

Observations in Design

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The sixth semester Bachelor of Landscape Architecture students are required to travel to any country or region in Malaysia. The objective is to ensure students understand the effects of local culture, nature and politics in shaping landscape. Most importantly, students need to understand that they have to take precautionary measures when designing in sensitive cultural, natural and political sites. The travel programme also plays a vital role in enhancing students' professional and environmental ethics. In 2009, the students of third year were fortunate to visit the city of Jogjakarta and the Island of Bali in Indonesia. Students worked very hard to pursue sponsorships and necessary approvals for the trip to happen.

Jogjakarta was chosen because it is a unique city. The city has strong Javanese influences and is the center of Javanese culture. It is interesting to note that Jogjakarta was planned and laid out according to Javanese myth based on "Kitab Primbon". The myth states that the King of Java, the first Hamengkubowono, has chosen the site of Jogja based on its location between a mountain at the north (Gunung Merapi) and the sea at the south (South Sea). According to the Javanese belief, these two nature wonders will give the city ample protection. In addition, the city itself is planned between the curvature of two great rivers (Opak and Progo Rivers) giving added advantages in defense and prosperity. The power seat is accentuated with Kraton (royal palace) at the center and connected with other parts of the city by an axis road (Malioboro Street).

On the other hand, Bali was chosen because of its tourism development. The students saw how landscape contributes to tourism. Since the concept of Balinese Garden is already known throughout the world, the students wanted to observe its uniqueness at its origin. During the trip to Bali, students stayed at the City of Kuta. The city is well developed for tourism where all its premises are devoted for tourism activities. There is one aspect that stands out above the tourism endeavour, Hinduism-related activities. Balineses, who are devout Hindus, do not see tourism as deterrant to their belief. Instead, Hinduism practices are made tourism attractions. Bali protects the nature and its culture because the religion requires them to do so. Every entity of nature and the built environment has meaning

attached respectively. The belief is deliberated in Balinese manuscripts; Hasta Bumi and Trihita Kara, in which the books instruct Balinese how their houses should look like and how they should use their spaces. In essence, the manuscripts inform Balinese on how Bali Island should be seen. Bali without Hinduism will become another pseudo cultural site where cultural activities are portrayed for the sake of tourism instead of they being part of the local culture.

The students' understanding about their experience in Jogjakarta and Bali was later presented and exhibited at Sultan Abdul Samad library, Universiti Putra Malaysia. Each student produced an artwork that reflects what they had seen and understood about Jogjakarta and Bali. The artworks comes in many forms: sculptural, paintings and photographs. The exercise trained the students to become ardent observers so they may later be able to communicate what they have seen in various creative alternatives. As a designer or landscape architectural students, the process of "abstraction" is important skill when designing aesthetically pleasant yet meaningful design.