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THE INFLUENCE OF URBAN PUBLIC PARK AS A RESTORATIVE ENVIRONMENT AFFECTING MENTAL WELL-BEING AMONG COMMUNITY IN KUALA LUMPUR

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ABSTRACT

Urban growth creates challenges recognized by the global community. Many studies in the related field have drawn a connection that natural and green places are more likely to be restorative to a person's health, especially when compared to those living in cities. This study aimed to investigate the effect of urban public parks as a restorative environment affecting mental well-being as perceived by urban dwellers specifically in Kuala Lumpur. A qualitative approach was acquired through multiple sources, including document reviews, image-based interviews, and field observations. This study uses the PERMA framework to study the attributes of urban public parks to achieve good mental well-being. Hence, the instrument will then be used to measure the level of mental well-being of urban dwellers by analysing an existing urban public park as a case study. In brief, data from findings confirm the presence of restorative elements can be perceived by users and it is claimed to be crucial for an increasingly urbanized society's quality of life as a location to recover oneself. Therefore, current designers and landscape architects are recommended to add more special features that can make the park have novel elements by implementing the theory of restorative environment and its qualities when designing or optimizing parks.

Keywords: *urban park, public space, mental well-being, urban dweller, restorative environment*

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INTRODUCTION

According to The Cultural Landscape Foundation (2020), a public park is defined as a public open space which was managed by federal, state, municipal governments, and private organizations. In a frenetic urban setting, it may provide urban dwellers with an active atmosphere, calm space surrounding and facilities for leisure and recreational activities. The phrase associated with this research of restorative environments such as healing gardens, therapeutic landscapes as well as urban public parks has been developed to refer on how a space with natural affinities may encourage mental wellbeing and their daily lives. A restorative environment describes how certain types of environments help people heal mentally and physically, and numerous studies in the related field have found that natural and green places are more likely to be restorative to a person's health, particularly when compared to those who lived in cities.

Mental well-being, on the other hand, is how humans deal with life's ups and downs. This basic notion of mental wellbeing definition contains profound significance and implications for our lives. It encompasses how a person thinks, handles emotion (emotional wellness), and behaves. In this regard, the rapid rate of urbanization and urban planning may play a special role in molding the mental well-being of urban dwellers. As stated by (Kaplan, 2001) getting outside and having access to nature are instinctively linked with mental well-being and there is now a considerable body of data and evidence demonstrating the association of nature and mental wellbeing. As a result, both scopes, restorative environment, and mental well-being, are interconnected to each other. Hence, urban public parks serve as a type of restorative environment that has an impact on mental well-being in highly urbanized city.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ward, Parker, & Shackleton, (2010); Noriah, Noralizawati, Mohd Hisham, & Mohd Ali Waliyuddin, (2015) agreed on the idea that the establishment of urban parks initially entailed different functions and purposes compared to the present era. These green spaces no longer solely serve as areas for vegetation and environmental conservation but also exert a positive influence on the social and psychological wellbeing of individuals within urban settings. A well-designed urban park not only provides opportunities for visitors to relax and retreat from their daily routines but also incorporates captivating elements such as lush vegetation and visually appealing vistas.

The concept of a restorative environment is rooted in the field of environmental psychology, which examines the interactions between individuals and their physical surroundings. In this context, a restorative environment refers to a setting that has the ability to promote psychological and physiological recovery, reduce stress, and enhance overall well-being. The modern urban lifestyle often exposes individuals to various sources of stress and mental fatigue. Hartig et al., (2011), in their findings, agreed that with a concentrated urban population, naturally, people often feel the need to escape the overwhelming human-made concrete jungles of the cities.

Finlay et al., 2015 mentioned that the presence of green and blue spaces within urban parks contributes to a sense of well-being and restoration by providing pleasant, tranquil, and calming environments. Hence, restorative environments provide a counterbalance by offering spaces that allow people to escape from the demands of everyday life, recharge their mental resources, and experience a sense of relaxation and rejuvenation. These environments are thought to have a positive impact on mental health, cognitive functioning, mood, and physical health. Nature, especially urban parks, often involves getting away from those urban settings, besides being an exciting and engaging experience. Furthermore, elements of green and blue spaces in the urban park can promote a sense of well-being and restoration that does not tax the mind by offering pleasantness, tranquil, and calmness (Finlay et al.,2015; Hartig et al. 2011).

The topic of the restorative environment has been predominantly explored through collective research, guided by two theoretical explanations, each presenting its own array of ideas and definitions pertaining to the concept of restoration.

Attention Restoration Theory, ART (Kaplan,1995; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Based on ART, the idea of perceived restorativeness has been established. It implies that restoration experience is exhibited by experiencing environments rich in restorative elements such as 'being away,' 'fascination,' 'extent,' and 'compatibility' (Han, 2003; Kaplan, S. 2001).

Being away creates an atmosphere in which one can engage in cognitive content that is unrelated to the current circumstance or demand (i.e., day dreaming). This refers to situations that need mental content that is not normally evoked. The idea is that by avoiding well-worn mental information, one might avoid using focused attention to facilitate the activation of such content (Kaplan, S. 2001). As a result, fatigued directed attention can rest. This is the fundamental explanation behind the positive impacts of "getting away from it all. From this idea, two aspects emerged: physically 'being away' and psychologically 'being away'. 'Being away' physically refers to metamorphosis and geographical distance from where one is carrying out every day routines and commitments. The mental 'being away' refers to a psychological separation from normal routines. It has been proposed that restoring attentional fatigue is unlikely to occur only by physical migration away from one's daily environment and the continuation of one's daily worries and concerns. When

one explores an old environment in a new way, one might discover restoration of mental tiredness (Kaplan, S. 1995).

'Extent' is the next element in Attention Restoration Theory (ART). According to Herzog et al., (2003), it can affect one's thoughts for a long time to intriguing and delightful objects. Natural environments have a comparatively high extent (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989) This attribute has also been defined as having a sense of 'connectedness' and 'scope' in an area (Kaplan, R., & Kaplan, S., 1989). The 'connectedness' component relates to the impression of coherence and relatedness between environmental factors. The 'scope' component refers to the size and capacity of the environment that allows for enough to see and feel (Kaplan, S. 2001). Environments with both 'coherence' and 'scope' can give individuals the impression that they are in a "whole other universe." A setting has scope if it contains enough content and structure to engage the mind for long enough to enable focused attention to rest. They stimulate the intellect and allow for lengthy exploration. Natural contexts, according to ART, are comparatively endowed with extent (Kaplan, R., & Kaplan, S., 1989; Kaplan, S. 1995).

Mental well-being is a condition in which people may comprehend their potential, work productively, handle life's stresses, and generally engage in society. As a result, it cannot be defined just as the absence of mental disease (World Health Organization, Promotion of Mental Well-Being, n.d.). The existence of green areas for human health is extensively researched and acknowledged. The presence of greenery in one's surroundings enhances one's mental condition. Green areas are an important source of mental wellness since they reduce mental stress and despair. The role of urban green areas as a buffer zone for human stress and anxiety has been studied. According to research conducted in the United States on college students, those who maintained contact with green areas (open and woods) were shown to be happier and calmer than others. According to the study, restoring passive green areas at universities improved students' health and life happiness (Holt, E. W., et al., 2019). The recovery of mental health issues requires an important component of urban greenness.

In the context of positive psychology research, the PERMA model, introduced by

Seligman, serves as a comprehensive framework encompassing five key elements— Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment—that collectively contribute to individuals' well-being and flourishing (Seligman, 2002).

Both theories converge on the fundamental premise that interactions with natural environments play a pivotal role in enhancing individuals' psychological and emotional states, thereby contributing to overall well-being. In essence, the correlation between the ART and PERMA MODEL theories underscores the importance of nature-based experiences and interactions in cultivating a state of

restorative well-being. As both theories share common ground in recognizing the profound impact of natural environments on human psychological functioning and emotional states, their relevancy is evident in guiding strategies aimed at designing restorative spaces and interventions that holistically enhance individuals' overall wellbeing. This study seeks to bridge this gap by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the similarities between ART and PERMA MODEL theories, particularly in relation to their roles within the context of creating restorative environments for well-being enhancement. Through this analysis, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying the restorative effects of natural environments and psychological factors, offering insights that could inform the design and implementation of more effective strategies for promoting well-being in various settings.

METHODOLOGY



This research methodology is geared towards methodological choices in an attempt to attest whether both scopes of the criteria fulfil the theory based on the study's purposes and objectives. As the aim of this research is to determine the effect of an urban public park as a restorative environment affecting mental well-being among urban dwellers in The Perdana Botanical Garden, Kuala Lumpur .Hence, it will be discussed towards series of analysis based on the researcher's perspective on each data collected, parallel to the purpose and objectives of this research as to extensively measuring on how restorative environment affect urban dweller's mood to determine the validity of the PERMA theory and its relevancy .Besides, to measure the level of mental wellbeing of urban dwellers in Kuala Lumpur.




The study is carried out by making observations using unstructured and uncontrolled approaches. The research is programmed to follow the operation procedure of a nonexperimental study rather than the experimental study due to its pros that backing up the situation of today's surrounding in which it results to several difficulties in data finding. This method of analyzing data was gathered from field observation, (i) data collection such as photo elicitation based on the observation, mapping and photography in both scopes. By using those visual methodologies, the image of the environment will be used as actual data with subsequent knowledge production to measure the level of mental well-being of urban dwellers and identify the features of an urban public park as a restorative environment that may satisfy urban dwellers. The independent variables of this method consist of the individual, social and physical attributes of urban dwellers in Kuala Lumpur. Upon every detail, information and photographs on the criteria of restorative elements will be arranged according to the sources and proceed through a qualitative research method to determine the validity of the Attention Restoration Theory (ART) and PERMA theory towards its relevancy in selected urban public park by measuring how restorative environments affect visitor's moods to determine the state of mental well-being

among visitors in an urban public park. Respectively, all obtained data will be analyzed along with the findings in Literature Review to enhance the understanding of the topical study. Fundamentally, thorough findings regarding the theoretical framework of the PERMA theory of well-being will be drilled in order, subsequent to the data collected at The Perdana Botanical Garden, Kuala Lumpur.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Description contents of representative landscape scenes in Perdana Botanical Garden

No	Features	Features Description
1	<p style="text-align: center;">Herb & Spice Garden</p> 	<p>The Herb & Spice Garden is considered as a part of the Conservatory Garden and nursery area, features the various cultures of the tropical regions through the herbs commonly planted and used in people's everyday lives, both in culinary and traditional medicine practices.</p>
2	<p style="text-align: center;">Playground</p> 	<p>The playground area are well developed amenities for children to play as well as it has many seating areas.</p>

3	<p style="text-align: center;">Sunken Garden</p> 	<p>Groupings of flowering plants, where multi-coloured groupings of shrubs and herbaceous plants, flowering shrubs are planted in a sunken circular area for interest and exploration. A star-shaped fountain sits in the centre of the circular garden, which is surrounded by white Grecian containers filled with flowering annuals.</p>
4	<p style="text-align: center;">Cycad Island</p> 	<p>The lake has a small Island in the larger waterbody, and it has two clumps of bamboos growing on it giving almost scenic look to the lake. The other island, which serves as a short cut to the area across the lake has two concrete bridges crossing the narrow water bodies around it. The lake small island; contains bamboo pavilion for kids as well as varieties of unique plants.</p>
5	<p style="text-align: center;">Laman Perdana Square</p> 	<p>The Laman Perdana features majestic trees such as Adasonias, Moringas and Eucalyptuses. In the late 1960s, the amphitheatre was built, and it was named as 'Pangung Anniversari'. Today, the refurbishment of the amphitheatre has been completed with roofs attached to it and has been recognized as a huge pavilion. It is a central spot near to the boathouse.</p>





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Water Bodies



Therapeutic Lake located at the centre as well as the fountain, also waterfall is a new feature in the botanical garden along Jalan Tembusu.

Table 2: Data analysis during field observation according to Attention Restoration Theory (ART)

Attention Restoration Theory (ART)	Observation
<p data-bbox="312 369 454 397">Being Away</p>  <p data-bbox="234 596 543 658">Figure : Green and blue of Cycad Island</p>  <p data-bbox="234 871 543 933">Figure 2: Lake near Cycad Island</p>  <p data-bbox="214 1136 563 1197">Figure 3: Collection of bonsai near Laman Perdana Square</p>	<p data-bbox="584 369 739 397">Cycad Island</p> <p data-bbox="584 442 1160 653">Urban dwellers felt safe and secure as the location of Cycad Island is secluded and enclosed with different type of elements. In conjunction, this feature offers the feeling of entering to a new world which enabled them to be away and escape from unwanted distractions and daily routines.</p> <p data-bbox="584 697 744 726">Water Bodies</p> <p data-bbox="584 770 1160 952">Based on the facial expression, most of urban dwellers showed signs of calmness as the urban public park offers harmonious blue elements for relaxation. The animistic qualities of water were found to bring life which create the sense of being away by sitting near to the blue settings.</p> <p data-bbox="584 996 865 1025">Laman Perdana Square</p> <p data-bbox="584 1070 1160 1271">Based on field observation, most of urban dwellers expressed the emotion of joy for being free and independent when accessing the Laman Perdana Square. Also, urban dwellers expressed the facial expression of relax and calmness as they felt at ease and being away from their daily stress.</p>
<p data-bbox="344 1338 422 1367">Extent</p>  <p data-bbox="234 1584 543 1646">Figure 4: Entrance of Herb and Spice Garden</p>	<p data-bbox="584 1338 865 1367">Herb and Spice Garden</p> <p data-bbox="584 1408 1160 1628">Urban dwellers be able to reflect through the awareness of multisensory engagement in a deeper appreciation and understanding of the therapeutic benefits of nature in ones' lives. The informative and educational experience are also offered in the botanical garden through exploration.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Fascination</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Figure 5: Fountain across playground</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Figure 6: A star shaped fountain Garden</p>	<p>Water Bodies</p> <p>The animistic qualities of water were found to bring life to an otherwise a dull space. Moving water can make a place look more 'refreshing' and inviting. To illustrate, urban dwellers are positively impressed as they stopped and awed by the man-made waterfall. The behaviour show that urban dwellers evaluate this feature as a soothing, energized, and full of positive spirit element.</p> <p>Sunken Garden</p> <p>Based on the field observation, urban dwellers felt delighted as they identified some of the flowers that hide shyly in out-of-the-way spots in the pots, while others boldly nod their pretty heads in the breeze of wind. Besides, the freshness of fragrance flowers also boost urban dweller's mood where they showed the expression of euphoric after sniffed the flowering plants.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Compatibility</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Figure 7: Playground Amenities</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Figure 8: View of urban dwellers socializing</p>	<p>Playground</p> <p>This feature provides sense of 'free', 'connectedness', 'limitless' and 'spaciousness'. During the field observation, it is observed that most of the urban dwellers clearly showed the expression of joy, fulfilment and gleeful. Such feelings and emotions were positively triggered as they get the opportunities to jump around and let loose.</p> <p>Laman Perdana Square</p> <p>It is observed that there were a group of teenagers skating on a concrete ramp. On the other hand, the major activities observed is either resting and relaxing. Bright expressions on their faces could be interpreted as positive influence of the surrounding environment.</p>

According to field observation, it can conclude each of the setting eventually impact the emotions of urban dwellers based on their facial expression. The most frequently mentioned positively perceived emotion descriptions were, joy, calm, astonished and the like. Such feelings not only occur when urban dwellers engaged with nature and greenery, hence also in active and free environment. Based on the qualities of being away in previous chapter, feeling safe was also noted to offer positive emotion towards urban dwellers. As the setting allowed urban dwellers to escape and switching off from reality. In result, they felt less stress and could restore in terms of mental and physical wellbeing. Besides that, the sense of privacy offered in the setting help urban dwellers to seek peacefulness and quietness. Hence, they be able to sort out their thought, de-stress and meditate. Furthermore, since the setting provide well-developed features that is distinctive for various range of activities, it is observed that urban dwellers were positively impact as they felt free, independent, and uncontrolled. Therefore, the sense of comfort and openness also contribute to affect their emotions, thus enhancing their mental wellbeing and overall feeling satisfied with their life.

To conclude the field observation, the aspects of engagement were found in the activity of interaction, such as with elements of nature and the landscape, among urban dwellers and oneself. The attractiveness of setting and features in the urban public park effortlessly grab and engage urban dwellers attention in a positive and relaxing way. This is due to the various elements of natural features that are fascinating such as the extensive richness and diversity of herb and spice, varieties of colourful petunias in the Sunken Garden and the motion of waterfall. Concurrently, develop the feeling of marvel by the nature's complexity and beauty. Besides, engaging with nature directly allow the urban dwellers to completely immerse themselves in a whole new world. On the other hand, the element of engagement is influenced by the environmental perception of multi-sensory which include the five senses such as vision, hearing, smell, touch and tactile. Multiple of sensations provide the urban dwellers with a full of experience and better understanding of their surrounding environment. Such engagement with natural and greenery can make affect urban dweller's emotion such as feeling happy and contentment and henceforth reduce the anxious and stress. Other than that, urban dwellers be able to forget their trouble and worries for a moment before coming back with a refreshed mind. In conclusion, engagement with nature, for instance in urban public park could hold the potential for mental well-being among urban dwellers.

Relationships descriptions were divided into three subthemes: relation to nature, relation to other humans and relation to the self. Within the park contexts, interactions between urban dwellers and variety elements of nature were observed. On the other hand, the urban dwellers also be able to build connections among themselves in Perdana Botanical Garden. Descriptions of relationships to nature were commonly observed and often included experiences of connecting to animals and insects such as birds and butterflies. Most encounters were positivity perceived such as felt comfortable socialize with friends, families and even stranger at some

point. Hence, this observation proved that social support element was positively afforded by Perdana Botanical Garden as urban dwellers get to enjoy nature and social use at the same time. Relationship with oneself was also observed where the urban dweller seems to like being in a secluded and private setting as a sense of being away from the twitchiness in the urban city. There was also a sort of social connection among urban dwellers by exploring the park together and fulfilling recreational activities. The availability of the opportunities for recreational activities and social connection causes the urban dwellers to perceive them as a functional for enhancement of mental wellbeing and self-restoration. This element of relationship indicates that urban dwellers who visit the urban public park from time to time tend to develop a better interaction to that park. In short, the development of strong networks of relationships around urban dwellers will all the other creation in their lives could enhance the state of mental wellbeing.

For the meaning element of the PERMA model, it can conclude each of the setting particularly has an impact on the urban dwellers. Based on the field observation, the element highlights how urban dwellers perceived the meaning of each feature and different setting in urban public park. For instance, the urban dwellers could reflect and developed the sense of belonging with nature as they get to experience of interaction with biodiverse spaces. On the other hand, they found the meaning by reflecting their innate need for biophilia. Hence, the sense of being away to create a space for themselves is developed and eventually impact their overall mental wellbeing as they could free their mind, enjoy their own company.

To conclude the field observation, the elements of achievement were found between the interaction among urban dwellers in urban public park. The sense of compatibility proved the element of accomplishment where urban dwellers could socialize and gathering with friends, family or partner. The particular reason is due to the features at the urban public park that fit the demands of urban dwellers. To illustrate, Laman Perdana Square is considered as 'the pleasure garden' where it is located at the centre and near to all other features. Hence, it could attract different types of people from all generations. In short, the elements of accomplishment could be achieved, and also urban dwellers are rewarded with feelings of joy, pride and accomplishment as they get to socialize with others. Concurrently, this element can improve the sense of effectiveness and mental wellbeing of urban dwellers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the aim of this study was to examine the impact of urban public parks as restorative environments on the mental well-being of urban dwellers in Kuala Lumpur. The findings have underscored the pressing sustainability concerns linked to urbanization's physical manifestation, including its implications for mental wellbeing. This research has contributed to raising awareness about the pivotal role of the urban physical environment in well-being, influencing both the city's livability and individual behaviors.

Drawing upon Dr. Seligman's PERMA theory of well-being, this study has successfully demonstrated the role of urban public parks as restorative environments within the framework of environmental psychology, contributing to the process of mental well-being recovery. The identification of green and blue settings as favoured locations for extended restorative opportunities has practical significance, particularly considering the constraints that urban dwellers face in accessing remote natural environments. The study also has highlighted the essential attributes of urban public parks that contribute to enhancing mental well-being, underscoring their potential to provide a valuable resource for restoring focused attention. The emphasis on an ecological approach within the local context has allowed for a deeper understanding of how urban public parks can serve as restorative environments for urban dwellers. Furthermore, the study's recommendations suggest that urban public parks can serve as attractive gathering places, fostering social interactions and positively impacting diverse visitor categories. To enhance park usage and appeal, strategies such as incorporating aesthetically pleasing features or novel elements are proposed. The implementation of restorative environment principles and qualities in park design, as proposed by this research, could have a transformative effect on urban parks in Malaysia, ultimately improving visitors' long-term subjective well-being and perception.

In summary, this study has shed light on urban dwellers' awareness of the significance of urban public parks as restorative environments and their correlation with mental well-being, specifically observed at Perdana Botanical Garden in Kuala Lumpur. The findings indicate that urban dwellers are indeed aware of the benefits offered by urban public parks, both mentally and physically, although external factors may hinder their utilization. The effective integration of Attention Restoration Theory (ART) and the PERMA well-being model has successfully achieved the study's objectives, revealing the often-unnoticed features of urban public parks that contribute to well-being. Future research could delve deeper through in-depth case studies, further exploring the intricacies of restorative environments and well-being.

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Sekian, terima kasih.

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Saya yang menjalankan amanah,

SITI BASRIYAH SHAIK BAHARUDIN
Timbalan Ketua Pustakawan

nar

Setuju.

27.1.2023

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