LANDSCAPE AND PLANNING INTEGRATION TOWARDS A BETTER PUBLIC OPEN SPACE IN CHERAS RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

Janice Yap Sheu Jun[1] and Hazreena Hussein [2*]

[1]Department of Architecture, Faculty of Built Environment, Universiti Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
[2]Centre for Sustainable Urban Planning and Real Estate, Faculty of Built Environment, Universiti Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

E-mail: *reenalambina@um.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Urban settlements are inherently incomplete without the strategic design of public open spaces, which are essential for enhancing the quality of life and providing numerous social, health, environmental, and economic benefits to residents. In Kuala Lumpur, rapid urbanization and inadequate residential planning have led to a decline in the quality of public open spaces, negatively impacting residents' well-being. This situation highlights the critical need for a comprehensive approach to public open space design that addresses these issues and fosters community engagement and vitality. This study investigates the current state of public open spaces in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, specifically focusing on Taman Mutiara Barat and Taman Taynton View. By analyzing the physical characteristics, social dynamics, and environmental factors of these areas, the study aims to propose design criteria for improving these spaces. Ultimately, the goal is to create vibrant and inclusive public open spaces that enhance the quality of life for residents of Cheras.

Keywords: Public Open Space, Landscape, Urban Planning, Residential Neighbourhood

1. INTRODUCTION

The integration of landscape and planning is essential for creating better public open spaces within residential neighbourhoods, as it ensures that these spaces are not only accessible but also foster social, recreational, and functional activities. By definition, public open spaces are designed to be freely accessible to the public and serve as vital components of urban environments, providing a venue for various communal interactions (Li et al., 2022; Nasution & Zahrah, 2014). These spaces are integral to the quality of urban life, contributing to both individual well-being and community cohesion by facilitating leisure, social inclusion, and engagement (Moulay & Ujang, 2016; Gehl, 1987).

Carmona (2021) emphasized that, in order to foster livable and sustainable environments, public open spaces must be integrated into the broader urban fabric rather than existing as isolated entities. These spaces should seamlessly integrate with residential areas, enhancing neighbourhood functionality by fostering social interaction and providing opportunities for recreation and relaxation, thereby reinforcing the social fabric of the community (Abbott, 2000). Therefore, the integration of landscape and planning is crucial for transforming public open spaces into vital, inclusive, and dynamic components of residential neighbourhoods. The use of public open space has broadened in the daily life of Western countries. This has been shown in the earliest urban settlements through Greek and Roman cities, medieval cities, and renaissance and baroque towns and cities from the enlightenment and the industrial age (Thompson & Travlou, 2007). The Death and Life of Great American Cities, written by Jane Jacobs in 1961, marked a turning point in the gradual erosion of the concept of public open spaces and public life.

In the 1870s, Kuala Lumpur developed from a state to a city, dealing with the challenges of rapid growth and often unplanned urban planning (Nor Akmar et al., 2011). As of August 2024, Kuala Lumpur's population is estimated to exceed 8.8 million, reflecting a 2.25% annual increase, and Dr Zaliha Mustafa from the Prime Minister's Department (Federal Territory) foresees it will reach 9.8 million by 2030, necessitating a more proactive approach from Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) to balance development with the well-being of the city's citizens (BERNAMA, 2024). Kuala Lumpur is considerably reducing open space because of the high demand for housing and related essential infrastructure (Nath et al., 2018). The urban green area per capita in Kuala Lumpur has declined from 13 square metres in 2010 to 8.5 square metres in 2014 due to residential, commercial, and other infrastructure development (Maryanti et al., 2016). Nowadays, the developers only focus on the public open space in the new high-end housing development (Ismail, 2010). Therefore, while the public open space for the existing old neighbourhood and medium-cost housing is sometimes neglected, the aim is to fulfil the submission requirement.

According to PLAN Malaysia (2021), the Town and Country Planning Department (TCPD) has issued guidelines on Open Space and Recreation Areas that provide a framework for planning and developing public open spaces in urban areas, emphasizing standards for accessibility, types of open spaces, design principles, integration with new developments, and community engagement. The guidelines note that the provision of public open spaces within housing developments in Kuala Lumpur remains at a minimal level. In the densely populated area of Cheras, the lack of adequate parks limits residents' access to essential green spaces. Mohd Yusof (2013) argued that the benefits of urban green spaces for residents' well-being become increasingly significant as the population grows, helping to mitigate some of the adverse effects of urban development. As noted by Awang et al. (2022), enhancing these facilities can lead to greater social participation, ultimately improving the well-being of urban residents as they seek to foster community ties in an increasingly urbanized environment.

The study aims to understand the landscape and planning of the residential neighbourhood to promote better public open spaces. In order to achieve this aim, this study has two objectives: To identify the current condition of the public open space of the existing residential neighbourhood in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur; and to suggest the design criteria of landscape and planning in contributing toward a better public open space in the residential neighbourhood. The result of this study can potentially build a better understanding of the public open space in Kuala Lumpur.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Public open space in residential neighbourhoods supports sustainability and a living economy as it offers space for the residents. Cranz (1989) argued that public open spaces are wide open and are being described as fluid to the extent that the city can flow into the park, can flow into the city. It is vital to ensure the quality, accessibility,

and quantity of public open space to serve the residents (Ibrahim et al., 2013). According to Jacobs (1961), the activeness of public open space contributes a direct effect in creating a stimulating and safe environment. It cannot be denied that human activities and people attract people. It is described as new activities that begin in the vicinity of events already in progress.

The amount of provision, the distribution of public open space, and the accessibility of such spaces are fundamental contributions to the society and environment (Barbosa et al., 2007). To understand the quality of public open spaces, one must understand the supply, use, access, operation, need and demand of public open spaces. (Carmona et al., 2003). Good vegetation, greenery and grey planning should be taken into consideration. (Ibrahim et al., 2013). Gehl (1987) stated that people would choose to sit in the public open space with a bench that provides a good overall view of the surrounding activities than those with less or no view. Efforts should be made to protect against bad weather or access to good weather. The attractive and safe environment characterizes the criteria of the public space. The Project for Public Space (2020) proposed four key attributes for a great place: (i) Access and linkages, (ii) Comfort and image, (iii) Uses and activity, and (iv) Sociability.

(i) Access and linkages, include the physical visual connections. According to Ibrahim et al. (2013), accessibility can be expressed through distance thresholds, which means the maximum distance a resident is willing to travel to the public space.   (ii) Comfort and image, include the safety, cleanliness, and availability of the place to sit and relax. Seating plays an essential role in providing a good place. They improve the environment quality, enhancing community and street safety (Al-Hagla, 2008). (iii) Uses and activity, a quality public open space has programs and facilities that draw the uses and activities, increasing people's usage and encouraging visitation (Wakaba, 2016). (iv) Sociability, a place where people meet their friends and neighbours or interact with strangers, providing a place for safe social interaction (Ibrahim et al., 2013). People will feel a stronger sense of place in their community (Wakaba, 2016).

In Malaysia, the integration of landscape and planning has faced several challenges, particularly in the context of rapid urbanization and development (Bagheri et al., 2022; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022; Yasin et al., 2022). One significant issue is the lack of cohesive planning frameworks that prioritize public open spaces, which are essential for enhancing community well-being. Hassan et al. (2023) emphasize that the built environment, especially the quality and accessibility of public open spaces, plays a crucial role in shaping urban community well-being by influencing factors such as accessibility, safety, aesthetics, social interactions, and mental health. Addressing these challenges requires an integrated approach that balances development with the need for functional and inclusive public open spaces. Often, these spaces are seen as secondary to infrastructure and housing development, leading to their neglect and underutilization (Ling et al., 2019). This issue is further exacerbated by a fragmented approach to planning, where different agencies are responsible for various aspects of urban development, leading to a lack of coordination (Bagheri et al., 2022). Hence, the holistic impact of decisions on public open spaces is often overlooked, contributing to their neglect and underutilization, as urban planners fail to recognize the interconnectedness of infrastructure, housing, and communal areas.

Historically, scholars have typically used literature reviews to examine the existing body of knowledge within a particular field. In response to these unique challenges, the objective of this study is to assess the current state of public open spaces in the residential neighbourhoods of Cheras and to propose design criteria for landscape architecture and urban planning that can enhance these spaces. Thus, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of public open spaces in the city. The assessment will critically explore the interplay between social usage, ecological sustainability, and aesthetic value in public open spaces, highlighting how these factors collectively influence community well-being and resilience in urban environments.

3.   METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the complexities of landscape and planning in public open spaces, which is particularly effective in conservation and environmental planning. Public spaces are complex, socially constructed environments where various cultural, emotional, ecological, and behavioural factors converge (Li et al., 2023). A qualitative methodology is well-suited for exploring these complexities, as it enables researchers to engage deeply with participants through methods such as close observation, which facilitates a subtle understanding of the lived experiences and cultural contexts surrounding these spaces. The qualitative approach is one of the best methods for research in conservation and environmental planning (McNeely & Pitt, 1985). According to Zhao et al. (2024), public spaces extend beyond their physical form to become crucial settings for

social interaction, identity formation, and community exchange. In this context, the researchers are able to gain better insights into the social interactions, ecological aspects, and design values that influence how public open spaces are experienced and understood within the community. Given the complexity of public space utilization and the variety of human experiences and interactions that occur within them, a qualitative approach offers the most suitable framework for capturing these dynamics in their full richness and depth.
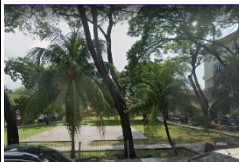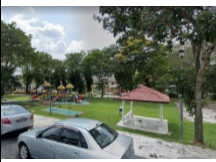
In general, a case study approach is a method that entails an in-depth description and analysis of a phenomenon, social unit, or system that is constrained by time or space (Merriam, 1998). The researchers employed a case study approach, utilizing documentation methods such as mapping and sketching the selected residential neighbourhood's public open spaces. Lofland et al. (2022) argue that this method enables the researchers to engage in 'close participant observation' and grasp 'more readily both the reality of life and the cultural contact'. Chen et al. (2024) support the idea that these visual tools captured the spatial arrangement, functionality, and aesthetic qualities of the spaces, thereby establishing a baseline for subsequent analysis of how landscape characteristics influence the perception of public open spaces. The sketches were then analyzed alongside photographic data to uncover patterns in how the spaces were used. In doing so, the researchers recognized the unique advantages of sketches, which provided deeper insights into the functional dynamics, spatial relationships, and user behaviours within public open spaces. Sketches allowed for a more illustrative and interpretive representation of spatial relationships and design elements, highlighting specific features and dynamics of the landscape that might be overlooked in photographs. Furthermore, the act of sketching encouraged a more engaged observational process, enabling researchers to capture their interpretations and insights in real time (Staessen et al., 2024). This deeper understanding of user interactions and experiences within the space was crucial for the study. By employing this approach, the researchers aimed to uncover the underlying design criteria that contribute to enhancing public open spaces in residential neighbourhoods. They sought to uncover areas requiring improvement and those demonstrating effective integration of social, ecological, and recreational needs.

4.   STUDY AREA

Yasir Rashid, et al. (2019) suggested that the selected research method should allow the researcher to observe the current situation and work freely between the participants and literature. A case study describes a real-life situation that often comes with the research questions of 'how do?' instead of 'how should?' (Punch, 2014). In the preliminary stage, a study area should be selected based on its relevance to the research, as shown in Table 1. For this study, the focus is on public open spaces within residential areas.

Table 1: Cheras Residential Neighbourhood of Public Open Space

Cheras Residential Area Aspects	Taman Taynton View	Taman Mutiara Barat	Taman Mutiara Timur	Taman Lenseng
Location of public open space	Park (near MRT station) (Jalan Tiram) Park (beside surau) (Jalan Goh Boon Hong) Lorong (restaurant) (Jalan Choo Lip Kung) Park (beside school), corridor, allotment (Jalan Ahlimen) Park (beside pedestrian bridge) (Jalan Ahliman 3)	Park (beside MRT station) (Jalan Mutiara 2) Park (beside *Rukun Tetangga*) (Jalan Mutiara Barat 4)	Park (Jalan Mutiara Timur)	Park (Jalan 7)
Resident income level	Low – medium	Medium	Low – medium	Low – medium

Size (hectare)	Park size (0.06 – 1.00)	Park size (0.37-0.53)	Park size (0.02)	Park size (0.37)
Facilities	Playground, water feature, outdoor gym, sitting area, badminton court	Playground, outdoor gym, sitting area, badminton court	Playground, sitting area	Playground, sitting area, badminton court
Safety	Some area with security guard	No security guard	With security guard	No security
Distance within residential area	Walking distance 5 to 15 minutes	Walking distance 5-15 minutes	Walking distance 5-15 minutes	Walking distance 5-15 minutes
Site photos	 Park, Jalan Tiram Park, Jalan Goh Boon Hong Lorong Jalan Choo Lip Kung Park, Jalan Ahliman Informal business, pasar, Jalan Bee Eng 1	 Park, Jalan Mutiara 2 Park, Jalan Mutiara Barat 4	 Park, Jalan Mutiara Timur	 Park, Jalan 7

Chosen as site selection	YES. Various residential types can be found here including two-storey terrace houses, single-storey terrace houses, bungalows and apartments, with some commercial areas during the day.	YES. Function and activities are incorporated into the public open space. A higher population of senior citizens and higher usage of public open space by the residents, but with low maintenance of the current public open space.	No. Less public open space to explore with full security guarded.	No. The size of the residential neighbourhood is too small for the study.

(Source: Authors)

In the context of this study, the Cheras area is considered a significant town in Kuala Lumpur (Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2040). As one of the old established housing areas (**Figure 1**), Taman Taynton View and Taman Mutiara are the former rubber estates developed in the 1960s. All the evidence demonstrates that Cheras is a well-established mature neighbourhood (Draft Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2040).

Cheras area is highlighted in red (Source: Draft Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2040), and indication of public open space in Taman Taynton View and Taman Mutiara Barat
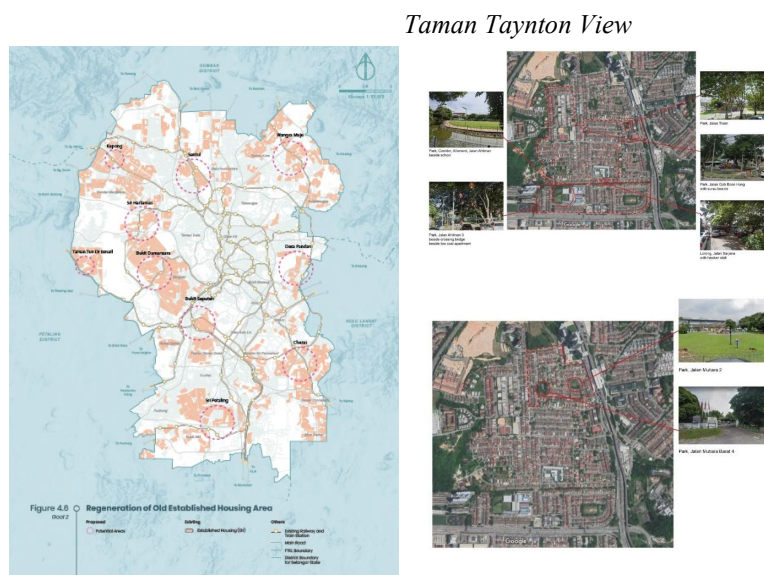
Taman Taynton View

Figure 1: Old Establishing Housing Area (Source: Google Map)

5.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1   Public Open Space at Jalan Tiram, Taman Taynton View

(The section highlights the formal accessway into and out of the park. It also shows the connection with the street, walkway and its geographical location)
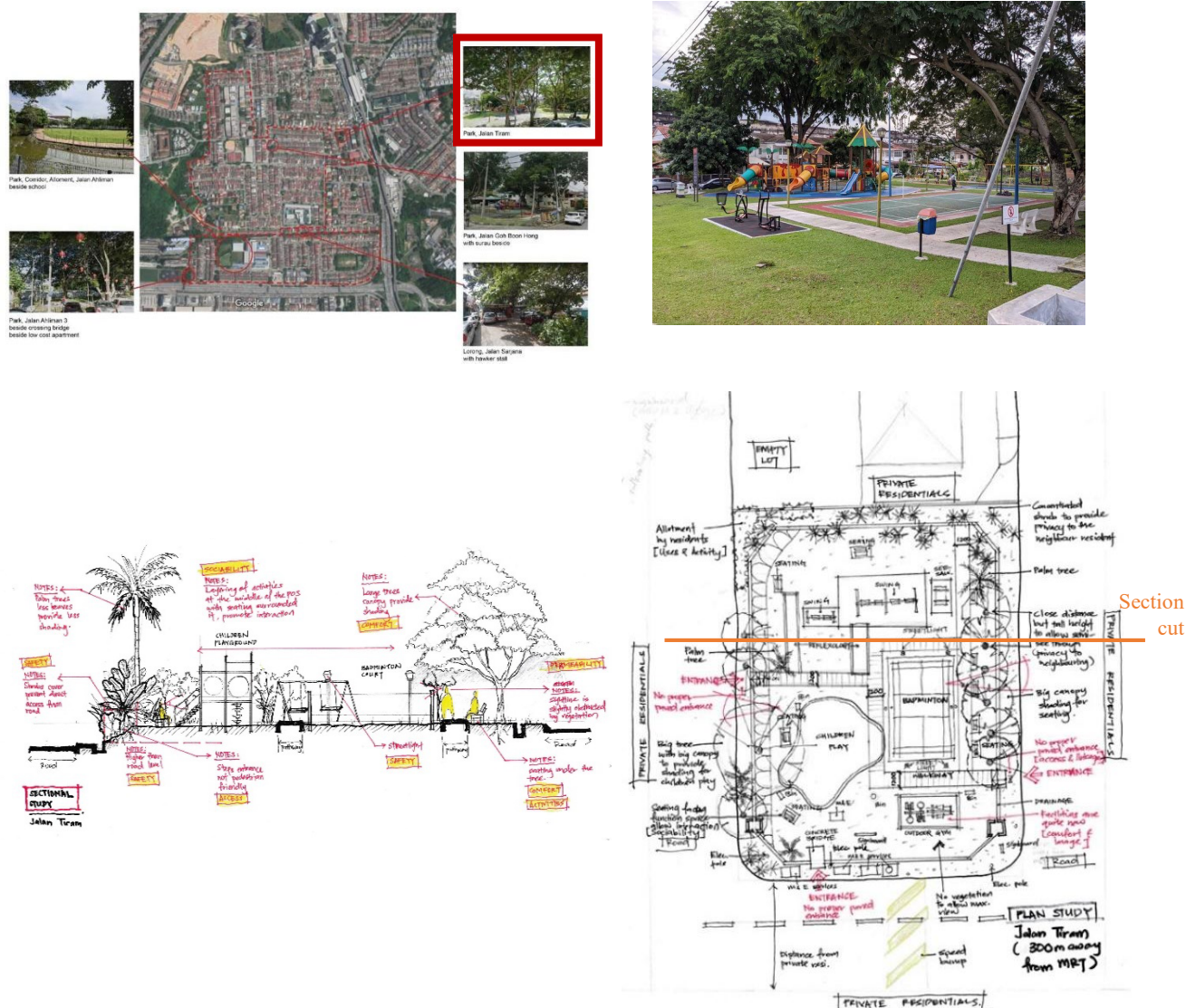

Figure 2: The Current Condition of the Public Open Space at Jalan Tiram (Source: Authors)

Comfort and Image - The park's facilities are relatively recent. Some of the facilities, such as the children's play area, badminton court, outdoor gym equipment, see-saw, and swing, are being upgraded. The overall natural light is enough, resulting in a dynamic atmosphere with sufficient shading provided by the trees above the seating area and children's play area. The green is in good shape, and the park as a whole appears to be clean. To offer privacy, the space between the park and the upper neighbouring residents is planted with low shrubs.

Access and Linkage - There are three entrances to the park (Jalan Tiram, Jalan Tiram 1 and Jalan Tiram 3). This park is accessible by public transportation, with the nearest MRT station being only 300 metres away. The major road, Jalan Tiram, has speed bumps that slow down the passing cars. The park does not have a designated parking area, and none of the entrances are handicapped accessible. A tree-lined walkway with a large canopy provides shade for a pleasant stroll. The walkway was designed to connect all of the function spaces, however not all of them are accessible to disabled people. Rough concrete finishes were used as the walkway's material.

Uses and Activities - Residents utilise the left side of the park in the sketch (**Figure 2**) as an allotment. The availability of several facilities allows multiple activities to take place at the same time (sports and children's play).

Sociability - Seating faces the badminton court, where children play, allowing for interaction and allowing guests to witness several layers of activities. The tall trees give a visual connection between the road and passers-by, while also providing privacy for the higher floor occupants.

5.2 Public Open Space at Jalan Goh Boon Hong (beside Surau)

The section shows the connection with the other public space - the *Surau*

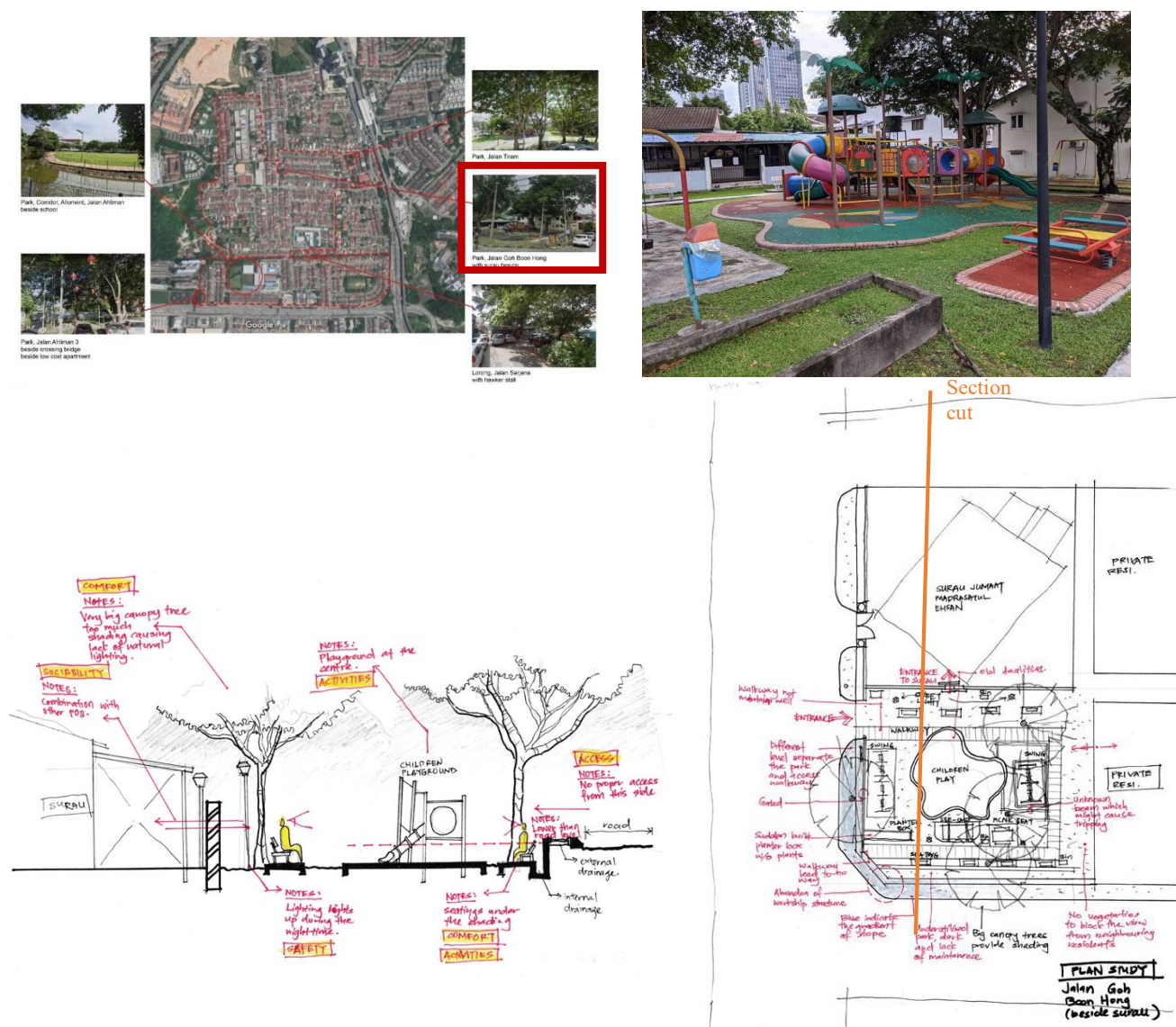Figure 3: The Current Condition of the Public Open Space at Jalan Goh Boon Hong (Source: Authors)

Comfort and Image - Because the park is adjacent to the surau, it can accommodate the surau's audience. The condition of the park is quite poor with old facilities and poor ambient. Trees are fewer, their roots break the walkways and facilities. The park's natural lighting is likewise limited due to the large canopy trees.

Access and Linkage - Because Jalan Goh Boon Hong is a busy road and different height of the roadside on the left side, pedestrians may find it difficult to access the park (**Figure 3**). The park's walkway is poorly planned, has a dead end, and is not properly maintained.

Uses and Activities - Littering of worship structures is found in the park. The drainage system is not well maintained and the planter box is built without design consideration and no plants are planted in it.

Sociability- a park located beside surau to allow any interaction activities to have happened. Seating is oriented toward the activities area to encourage interaction.

5.3 Lorong Choo Lip Kung (food stalls)
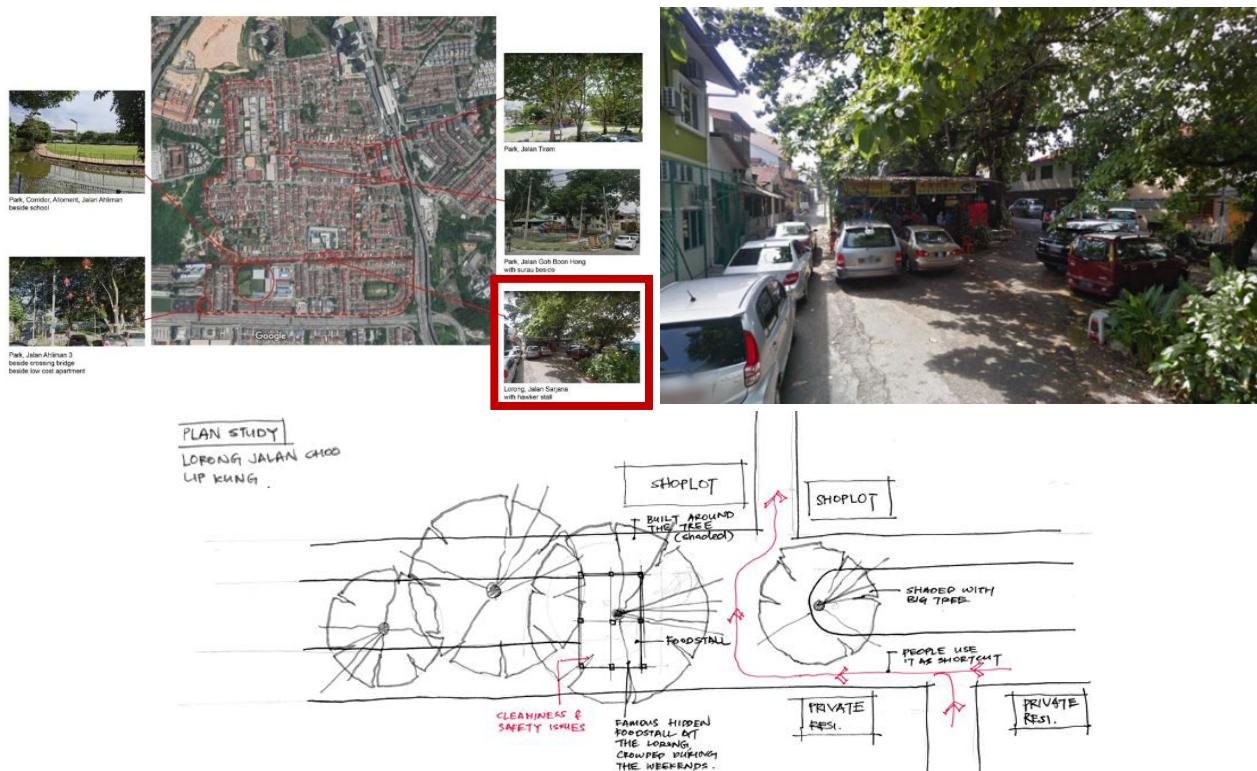
Figure 4: The Current Condition of Lorong Choo Lip Kung (Source: Authors)

Comfort and Image - Over time, the Lorong has facilitated informal business operations such as a designated public open space with modest Chinese food booths. Residents benefit from this activity since it provides them with extra sources of income.

Access and Linkage - Because it is not meant for business activities, vehicle accessibility could be an issue, causing traffic congestion on the Lorong during the peak hours of the food stalls. For pedestrians, it may be a necessary part of their journey when travelling through the Lorong.

Uses and Activity - This activity has resulted in not only physical deformation of the residential as built but also encroachment of open areas and increased rubbish production, which has been deposited into canals or open spaces within the residential in certain situations.

Sociability - This could be an opportunity for residents to gather at the location as it is just right after their dwelling.

5.4 Public Open Space at Jalan Ahliman (park, allotment, school corridor, jogging trail, beside school compound)

The section shows the water feature, pond, with the composition of landscape features and its relation to the park's overall scheme
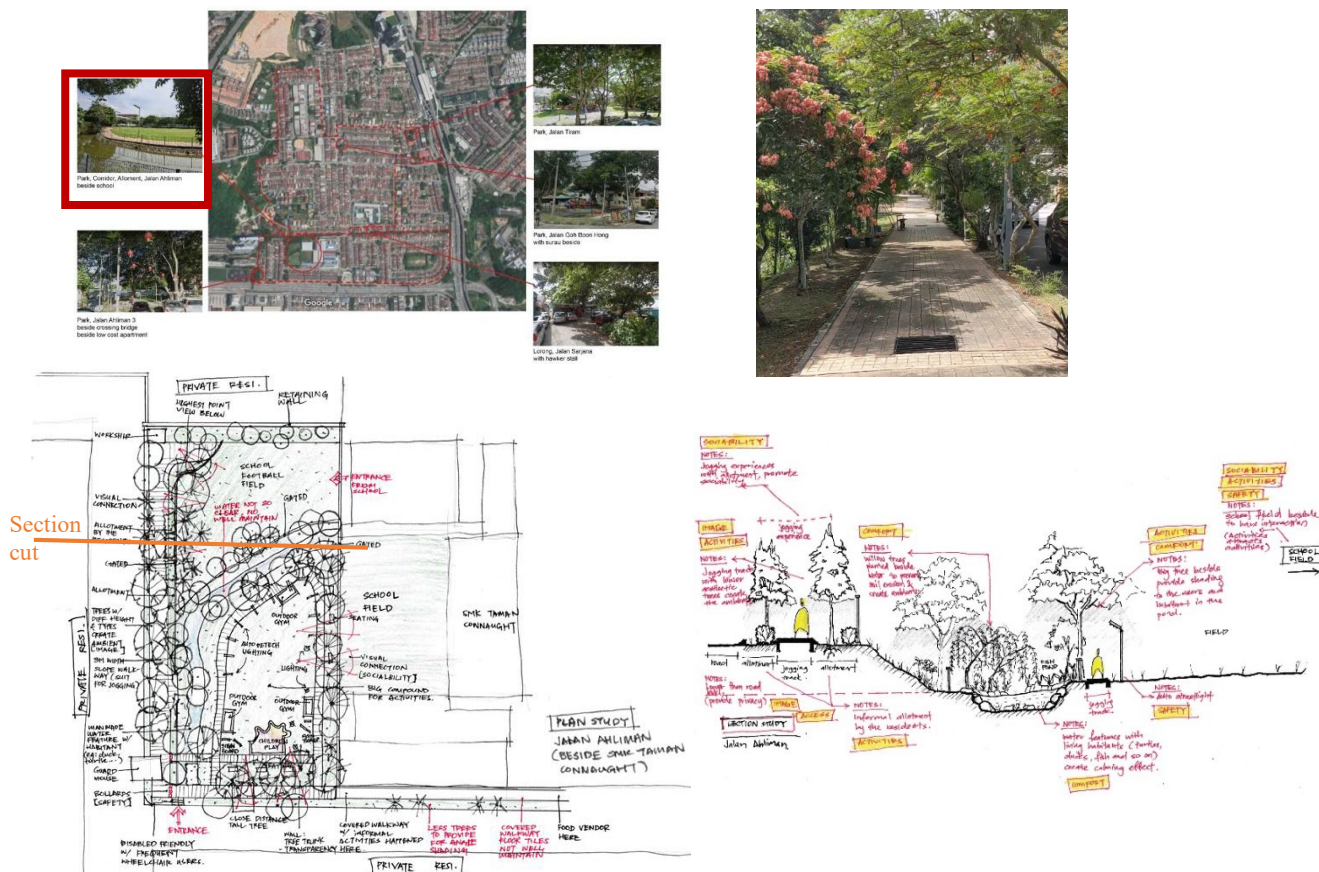
Figure 5: The Current Condition of Public Open Space at Jalan Ahliman (Source: Authors)

Comfort and Image - The park, which includes a variety of other public open spaces, is located adjacent to the school grounds. The park has auto-sensor street lighting (safety). The park is created with a huge compound in the centre to accommodate various activities and events. A water element has been incorporated to improve the quality of the spaces with habitats. The tree distribution around the park perimeter is appropriate to provide privacy to the surrounding neighbourhood.

Access and Linkage - the entrance of the park is disabled friendly with frequent usage by disabled persons. The wide jogging track on the slope is suitable for joggers and is planted with various plants to create a pleasant atmosphere. Bollards have been installed to ensure the safety of the users.

Uses and Activities - The park's connection to the school compound creates a situation where "activities attract activities" and "people attract people." The school hallway is frequently used as an informal hangout spot for students and youngsters. The corridor is also used for informal enterprises, such as sellers. However, the corridor is in poor condition, with some tiles falling out of place.

Sociability - The proximity to the school grounds enables visual and activity contact. Seating at the parameter is oriented toward the park's centre, allowing visitors to see the events going on. Different habitats (duck, turtle, fish, and flora) coexist at the park, allowing humans and the environment to engage directly. It is also a place of worship near the end of the slope jogging route, where it reaches the highest point with a view of the entire park.

5.5 Informal Business and Pasar at Jalan Bee Eng 1

Figure 6: The Current Condition of Informal Space, Jalan Bee Eng 1 (Source: Authors)

Comfort and Image - The informal business of pasar was made easier by this single usage of developments. The business was started by the residents under the 1.5m covered walkway. It also makes it easier for local individuals to obtain supplements without having to travel outside of their neighbourhood. The public open space's cleanliness and waste management would be a concern.

Access and linkage - the street in the middle serves the shop lots and the informal business. It allows the access for both ways. The street ramps are not suitable for disabled people because they are designed for loading and unloading activities.

Uses and Activities - Such informal business activities include small-scale fruit and vegetable vendors, meet vendors, retail kiosks, food stalls and eating joints. A new worship place was added beside the corridor of the space.

Sociability - the informal space often attracts people from other residential neighbourhoods. The interaction within the space of shoplots, streets and stalk is strong as the activities network are happening within the compound.

5.6   Public Open Space at Jalan Mutiara Barat 2 (near to the MRT station)

Figure 7: The Current Condition of Public Open Space at Jalan Mutiara Barat 2 (Source: Authors)

Comfort and Image - most of the space in this park is green space. The design planning of this park emphasizes the green element. The park consists of only the children play as the central point. There is no pavement connected to the function space and seating area, which might cause difficulty to walk on after rain. The street lights within the park are adequate. The condition of the green is maintained well and the whole park looks clean. The trees are planted closer together or with a slope to separate the view for privacy reasons. There is less vegetation on the Lorong side, which is close to the neighbours, and the private residence has less seclusion.

Access and linkage - Three entrances can be accessed (Jalan Mutiara Barat 1 and Jalan Mutiara Barat 2). The entrances are not disabled-friendly and do not have pavement leading to the function area or seating. This park is accessible by public transportation, with the nearest MRT station being only 300 metres away. Its main roadways, Jalan Mutiara Barat 2 and Jalan Mutiara Barat 3 include speed bumps that slow down passing cars. The park does not have a designated parking area, and none of the entrances are handicapped accessible.

Uses and Activities - Residents utilise the upper section and right side of the park in the sketch as an allotment on the roadside curb. There are not much of facilities, causing a lack of activities happening at the park.

Sociability - Seating is facing children's play to allow interaction and can see the activities happening there. However, there is a lack of shading for the seating area. The tall and dense trees that line Jalan Mutiara 2 provide privacy to the nearby residents.

5.7 Public Open Space at Jalan Mutiara Barat 4 (with Rukun Tetangga)

Figure 8: The Current Condition of Public Open Space at Jalan Mutiara Barat 4 (Source: Authors)

Comfort and Image - The park is located within the *Rukun Tetangga* compound. It only consists of a badminton court and a gazebo. The trees are large and tall in general; however, they are not well maintained and attract a lot of mosquitos.

Access and linkage - the park has only one entrance which causes inconvenience to the users. The pathway is made of tarmac, which is unsuitable for outdoor activities.

Uses and Activities - The jogging trail circulated the function area (badminton court and *Rukun Tetangga* office room) allow interaction between activities and activities. There are allotments and places of worship can be found at the parameters of the park.

Sociability - people who are using the jogging trail can overview the activities which are happening within the trail. The gazebo is located within the trail and is surrounded by different activities. The place of worship is well-kept and gated. The allotments and place of worship show the active use of the residents nearby.

6. DISCUSSION

The public open spaces examined in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, exhibit a diverse range of qualities, with landscape design playing a pivotal role in shaping user behaviour and experience. In well-designed areas like Taman Taynton View, design elements, such as vegetation, water features, and seating arrangements not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the space but also promote positive social interactions, comfort, and prolonged visits. Research has demonstrated that landscapes that incorporate natural features, such as greenery and water, contribute to a sense of calm and well-being, fostering positive psychological effects and encouraging individuals to spend more time outdoors (Niazi & Khan, 2024; Shan et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2023; Awang et al., 2022; Bustamante et al., 2022). When these spaces are thoughtfully curated, they cater to diverse needs, from passive relaxation to social gathering, which in turn fosters a sense of community and belonging.

Interestingly, landscape design can also affect user behaviours by influencing the degree of social interaction and the types of activities that occur within a space. In Taman Taynton View, the careful placement of seating areas, shaded zones, and open spaces for recreation creates a welcoming environment for social gatherings, family outings, and casual encounters. These spatial configurations help to delineate zones of activity, from quiet contemplation to more active, communal uses, facilitating both solitude and interaction. Studies on environmental psychology highlight the importance of spatial design in encouraging social engagement (El-Didy et al., 2024; Ellery & Ellery, 2019). For instance, the concept of "territoriality" in public spaces suggests that people are more likely to interact and feel a sense of ownership in spaces where they feel physically and psychologically comfortable (Brighenti & Kärrholm, 2023; Paiva & Sánchez-Fuarros, 2021). Well-designed seating areas and walking paths promote these behaviours by providing clear zones for different activities, thus enhancing the social dynamics of the space (Li et al., 2022).

Conversely, the impact of landscape design can be undermined by poor maintenance and inadequate management, as seen in spaces like Jalan Goh Boon Hong. Neglected public areas, with overgrown vegetation, litter, and deteriorating infrastructure, not only diminish the aesthetic value of a space but also deter people from using it. As suggested by Carmona (2021) research on urban design and maintenance, the state of upkeep in public open spaces is crucial in shaping user behaviour and perceptions. The signs of neglect and disorder can encourage antisocial behaviour and reduce the likelihood of positive engagement with the space (Zhao et al., 2024). In contrast, regular maintenance and cleanliness ensure that spaces remain inviting and safe, encouraging their use by a wider range of individuals. Well-maintained landscapes contribute to feelings of safety and security, which are essential for fostering regular use and promoting social interactions.

Accessibility is another critical factor in the design of public open spaces, directly influencing their inclusivity and usability (Shan et al., 2024). In areas like Jalan Tiram, where paths are paved and there are multiple entrances, the space offers relatively good accessibility for a broad range of users. However, challenges persist for people with disabilities, particularly concerning the design of ramps, gradients, and parking facilities. Inclusive design principles emphasize the need for spaces to accommodate people of all ages and abilities, ensuring that public realms are genuinely open and welcoming to everyone (Carmona, 2021). According to Kapsalis et al. (2024), the concept of "universal design" advocates for the creation of environments that provide equal access for all, addressing the needs of people with physical, sensory, and cognitive impairments. In the context of Cheras, this might involve the integration of features such as tactile paving, accessible toilets, and smooth, level pathways, alongside the more traditional design elements of seating and greenery.

Regardless, the social and cultural context of a neighbourhood must be considered when designing public open spaces, as it influences both the functional requirements and the aesthetic preferences of users (Chen et al., 2024; Nia, 2021). In Cheras, a district characterized by a mix of older residents, young families, and a diverse cultural makeup, public spaces must reflect these varying needs. Research on the role of public open spaces in fostering social cohesion suggests that culturally sensitive design, which takes into account local customs, values, and activities, enhances the relevance and usability of these spaces (Askarizad et al., 2024; Awang et al., 2022; Bagheri et al., 2022). For example, spaces designed for multi-generational use, like playgrounds, quiet gardens, and communal activity areas, can more effectively meet the varied needs and preferences of a diverse community. By understanding the social dynamics of a neighbourhood, landscape designers can create spaces that promote inclusivity, celebrate cultural identity, and encourage a sense of belonging among users. Through a comprehensive understanding of landscape design's impact on behaviour, urban planners can create public open spaces that not only enhance the quality of life but also foster stronger, more connected communities.

7.   CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the critical role of public open spaces in enhancing the quality of life for urban residents, specifically in Taman Mutiara Barat and Taman Taynton View, Kuala Lumpur. The research findings underscore the significance of landscape strategies and planning in shaping spaces that not only foster outdoor activities but also facilitate social interaction and community engagement. Moreover, the study emphasizes that future research should explore the dynamic relationship between users and landscape strategies, with particular attention to how these spaces contribute to psychological well-being, mental health, and stress relief. It is clear that the preferences of end-users, as the primary inhabitants of these spaces, must be prioritized throughout the planning, design, and implementation stages to ensure spaces that truly serve their needs and promote sustainable engagement.

The contribution of this research lies not only in expanding knowledge about the role of public open spaces in urban contexts but also in offering practical applications for urban planners, landscape architects, and policymakers. By prioritizing the creation of accessible, inclusive, and aesthetically pleasing spaces, policymakers and urban planners can enhance the liveability of the city. Furthermore, the integration of nature-based solutions, such as green infrastructure and biophilic design, can contribute to a more sustainable and resilient urban environment. Future urban planning policies should inevitably involve end-users from the early stages of development to ensure that public spaces are not only functional but also inclusive and adaptable to evolving community needs. Additionally, fostering interdisciplinary research that connects landscape design with fields such as therapeutic landscapes could further enhance the mental and physical health benefits of these spaces. By incorporating these insights into future developments, policymakers can promote the creation of vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive public spaces that strengthen the social fabric of urban communities and contribute to a higher quality of life for all residents.

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