DESIGN IDEALS
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COMMUNAL LANDSCAPE DESIGN: IMPLEMENTATION AT LOW-COST FLAT IN SELAYANG, SELANGOR

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the process of implementing a communal landscape design project for a low-cost flat in Selangor. The project aimed to rejuvenate the existing communal area into a unique outdoor landscape space that is vibrant in use, comfortable and beautiful. There are five main phases in the process of implementing the project: (1) planning and site selection, (2) site inventory and analysis, (3) design proposal, (4) presentation of project to the client and the residents' management body (JMB), and (5) implementation of the project on-site. The project involved the cooperation of various groups, including the client, local authority, the students from the Bachelor of Landscape Architecture programme and ARCLA Society, the academic staff of IIUM, and Selayang Mulia flat residents at Batu Caves. As part of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to encourage academic staff and students to be engaged in a community project, this communal landscape project has promoted a sense of place to the residents.

Keywords: *Communal landscape, landscape design, low-cost housing, landscape space, community design*
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INTRODUCTION

Low-cost housing units in the urban areas are affordable housing units for the section of society whose income is below the median household income (The Economic Times). Low-cost housing in Selangor ensures social-economic stability, giving Malaysia's B40 groups (B1-B4) a chance to own houses. Several low-cost housing types, such as the multilevel flat ranging from 5-18 floors to landed property, are provided. However, the basic type of housing unit has a limited floor area, which can be as small as 700 square feet, but with three bedrooms (Baharuddin, 2012). The standard outdoor facilities for low-cost housing include a community hall, *surau*, retail shop, food stall, kindergarten, playground/free area, parking space and a garbage house. The housing units are most often connected to the adjacent community facilities (such as the park, school and shop lots). Due to limited space within the individual housing units, residents need comfortable outdoor spaces within their community, especially those they call their communal space. Outdoor facilities are available to be used within their community's compound, even though they too are limited. However, with a good design, they can be optimally used and appreciated by the residents. The existing communal spaces need to be upgraded and beautified to make residents feel comfortable and happy to use them.

LANDSCAPE COMMUNAL SPACE

A *landscaped communal space* is an outdoor area that provides additional facilities for residents to enjoy, relax and socialize. The enhancement of communal spaces will increase the functional value of the space and the surrounding areas. Effective communal spaces that have been designed well would have a strong aesthetic appeal to invite users to spend time in them. It is suggested that open-air communal areas' design will make the outdoor landscape of a building inviting and attractive to users. The resulting activity in these spaces would make the buildings within the surrounding look livelier, enhancing the neighbourhood's overall appearance (Yushu, 2015). Communal spaces include the following facilities: outdoor working areas (if it is an office building), party or gathering spots, walking tracks, playgrounds, coffee shops, community centres, a common courtyard, a narrow corridor, plaza or any other incidental space within reach of residents. Such spaces encourage social interaction. Once the area could accomplish neighbourliness through these communal spaces, the surrounding buildings would not just qualify as one building but as a whole thriving community (Arch20).

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This article demonstrates the implementation process of a landscaped communal space project in a low-cost flat in Selayang, Batu Caves, Selangor. The project aims to create an attractive and interactive space that consists of various soft and hard landscape design elements. It was implemented at one of the most significant communal spaces, i.e. in front of the entrance of Pangsapuri Selayang Mulia, Batu Caves, Selangor.

The objectives of the project were to:
1)Promote a sense of welcoming, openness and identity of the communal space as a part of the outdoor space of the flat.
2)To enhance the space with suitable landscape elements for the use of residents.
3)To create a playful and child-friendly environment for young users.
4)To use eco-friendly and upcycle materials of low maintenance and upkeep.
The project team consisted of academic staff from the Department of Landscape Architecture & Environmental Design, IIUM and 26 undergraduate students that took a Basic Digital Visualisation subject during the semester. The students are members of the ARCLA society, a landscape students' society of the department. The project was a part of the SDG of the University and is in line with the IIUM Service-Learning Malaysia-University for Society (SULAM). The project requires engagement with the various participants from project inception to implementation on site. Apart from the client, Lembaga Perumahan dan Hartanah Selangor, the project involved the local authority, Majlis Perbandaran Selayang, and the Selayang Mulia flat residents.

THE SITE AND OUTDOOR FACILITIES

Selayang Mulia flat is three blocks of low-cost housing building with sixteen floors. The flat is located at Jalan SM 1/1, Selayang Mulia in Batu Caves, Selangor (Figure 1).

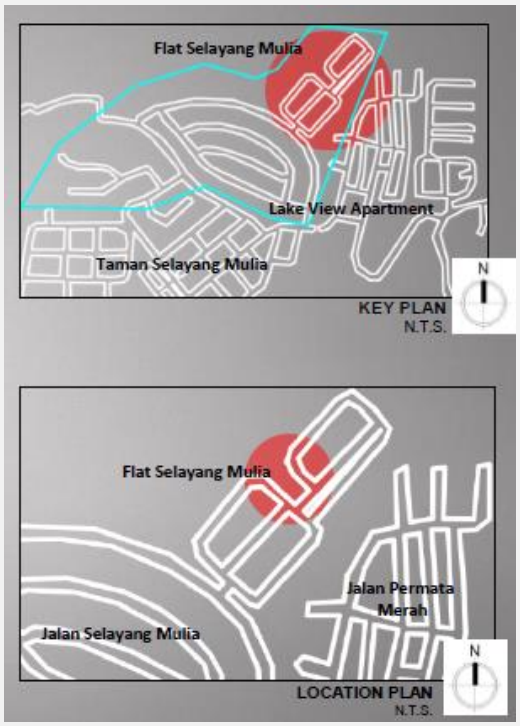

Figure 1: Key plan and location plan of Selayang Mulia flat

The basic outdoor facilities and the communal spaces within the flat's area are as follows:

a)A sheltered space near the main entrance of the flat.
b)A futsal playfield.
c)A community garden at the rear of the sheltered space.
d)A Multipurpose hall with an outdoor compound for the children's playground.
e)A playschool's outdoor space.

Figure 2 shows the spaces within the flat's compound.

Figure 2: Outdoor facilities and communal spaces at Selayang Mulia Flats

THE SELECTED COMMUNAL SPACE

The planning of the communal project started with selecting the most suitable space based on the criteria set by the client. As defined by the LPHS, the selected communal space must be currently an active space that is most often used by the community for various activities. The selected space is also in need of enhancement in terms of its appearance and landscape. Simultaneously, the residents and the flat management should have a good rapport with one another to ensure these spaces will be cared for in the long run. Hence, based on these criteria, the team, i.e. the Commissioner of Building (COB) from Selayang Municipal Council (MPS), the project's participants from IIUM, and the chairman and committee of Joint Management Body (JMB) of the flat, made a walk-through visit to the site. The visit was to select and agree upon the most suitable communal space for the project's implementation, i.e. the sheltered space. The sheltered space was agreed to be located in front of the flat entrance, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Sheltered communal space at the main entrance was chosen for the project.

The shelter consists of four (4) main spaces: seating area, waiting area, a cabin and planting area. At the back of the cabin is a community garden (Figure 4). This project does not cover the community garden area. The communal space is located higher than the street level from the road view, but it is accessible from the opposite side where the blocks of the residential flat are located (Figure 3).

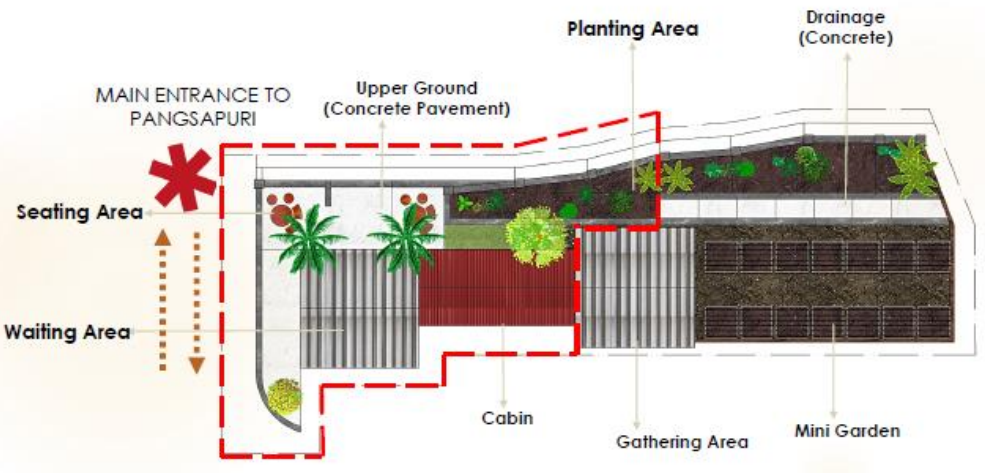

Figure 4: The site layout plan for the existing communal space at the main entrance of the flat.

METHODOLOGY

The process of implementing the project consists of five main phases: (1) planning and site selection, (2) site inventory and analysis, (3) design proposals, (4) presentation of projects to the client and the resident management body, and (5) implementation of projects.
The methods of data collection are sequential, which was related to each phase of the project.

Phase 1 was the site selection, a walk-through site visit to select the best communal spaces agreed by the residents, the local authority, and the project team. The selection was based on the criteria set by the client, carried out together with the professionals from Majlis Perbandaran Selayang (MPS), and agreed by the residents in the Joint Management Body (JMB). The decision was reported to the client in a specific meeting.
In Phase 2, the site inventory and analysis of the site were carried out by the project team to learn on the site's characteristics based on its potentials and the space constraints for landscape design. The needs of residents of the space were explored using on-site interviews with the users and the JMB.
In Phase 3, literature reviews/precedent and case studies were carried out to obtain design ideas and concept based on the objectives as both primary and secondary data collection. The design ideas were put together as the design proposals for presentation to the client (LPHS) and the residents' representatives - the JMB. The design process from conceptual to digital documentation of the proposed design ideas led to numerous presentations to the client and the residents in the refinement of the proposal (Phase 4). The finalized design was then implemented on-site in Phase 5, which took two weeks to complete. Figure 5 shows the summary of the process.

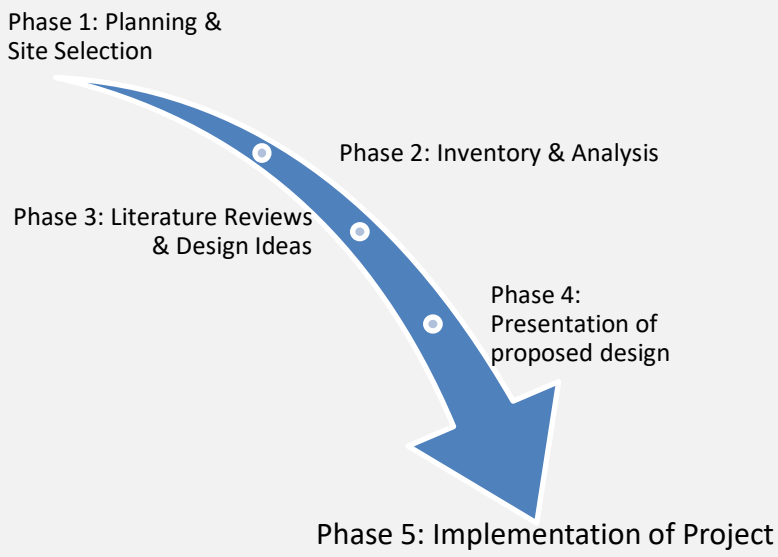

Figure 5: The project's process

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Phase 2: Inventory site analysis documented the existing site conditions using site observation and a checklist of site potentials and constraints. Among the analyses were:
•The painted sign, 'Selamat Datang', at the site's entrance was fading and looks dull ;
•The side wall facing the main road with the flat's image needs a facelift too;
•The side wall facing the main road has no safety fence, which can be quite dangerous to children while playing in the shelter;
•The wall facing the entrance also needs to be higher for safety purpose;
•The landscape furniture such as the concrete table and seating are outdated;
•The space does not provide a children-friendly environment with a lack of colour, safety, and cluttered with unorganized furniture;
•Tools and equipment used by *Rukun Tetangga* were not kept and organized efficiently in the storage area;
•The floor of the shelter needs to be resurfaced;
•The entrance's identification sign placement is quite indecorous; and
•Iron drums located in the middle of the road at the junction to denote entrance and look unsightly.

Responses through interviews with the committee members in the JMB and users of the communal space were also collected. Questions raised were mainly residents' wish list for the communal space. Findings from these interviews suggested that the residents need a vibrant, colourful and welcoming space for the communal space. These could be in the form of a mural to welcome the residents to their own homes and feel inviting to visitors. The residents also need a landscape space with ornamental shrubs to complement the community garden at the rear of the sheltered communal space. The waiting area should also have fun spaces for children since most users during the day are school children. The proposed communal space is currently used by school children while waiting for their school bus, playing games and doing their homework after school hours. Other users also need the space to wait for transportation, gather, hold events and play chess or board games at night. The place is also currently used for meeting and events held by *Rukun Tetangga* committee members. Hence, based on these findings, the conceptual design for the communal space was formulated.

CONCEPTUAL PROCESS

The conceptual process involved the formulation of a concept derived from the aim and objectives of the project. Literature reviews helped in materializing the design idea board for the project. The reviews also explored various potential landscape elements for the communal space that suits the proposed concept. Appropriate design elements proposed were chosen based on the objectives of the project and findings from the data collected, which intended to induce a sense of welcoming and openness to the area. The communal space should have suitable landscape elements from upcycle materials for a playful and child-friendly area for young users. The children user group is the major user of the existing communal space during the day. Other design features, such as safety railings and a proper wall, were considered.

DESIGN IDEAS

The most important landscape elements chosen for the proposed project is as shown in Figure 6. Since the site has a wide wall at two sides of the entrance, colourful murals would create a cheerful and welcoming atmosphere to the entrance area. The sheltered space needs safety precaution because of the high walls. An anti-climb fence was therefore recommended for the area to keep the young users safe. Landscape furniture is essential for any communal spaces. Thus, vibrant and playful seating elements to cater for the high usage of young children was proposed. The project also explored ideas on using upcycled materials. Upcycled elements include old tyres of different sizes designed as practical seating element and planter boxes.

Figure 6: Design ideas based on literature review.

THE CONCEPT

The concept proposed is called 'Terra Mulia'. It is a combination of ideas between the word *terra*, which means earth and the name of the housing flat-Mulia. The concept was a derivation from the literature review, site inventory and the analysis in Phase 2 of the project. Figure 7 elaborates the description of the concept to reveal the essence of the communal space.

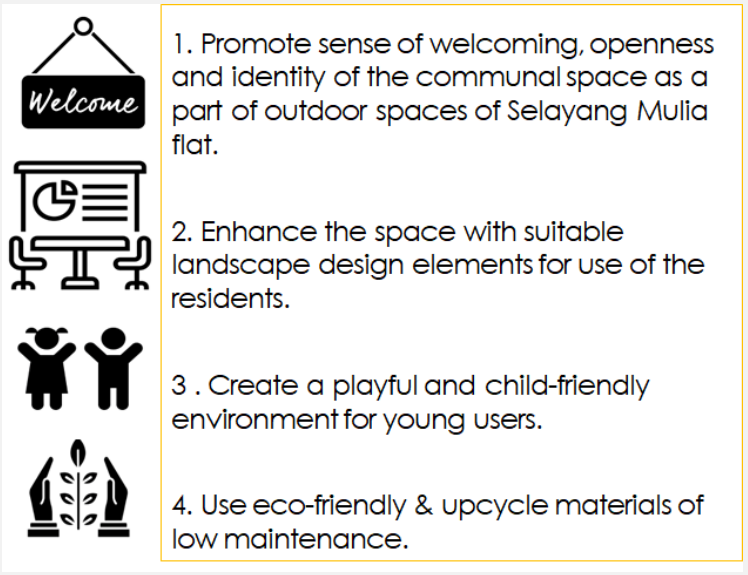

Figure 7: The design objectives and concept

THE PROPOSED DESIGN

Figure 8 shows the proposed landscape design for Terra Mulia communal space. The proposed landscape design consisted of four (4) main focused areas: wall mural, waiting area, seating area and planting area.

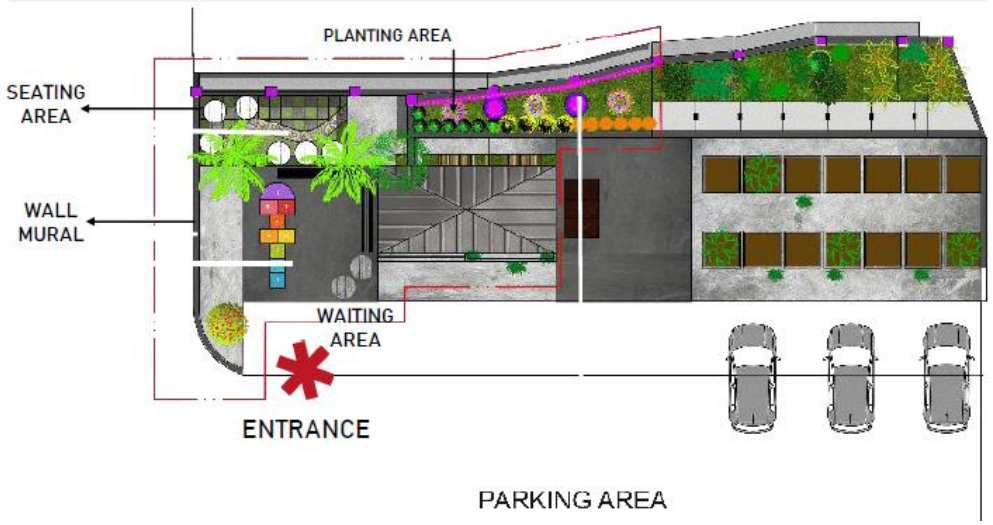

Figure 8: Proposed Landscape Plan for the communal space (n.t.s)

PRESENTATION OF PROPOSED DESIGN

Presentation of the proposed communal landscape design in Phase 4 of the project was to the client (LPHS) and the residents' management body (JMB). The student conducts a presentation to the client and attended by various parties, including the local authorities (Figure 9). The presentation to the JMB includes its committee members and the representatives from the MPS (Figure 10).

Figure 9: Presentation of proposed project at the client's office in Shah Alam

Figure 10: Presentation of proposed design to the JMB, Selayang Mulia

FOCUSED DESIGN ELEMENTS

This section demonstrates the final design of the Communal Space project. The design embraces the existing structure/space with the proposed design elements with the actual implementation on the project's site. The focused design elements of the project are the mural, the waiting space, the seating space and the planting area.

A. THE WALL MURAL

The existing mural at the entrance with the faded painted words 'Selamat Datang' is shown in Figure 11. Therefore, based on the Terra Mulia concept, the wall will be painted with the colours of nature with a fresh design and welcoming words as in Figure 12. Figure 13 shows the actual design implemented on-site. The ideas were the product of the residents' perspectives and constructive comments for the proposed design. The wall facing the entrance is raised to enhance the visual image of the mural and provide safety for children while doing activities inside the sheltered communal space.

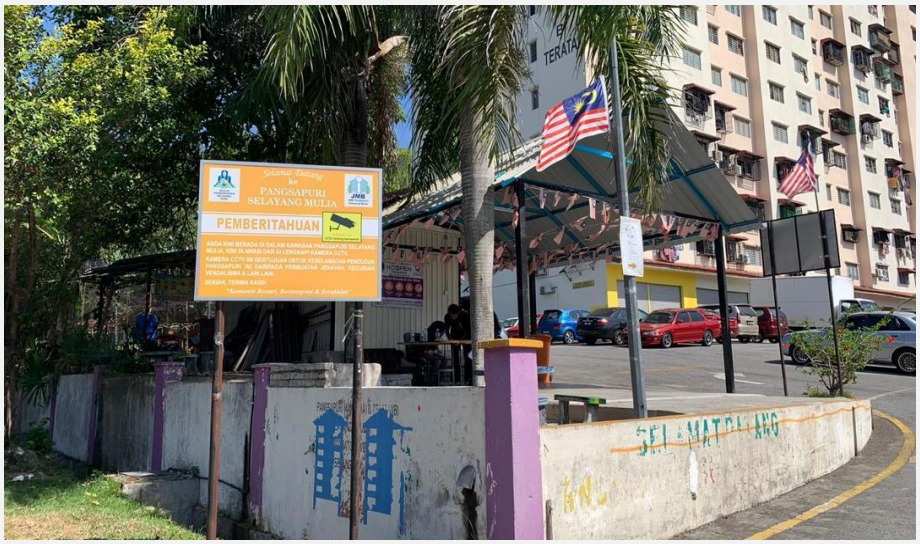

Figure 11: Existing faded wall writings

Figure 12: Design proposal of wall mural

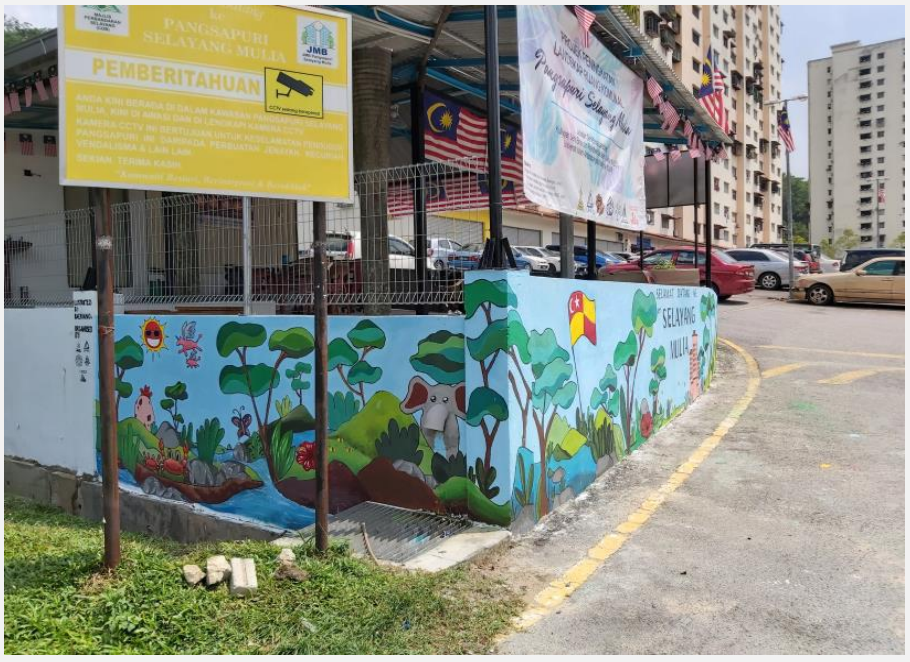

Figure 13: The implemented design of wall mural

B. SHELTERED WAITING SPACE

The existing sheltered waiting space consisted of two spaces. The main space is the waiting area, and the lower part of the space consisted of a concrete table and benches. The waiting area floor is cement render with two long cast-iron benches (Figure 14). The proposed design came with a painted floor ‘teng-teng’ or hopscorch game design pattern. The implemented design in Figure 16 shows that the ‘teng-teng’ painted on the floor, as in the proposed design, adds colour and excitement to the communal space. The long iron benches were re-used and re-painted in black. This former space will be used as playing spaces for children while waiting for their school buses or having other activities.

Figure 14: Existing sheltered waiting space

Figure 15: Design proposal of the sheltered waiting area

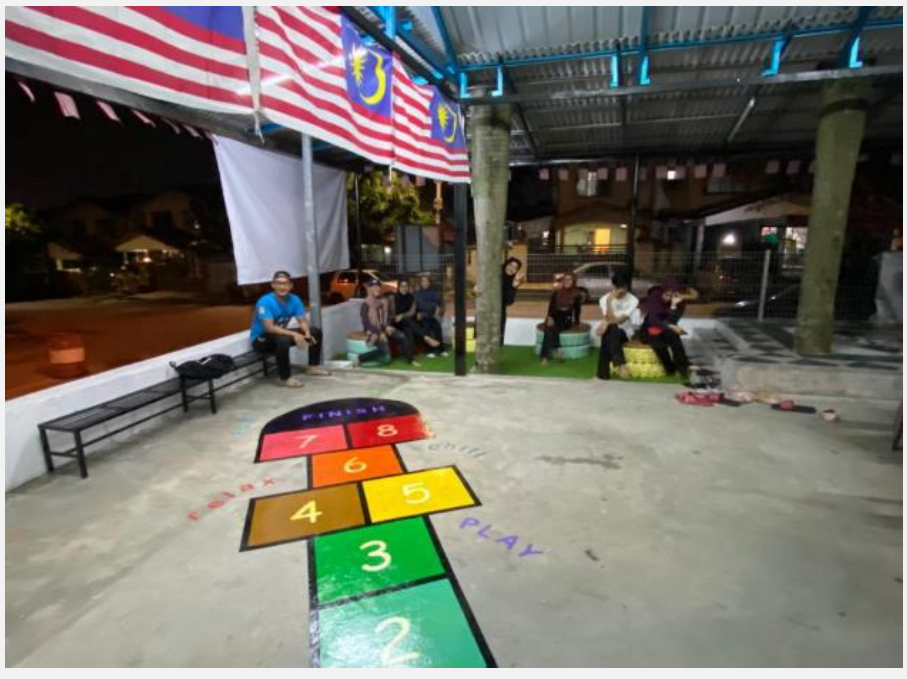

Figure 16: The implemented design of waiting area

C. SEATING AREA & ANTI-CLIMB FENCE

The lower part of the sheltered communal space is a cement rendered floor with an old concrete table and seating (Figure 17). In the proposed design, this floor was patterned with carpet and tiles provided by the six upcycled timber-tyre seating. For safety, the wall facing the main road will be installed with an anti-climb fence (Figure 18). The area will be used for children to sit, play in groups, relax and do their homework. The patterned floor was re-adjusted to provide partly carpeted and partly patterned tile flooring in the implemented design- a clean space for the children(Figure 19).

Figure 17: Existing seating space

Figure 18: Proposed seating space

Figure 19: The implemented design of seating space

D. LANDSCAPE PLANTING AREA

The planting area was a narrow space beside the cabin that linked the lower floor area for seating with the back area, where the community garden is sited. The decorative soft landscape was proposed for this space. It consisted of colourful shrubs planted on the ground and inside the recycled tyres (Figure 21). However, the proposed design could not be implemented due to the extension made for a storage area required by the *Rukun Tetangga* committee. As an alternative design, with JMB's approval, the proposed planting area was relocated to the opposite side of the communal spaces to beautify both sides of the entrance to the flat (Figure 22). A portion of the planting materials such as small trees, shrubs and groundcovers were donated by the MPS.

Figure 20: Existing seating space

Figure 21: Proposed planting area

Figure 17: The implemented design of planting area opposite the mural wall

CONCLUSION

The duration of the project to implement the proposed design took five and a half months from its inception - Phase 1 up until Phase 5. Despite the Movement Control Order (MCO), the team has managed to complete the project as per the schedule presented to the client.

Within the final phase of the project (Phase 5), although it was anticipated that the implementation would take only two days in the kick-off meeting, however, due to some unavoidable factors, the duration of work had taken about two weeks to complete. The challenges include the erratic rainfall that had caused the mural painting to halt and caused damage to wall design and floor pattern. Thus, the work needed to be re-applied. On-site work also considered the schedule and availability of students to be on the project site because the students were also required to attend other classes offered in the short semester of IIUM (Semester 3).

Nonetheless, these challenges were overcome with all parties' excellent cooperation and commitment - the students, the JMB and the IIUM academic staff. The project was also successful with the help of JMB's personnel, who provided the necessary assistance, and the local authority who collaborated to donate plants. The project was a great experience to all, especially to the students who had the hands-on experience to handle landscape projects from inception until their implementation. They will bring this knowledge into their working life in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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