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Review of Healing Gardens

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ABSTRACT

The natural environment is observed to give health benefits to the human. However, modern lifestyle had caused a lower health quality due to the stress level and unhealthy environmental conditions. Research has found that accessibility to high quality environment could reduce the level of stress and depression. Gardens are places that could bring the greenish view to the public and usually considered as healing places. A healing garden is a green and natural place created to restore the unbalanced system of individuals. An Islamic healing garden is a place that has paradisaical imagery and beneficial in providing a pleasant aura and stimulation in reminding Allah swt to the visitors. Islamic healing gardens are suitable for all population groups be it Muslims or non-Muslims. In an Islamic country, the Islamic gardens are usually expressed by Islamic designs that are acceptable to all people. Architectural designs in Islamic healing gardens play important roles in displaying Islamic elements to symbolize the Islamic heritage. In Malaysia, the proposal to incorporate local plants that have healing psychological and physical properties in the Islamic healing garden is discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

The therapeutic effects of nature have attracted numerous research attention since 1970s in Western countries [1]. Healing gardens have now captured more attention almost in all countries due to the erratic environmental and lifestyle conditions [2]. Healing gardens are created places that are aimed to reduce or heal the unbalanced individual system and facilitate in restoring the individual's mental and physical health [3]. The idea of Healing gardens is both from ancient and modern. According to Vapaa [4], healing gardens can be indicated as health promoters by considering a balance between the body, mind, and soul.

Medical geographers have first introduced the therapeutic landscape concept in order to define places with natural or historic features for the maintenance of health and wellbeing [5]. During the Middle ages, the patients spirits were treated in green private gardens in monastic hospitals as the first appearance of a healing garden [6]. Some researchers have conducted interviews and found out that the natural environment could help people for self rehabilitation under stressed or depressed conditions [1].

According to Vapaa [4], healing gardens are not just for sick people, but also serve both the healthy and the ailing. A healing garden should able to restore the natural balance in humans so that they do not feel stress and other pressures. Moreover, access to natural surroundings has also been associated with mental restoration in all populations as in children [7], the elderly [8] and in people living under pressure due to a harsh lifestyle, or severe illnesses [9].

It has been noticed that health and well-being are important aspects that should be a concern for the future. The presence of green elements such as in public parks, school areas and private home gardens are major contributors to freshness and healthy lifestyle to urban societies [10]. In the Western and Eastern communities it has been noticed that greenery in the city is essential for the health of the city residents. The public green areas is crucial to be located near and around residential areas [2].

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In Malaysia, out of 30 million inhabitants, 74% of the population live in urban areas [11]. In the National Urbanisation Policy, the government has identified strategies that should be implemented by local governments. One of the strategies is to improve quality of life through provision of adequate recreational and health facilities [12]. As Malaysia is an Islamic country, consisting of a heterogeneous mix of ethnic groups, with three main groups of races which are Malay (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%) and Indian (7.3%) [13], the development of an Islamic healing garden could be one of the initiatives in improving the quality of life.

However, there is still insufficient guideline for people to refer to as the example in continuing the idea of the Islamic garden as the essence and nature of the Islamic garden have slowly diminished. It is because the prominent garden was developed ages ago and there is a deficiency in physical evidence to support that the essence of Islamic garden has been adapted in other parts of the world. Besides, the prominent Islamic gardens only focused more towards the Middle East countries and evolved around the country and developed based on the Islamic principles as the area is predominantly Muslim [14].

Since Malaysia is known with its heterogeneous society, the cultural diversity is not an issue to the country since all citizens are living in peace and unity [14]. Although there are cultural differences, Islam is recognized as the official religion and the predominant society is Muslim and the respect from the other cultures is high towards each other.

Islamic Garden And Adaptation In Malaysia Cultures:

A garden is described as Islamic not only through the development of patterns or structures but also when the environment encourages and stimulates in remembering Allah swt and displaying the Islamic values into the garden design. The garden must show its values and symbolism in remembrance of God, through the natural environment, as a way of educating and appreciating, balancing of resources used, as a stewardship to resources, as a place of exchanging knowledge and the beauty of nature as highlighted in the al-Qur'an. Therefore, any garden that have these similar values is considered Islamic [14, 15].

The Islamic garden is always imagined and designed based on the Qur'anic descriptions with paradise imagery consisting of beautiful wall decorations, cool gardens with shaded areas, fruit trees, sweet scents, pleasant sound, fresh air and water sources [16]. As the Islamic world expanded and reached Persia and North India, the gardens were designed with the symbols of paradise as described in the Qur'an to become the reflections of heaven by utilising the existing features of traditional garden architecture [17].

In implementing the Islamic garden, Qur'an is the main source in guiding the ethical issues, including the principle of environmental responsibility as it contains the basis for understanding ecological issues, the role of science, the correct way to interact with the environment, and the responsible use of the earth's resources. Besides, the development of Islamic garden design should consider the ecological and environmental conditions of today and the future, thereby reflecting the Qur'anic imperative that human as responsible leaders and users of the earth's resources [16].

The Islamic garden was established around the 7th century and the earliest design of the Islamic garden highlighted the privacy concept in the garden design [18]. After the establishment of the Persian garden, there are several known prominent Islamic gardens which are the Mughal garden, Kashmir, Pakistan and Al-Andalus, Spain [14]. The development of the Islamic garden became a trend as it was selected as one of the official architectural styles in the World Fair in Paris, 1900. Throughout the 19th century, the Islamic garden continued to influence the world until it was slowly neglected due to the modern technologies and lifestyles and the limited access to the physical evidence of the Islamic garden at beginning of the 20th century [14].

According to Gilliat-Ray and Bryant [16], traditional Islamic gardens in United Kingdom such as Kensington Roof Gardens, London; Sezincote House, the Cotswolds and Mughal Garden, Lister Park, Bradford were built based on the British-Muslim history along with Islamic art, architecture, and science. The Islamic gardens carry the potential in educating all British people about beneficial relationship between Britain with the Islamic world. However, many existing traditional Islamic gardens in the UK, only have aesthetic value but still did not cover environmental awareness, biodiversity conservation, or ecological sustainability to be accessed by the general public. Then, they were essentially looking forward to establish the feasibility of bringing Islamic gardening traditions together with faith-based environmentalism in their research [16].

From the research, Gilliat-Ray and Bryant [16] found out that the public suggested that the Islamic garden could have a role to play in biodiversity conservation, particularly in educating visitors about the association between Islam and the environment. Therefore, Islamic garden should not only focus for Muslims but include non-Muslims as it plays an important role in educating visitors on the importance of respecting the environment. At the same time, people will feel a new dimension of Islamic garden design as they go through the garden. Therefore, Islamic gardens could have a significant role in promoting Muslim heritage which in turn be valuable and beneficial for understanding between religions and social relation.

In Malaysia, Muslim is the predominant society and Islam remains as the official religion. As there is a great diversity and differences between the ethnicities in Malaysia in term of unique practices in religion, culture, economics and language, thus it becomes important for the society to develop the understanding of the

Islam religion in order to adapt the concept of the Islamic garden in a local heterogeneous environment [14]. Based on this, it can be suggested that it is relevant for the Islamic garden to be acknowledged and adapted in Malaysian heterogeneous society.

Natural Environment For Healing:

Islamic botanical garden is characterized by the presence of plants species mentioned in the Holy Quran and in the Hadith of the Prophet or his Sunnah [19]. In contrast, many existing Islamic garden only concentrate on the hardscape features such as pillars, fountain, and sculpture carved based on Muslim traditions originated from the Arabic Peninsular, Iran, Turkey and India [20].

A healing garden is always characterized as a paradise on earth that provides peace, relaxation and freshness to visitors by its natural surrounding and environmental characteristics [21]. The nature of a garden welcomes people to get into the garden by displaying its beauty in various colors, multiple fragrances, different textures and unlimited power of life. In rehabilitation and healing process, attraction of the garden is the first step in capturing the people's attention. The combination of the five senses which are sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste are all of the elements that is used in therapeutic garden design.

The variety of colors and fragrance produced by plant species show the abundance of nature and images. The natural sound produced by nature and the feeling of plucking and eating fresh fruits from trees and shrubs enhance the senses of touch and taste. Moreover, planting trees and flowers in healing gardens gives multiple benefits in providing shade, retaining privacy and recall childhood memories [22]. Additionally, the combination of different flowering plants in shapes and heights, including herbs, non-toxic species and edible plants in the local climate and soil will not only create the interconnection of human and nature but also will produce various colors all year round [23].

Besides, a healing garden with exposure to sunlight has positive effects on human health in reducing stress, blood pressure and pain [24]. Gardens that contain green views of foliage, colourful flowers, water sources, insects or animals, different types of trees, with nature sounds such as birds, breezes, and water will effectively help to reduce stress and depression [25]. Besides, a water feature is usually used to create sounds for noise reduction, to cool the temperature and at the same time used to irrigate plants [23].

Modern society and lifestyles are usually stressful even at home or at work place and this will result in lower health quality that will bring more negative effect in everyday life [26]. Added to this in Malaysia, there is the annual problem of the haze coming from the fires in Indonesia since 1997. However, people who could access to nature either by involvement in a park or garden setting, or access through the visual by viewing through window gives more positive health benefits. These health benefits are applied for many population groups such as children, elders or ill persons [27]. Furthermore, communities living in higher quality environments show more positive valuations of nature, superior quality of life, greater association with society, and a stronger sense of place than communities of lower environmental quality [27].

In the other hand, some years ago, an elementary school in Berkeley, California, had created a garden in the school yard decorated with water source, woodland, and wind flower meadows for playing and learning process [28] (Moore and Wong, 1997). This is because children usually influence by nature through the playing process as in garden and enable them to have contact with nature [28] (Moore and Wong, 1997). All institutions or schools dealing with children should offer healthy outdoor environment for their wellbeing that allowing them to have interaction with nature by enjoyable experiences. This will help children to have self confidence and opportunities in communication with nature through the garden and at the same time it will make children to appreciate the value of nature in today and future life [29].

Architecture And Landscape Design Roles In Garden:

Islamic gardens started to expand further according to the situation and needs. These needs has led to the expansion of the landscape designing in order to enhance the environmental benefits. This makes the creation of designing that well distribute and organise all the resources. Islamic garden is not only specific for the Muslim but also for all groups of people. The garden designs and landscapes arose based on a combination of climatic conditions and regional concerns that are common to all people [30].

As suggested by Taib [31], an Islamic garden is a place of rest and reflection and a reminder of paradise. As the climate of the early Islamic countries is hot and arid, they usually used the water and shade criteria in designing the garden with facilities for rest and contemplation. The key elements that usually appear in Islamic garden landscape are water which is designed with fountains, pools and flowing channels of gardens that made people feel cool in hot and dry weather and at the same time it provides humidity to the plants in the gardens.

The garden walls is usually designed to give the freshness in order to avoid outside pollutants. The Islamic designers often use traditional decorations of beautiful geometric patterns which are arranged according to a symmetrical, harmonious plan in order to make the garden look beautiful and regular in patterns. However, the Islamic garden is not limited to the pattern, form or structure but also promotes the concept of simplicity and therefore, the sense of the Islamic garden are well adapted in the modern world [14]. Aside from their

originality, the simplicity in development of patterns encourage the architects to use such ornaments in almost all building elements, from floor finishes to minaret surfaces [32].

Based on the research evidence, it shows that there are four restorative components which are the social support for garden users, provision of privacy and control, opportunity for physical activity and movement, and provision of nature elements to reduce stress and that it will improve health. These garden features and designs not only enhance the quality of health, but also will attract and bring visitors more frequently in future [27].

According to Erickson [27], when designing a healing or therapeutic garden, landscape architects and garden designers should work closely with therapists or expertise who will bring their patients or visitors to the garden for healing activities. It is extremely important for landscape architects and garden designers to be well-educated and prepared when undertaking restorative garden design in order to provide health benefits when in contact with nature [27]. The well designed garden with optimal restorative design features will enhance all the senses and physical interactions [33].

Providing opportunity for physical activity and movement is one of the major components in the theory of restorative garden design model [27]. The designers should also consider the other garden user groups when designing opportunities for physical activity and movement in the garden. The landscape architect or garden designer should concern and organize strategies in handling the needs and facilities of the garden users [27]. For example, the garden should providing wider sidewalks and walking paths and also paved ground surfaces thereby, the users with mobility impairments will easily access into the garden when using wheelchair.

However, the existing healing gardens have not provide a specific guidelines in designing and landscaping the overview and characteristics of gardens that comprise of Islamic and healing elements. For example, in United States, the existing gardens have the healing values but did not show the Islamic values [34] while, in United Kingdom, the existing Islamic garden did not have the nature and healing perspective [16]. There are still no specific guidelines in designing the Islamic healing gardens in European nor Asean countries. Therefore, for Malaysia a guideline to be referred by others in designing the gardens that consist of Islamic, healing and Malay cultural values in line with green technologies is needed.

The proposed Islamic therapeutic gardens in Malaysia will consist of plants mentioned in the Qu'ran, and indigenous plants as the healing plants and at the same time are useful to reduce the climate and environmental pollutants such as air pollution, haze and the hot condition in current life. Besides, green practices such as rain harvesting, and recycling of the ablution (wuduk), or other sources in the garden to be used in irrigation of plants or for the cooling of the garden will be adopted.

Psychological And Physical Healing In Garden:

Health and well being always symbolize the quality of life for a sustainable community [35, 36](Johnson, 1995; Dave, 2011). Gardens were always illustrated as a paradise that offered respite from illness to the healing of the soul and the body [2]. Restorative or healing gardens for the unhealthy people have been part of the landscape of healing since medieval times [4]. Health studies and horticultural therapeutic programs prove that there is a relationship between health and gardens [37]. The earliest hospitals and infirmaries in the Western countries relied on plants, herbs and a cloistered garden as essential parts of the healing process [2].

Healing gardens is frequently applied to gardens designed to promote recovery from illness. Healing is not only referring to the cure of illness solely but also related as an improvement in overall well being in terms of the spiritual as well as the physical healthcare [38]. The therapeutic garden significantly plays a role in improving many different kinds of people, such as the elderly people who enjoy good health or those who need a healing treatment process. Therefore, a garden is usually designed to promote improvement in overall well being that incorporates the spiritual within the healing process in nature.

Physical movement is important as one of the activities in the garden. Many psychological or emotional benefits of exercise have been recorded in scientific literature. For example, exercise has been linked to lower the symptoms of depression symptom and produce other positive psychological changes in the physical impairment of older adults such as patients with chronic obstructive lung disease [39]. Besides that, exercise could also decrease stress, and blood pressure [40].

The human body is a self adjusting system that learns through experience. Gardens designed for well being will help not only the elder or ailing people but also include children that are growing that are physiologically and psychologically healthy [29]. They offer children a special boundless way of playing and learning that stimulates the development of mind, body, and spirit. [29].

On the other hand, people who are under stress usually will recall an occasion when they had been feeling stressed, depressed, angry, upset, confused, or miserable, and they tend to go to a particular place that helped them feel better. Garden is one of the places that are usually chosen to lessen the unpleasant feeling [27]. According to Wilson [41], gardens that have the religion and culture features will have a strong capability in healing and balancing people spirit and help to throw away the negative thoughts and emotions such as suicide.

Conclusion:

In urbanization, a healing garden should be implemented in the masterplan as it is found to give health benefits in order to help people to decrease the level of depression or stress for the modern society and lifestyle. Besides, the healing garden is developed for both healthy and ailing people to achieve a better quality of life by accessing the natural environment. The higher quality of health and wellbeing will provide a higher quality of life which benefits both society and country. Since Malaysia have a heterogenous society with Muslims as the predominant society a Islamic healing garden is the most suitable garden to be implemented. By making reference to the Qur'an and Hadith, the Islamic elements will be applied in the design. Taking into consideration the cultural values of the Malays, these too would be incorporated along with green practices. This Islamic healing garden could be a guideline for a tropical Islamic therapeutic garden and at the same time serve to educate both the Muslims and non-Muslims about the Islamic culture.

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