for people to relax and release tension after they working within office hours and after carrying out a daily routine. Forest Recreation Areas was stated under the National Forestry Act 1984 and the State Governments have the right to manage forest areas which is not only for timber manufacture however to encourage and reassure the multiple-use of forest recreational and educational purpose. Recreation or amenity forest means an attractive areas and natural environment that serves as areas for urbanites who need the tranquillity from the hectic life. Typically, recreational forest are related to the natural waterfalls or rivers and is usually situated at the foothills, at periphery of urban areas and easy to access by public transport or personal vehicles (Hussain & Aziz, 2015). According to Bratman et al. (2012) forest experience can contribute to enhanced emotional and cognitive health. Experience are the psychological consequences gained by individuals who engage in recreation activities and by experiencing social and physical conditions of the forest environment. Nevertheless, there are several factors that cause forest experience could not be achieved by the users such as natural threat, damaged, inadequate facilities and unpleasant environment.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Recreational forest**

Presently, Peninsular Malaysia have 130 forest areas nominated for public recreational use and these are known as Forest Recreational Area or Amenity Forest (Forest Act, 1984). Forest recreation areas (FRAs) or amenity forests are distinguished and created predominantly in forest reserves to provide opportunities for outdoor recreational activities (Ismail & Rahman, 2009). Recreational forest can depicted as areas designated for not only outdoor activities but also, preservation and conservation of greenery area and fauna as well as areas where natural education can be conducted (Ehsan, 2011). Recreational forest also



help to preserve people's health in maintaining the air quality and provide space for recreation activities. According to the Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia, the recreational forest has been established since 1965 for sustainable purpose which are preservation and conservation the practise of natural resources. Table 1 shows the number of recreational forest that have been developed in every Malaysia Plan since 1966 to 2010. Literally, Malaysia Fourth Plan presents the highest number of recreational forest been established from the year 1981 – 1985.

Table 1: Number of Recreational Forest That Have been Developed

Malaysia Plan	Years	Numbers of recreational Forest That Have been Developed
First	1966-1970	3
Second	1971-1975	1
Third	1976-1980	14
Fourth	1981-1985	28
Fifth	1986-1990	27
Sixth	1991-1995	22
Seventh	1996-2000	19
Eighth	2001-2005	7
Ninth	2006-2010	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>125</b>

Source: Forestry Department Peninsular Malaysia (2007)

In addition, Table 2 indicates the number of recreational forest in Peninsular Malaysia by the Forestry Statistics Peninsular Malaysia in 2009. The three highest number of recreational forest found in Peninsular Malaysia are Pahang (26 numbers of recreational forest) followed by Kedah with (25 numbers of recreational forest) and Perak with (15 numbers of recreational forest).

Table 2: Number of Recreational Forest in Peninsular Malaysia

Name of State	Numbers of recreational forest
Johor	08
Kedah	25
Kelantan	03
Melaka	04
Negeri Sembilan	12
Pahang	26
Perak	15
Perlis	03
Pulau Pinang	03
Selangor	10
Terengganu	13
Kuala Lumpur	02
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>

Source: Forestry Statistics Peninsular Malaysia (2009)

The theory of recreational forests is different with the concept of urban forest. Most urban forest are located in urban areas to supply the green area and reduce the impact of development from the surrounding. The objectives of urban forests are to enhance the surrounding areas, produce shade and green urban areas, act as a buffer area to diminish the air and noise pollution, and as a habitat to attract

birds and insects (Cho et al., 2014). Meanwhile, recreational forest act as an areas with natural charm and authenticity for the peace in order to avoid the noise of the surrounding environment. This is emphasized in one of the National Forestry Policy to draft community forestry programs and provide recreation and tourism facilities for the users.

The Department of Forestry in Peninsular Malaysia stated several objectives of recreational forests which are to provides place for recreation doings in the forests such as picnic and sight-seeing, recreational parks and beautiful natural areas for the public, especially to every community, enhancing individual performance through release of mind from the stresses of daily workload and also the not so pleasant atmosphere of the big cities. Apart from that, this also helps to enhance awareness to the public on the importance of maintaining the authenticity of the environment, especially forests to be preserved for the well-being of their lives.

Most residents in urban setting demands the forest setting to search for a different perspective of life. Therefore, a forest experience is considered as one of the practice to encourage the balance and harmony in the modern urbanite's life, and the forest environment with forest activities providing both preventive and therapeutic health benefits.

## **2.2 Forest Experience**

A forest experience provides a specific state of experience that could not be reached in the everyday life. During the forest experience, the users will be close which could sense the fascinated of the nature, the beauty and greatness of the nature. Based on Hendee – Brown model by Hendee et al. (1987) it was stated that the probabilities for personal growth from a person experience could be determined by five conditions specifically the person being in good health state, the optimal degree of stress from forest activities, engagement with the environment, a change and attunement from the forest experience and the awareness toward desirable qualities increase and can be applied back home.

## **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The literature is related to the recreational forest and users' forest experience. Library search engine such as Google Scholar and Sciencedirect, has been used to find relevant articles which is relate to this study. The snowball method is also applied from the references in the literature. For instance, key words like 'forest experience', 'recreational forest', 'transcendent theory', 'restorative theory' and 'flow theory'. The literature related to the users' forest experience or other forms of the word was then studied. A modified conceptual framework has been build to show how the users' forest experience was explained. The aspets from the users' forest experience was analysed through comparison from several literature within each field of information.

## **4.0 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

Ocasionally, the findings of this study had explored three elements of forest experiences which are transcendent experience, restorative experience and flow experience, as shown in Figure 1:

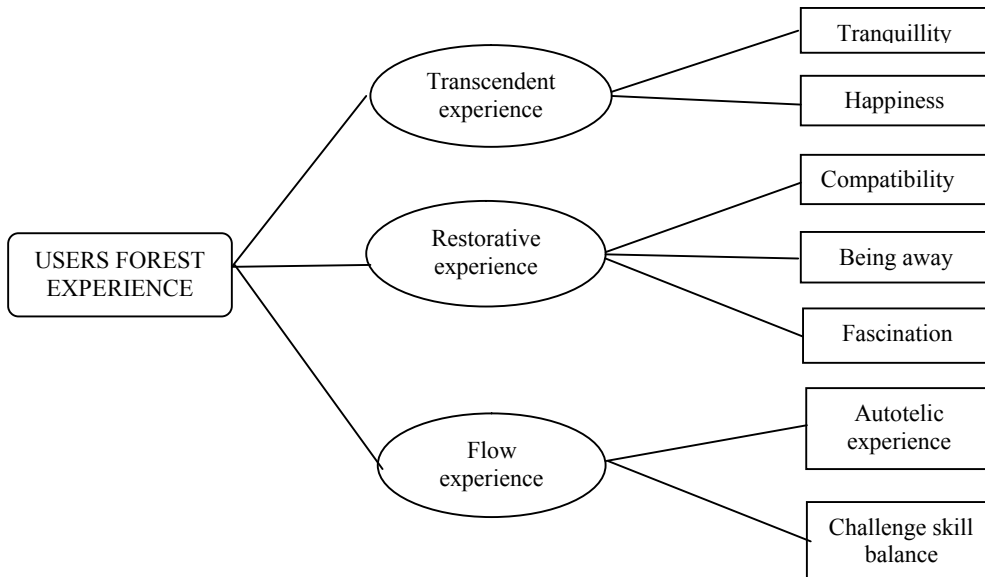


Figure 1: Three Elements Of Forest Experiences  
(Modified and adapted from: Williams & Harvey, 2001)

#### 4.1 *Transcendent experience*

Transcendent experience has been categorized in several phrases which are a moment of enormous happiness, a feeling of lightness and relief, a sense of harmony with the whole world, the moment that totally absorbing and which feel important (Williams & Harvey, 2001). Natural elements in recreational forest such as water and trees augment the symbolic meaning and it turn as a motivation of transcendent experience. There are two sub-elements identified in transcendent experience which are tranquillity and happiness.

Tranquillity was stated as ‘a peaceful, calm state without noise, violence and worry’. It can be possible to predict with rational accuracy on a rating scale using two factors which are the normal noise level from man-made noise sources and the percentage of natural setting in the recreational forest such as vegetation, water and geological features such as exposed rock out-crops. The area of the recreational forest can be affected by the maximum tranquillity due to effects of distance within space noise from the boundary of road and high fraction of natural setting provided at the area (Watts et al., 2010).

Waterman (1993) indicated that there are two conceptions of happiness specifically eudaimonia and hedonic enjoyment. Eudaimonia is definite as a feeling that exist when a person move towards self-awareness in terms of build unique individuals potential and continue the purpose of life (Waterman, 1993) Whereas, hedonic enjoyment described as positive affects in order to achieve something and the actions that individual wish to experience (Kraut, 1979). Happiness is a product or experience that gained by users during or after they engage in any leisure activities at the recreational forest.

#### 4.2 *Restorative Experience*

According to Williams and Harvey (2001), restorative experiences described as the revitalizing quality of the forest, the benefits of peace and tranquil, a sense of re-established energy. Recreaional forest has a greater restorative advantage than urban setting and this has been applied to diverse setting. However, Kaplan (1995) stated that restorative experience is an opportunities for reducing the fatigue of directed attention. It is the view that there is a link between the natural environment and human inclination (McKenzie, 2017) such as compatibility, being away, and fascination.

The element of compatibility from the restorative experience is a two-way street. A compatible environment where one's purposes fit what the environment demands and at the same time environment supply the information needed to meet one's purposes (Kaplan, 1995). Furthermore, compatible environment one carries out one's activities smoothly and without struggle.

Meanwhile, being away means frees one from mental activity that needs directed attention support to keep going and it involves a conceptual rather than a physical transformation. The important resource were easily accessible natural setting and not to be distant. Normally, natural environment become a choice for restorative opportunities. The seaside, mountains, streams and forests are suitable elements for people getting away (Kaplan, 1995).

Williams and Harvey (2001) analysed that fascination moments in the forest through the verbal descriptions were likely to characterize as fascination with compelling elements of the environment; tall trees, high waterfalls, the extreme of heat or cold. In addition, Kaplan said that characteristics of soft fascination which described by certain natural setting that users can recover from directed attention fatigue.

### 4.3 *Flow experience*

As eloquently stated by Csikszentmihalyi and Lefevre (1989), flow theory is a situation where experience will be most positive when a person engages with an environment that contains high enough opportunities for actions or challenges, which are equal to their own capabilities. The flow experience is identified by two components; the challenge and skill which balance an autotelic experience. Challenge skill balance is when both challenges and skills are high, the person enhance his or her capabilities like learning new skills or increasing self-esteem, and his or her not only enjoying the moment. Optimal experiences are reported to occur within sequences of activities in the recreational forest that are goal-directed and bounded by rules--activities that require the investment of psychic energy which could not be done without skills. In recreational forest, anxiety is experienced when challenge far exceed skills such as hiking, running and many more. An autotelic experience is an intrinsically rewarding experience and it is described as the end being of in flow experience. The term of autotelic has been extracted from the Greek words auto (self) and telos (goal). Autotelic activities is done for its own sake, with no expectation of some benefits or future rewards.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

From the findings, the study can conclude that forest experience can only be achieved by users who had engaged and experienced in forest recreational activities. Indirectly, the forest experience encourage users to reach good health and a well-being of life. Recreational forest not only are more than desirable natural setting nonetheless, also enhance stress recovery and restoration in a way in which urban setting cannot provide. the use of recreational forest is becoming more complex, and the results are becoming more significant especially to urbanites. Stakeholders and responsible people in managing recreational forest should ensure that forest recreational forest provides the best facilities and service in order to give the best experience to the users. With effective planning and management, recreational forest will provide a wide range of important benefits and profits in terms of health and social.

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