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OPTIMIZING HUMAN WELL-BEING THROUGH RESTORATIVE LANDSCAPE EXPERIENCES IN URBAN GREEN SPACE

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Have you found yourself feeling down and stressed amid the hustle and bustle of a busy environment? People tend to seek greener areas to restore their minds and relax their bodies. The idea of restoration has been extensively applied especially in environmental psychology studies focusing on the rest, recovery from mental fatigue, and the revival of physical exhaustion (Hartig, 2004). Experiencing a restorative environment refers to the surrounding setting that contributes to the recovery of mental depletion and helps to improve the human body for everyday lives. According to the Attention Restoration Theory developed by Kaplan (1989), being mentally exhausted could affect the individual attention and ability to perform specific activities. However, in order to fully recover from the exhaustion, it is suggested to divert the individual's attention towards involuntary engagement rather than intentionally focusing to force rejuvenation of physical and mental condition. According to Figure 1, being

fascinated or engaged with minimal effort needed is a key component of restoration experiences. "A sense of being away" refers to avoiding the usual environment and being away physically and mentally, the experience should be able to provide enough stimuli for a mind to be engaged and lastly, being able to match the purpose of an individual.

Consequently, to facilitate restoration experiences, the natural environment has been

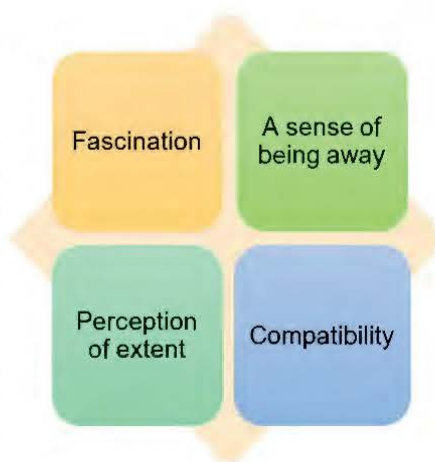


Figure 1: Key elements in restorative experiences.
(Source: Adapted from Kaplan, 1989)

recognized as the most important element in urban settings that provide the essential attributes for mental and cognitive development and fostering positive emotion.

Previous studies have indicated that being mentally restored is one of the motivation factors that encourage people to engage in tourism and leisure activities (Snepenger et. al., 2006). For example, Scopelliti and Giuliani (2004) discovered that visiting a museum and strolling in a park are examples of recreational activities performed by individuals who are seeking to improve their health and well-being. Additionally, Packer and Bond (2010) identified four types of leisure environments that people perceived as highly restorative environments which are historic museums, art museums, aquariums, and botanic gardens. Among these, the botanic garden recorded the highest preference as a chosen healing spot due to its restorative attributes. It has been demonstrated that green spaces play a critical role in providing venues for restoration experiences, serving as valuable assets in urban cities.

Cities worldwide are slowly recognizing the importance of incorporating green space into their urban planning for the sustainability of the city. From pocket parks to expansive gardens, these areas offer extensive experience to escape from the overload of urban life. Intentional design of urban green space is important in optimizing the restorative potential for the improvement of

human beings. Park features such as meandering paths, water elements, plant life and park furniture portray multisensory experience that gradually captures involuntary attention. Well-designed urban green spaces provide a platform to get a rest from everyday life, allowing individuals to immerse themselves in a restorative environment.

Current trends in urban green space planning formed the variety of central parks in Malaysia offered to residents in well-developed areas such as Gamuda Gardens and Elmina Central Park. Gamuda Gardens, situated on 810 acres of land in the city of Rawang, is a community garden that promotes sustainable lifestyle within natural settings. This renowned spot for the nearby community offers a variety of landscape elements that create restorative environments for visitors. In the realm of restoration experiences, Gamuda Gardens excel in incorporating five key elements in promoting restorative experiences which are:

- Plants – Variety of plant types including flowers and shrubs that contribute to the visually appealing and calming environment thus enhancing the overall aesthetic of the area.
- Water features – Ponds, streams or fountains that add a soothing auditory and visual dimension such as the gentle sound from the flowing water.



Figure 2: Plant element for calm environment

- Landscape constructions – Enhancing the functionality and accessibility to complement the natural surroundings as well as providing comfortable spaces for relaxation.
- Roads and pavements – Efficiently designed to ensure ease of movement and connectivity within the park and promoting physical activities.
- Garden facilities – Cater diverse needs allowing visitors to engage in activities ranging from socializing to individual reflection.



Figure 3: Water feature for soothing auditory element

In conclusion, the evolving landscape of urban green space planning, as exemplified by the well-designed green space such as Gamuda Gardens, is receiving growing recognition to enhance the well-being of the urban community. As cities expand, incorporating landscape features that offer restorative experiences such as diverse plant life becomes imperative in green space planning. As the pursuit of sustainable and healthy living gains prominence, urban planners and developers must continue to prioritize the creation of restorative environments in developing a city that is sustainable for generations to come.

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