



Wetland for People

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Wetlands have long been neglected as wastelands and as a result, the wetlands have been converted into a more "meaningful" uses such as agricultural and housing. However, for the last few years, especially after the infamous tsunami tragedy that struck Indonesia and Thailand in 2005, wetlands' values and benefits to the mankind have been explored, if not revisited. Studies found wetlands having a long list of values and benefits that people were not aware of even though scientists have long discovered them and warned of the consequences of losing wetlands quite a long time ago (Mitsch and Gosselink, 2007).

However, wetlands, especially those in the urban areas cannot be left without any uses attached to them because studies have found that people have less preference to wetlands because of their appearances that often look messy and untidy (Kaplan, R. & Kaplan, S., 1989). Nevertheless, Che Rashid, in his design, tries to bring wetlands closer to people. Using wetlands associated with the Sungai Paya Pagar at Bera, Pahang, Malaysia, he first surveyed people's visual preferences for wetlands as well as the site's potential uses. His study concluded that the wetlands at Sungai Paya Pagar have potential to be conserved and the uses should be limited to eco-recreational activities (Che Rashid, 2009).

Che Rashid has taken a very utilitarian approach in planning and designing the Sungai Paya Pagar wetlands. To a certain extent, his design is recommended to the public and town municipality because it relies heavily on sustainability and centered on recreation, sight-seeing and educational activities. He proposes the construction of the site to be based on industrialised building systems. However, the development of the landscape seeks economic viability of the project as well. It is worrisome that the development would flourish only for a number of years but later be abandoned partly due to the lack of public funding. To overcome this problem, Che Rashid proposed a limited number of exclusive chalets. In addition, the wetlands educational center, would require visitors to pay to enter. It is crucial because the amount generated from these two activities could be used to sustain the wetlands. People may argue that public goods should be free. On contrary, this is also a time to test how much would people be willing to pay in exchange of environmental benefits and values.

This project, indeed, neither looked very complicated nor full with design philosophy. Instead, wetlands have sensitive ecology where architects need to make a choice whether to make a design statement within this ecology or to be humble with nature. For this project, Che Rashid has shown his ability to read the sensitive landscape at a very fundamental level and chose to be humble with nature rather than going against it.

References:
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■ Che Rasid Che Seman

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