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## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MALAYSIAN GARDEN CONCEPT CRITERIA TO URBAN PUBLIC PARKS**

**Ahmad Zamil Zakaria<sup>1\*</sup>, Kartina Alauddin<sup>2</sup>,  
Nor Aini Salleh<sup>3</sup> & Kharizam Ismail<sup>4</sup>**

*<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Department of Built Environment Studies & Technology,  
Faculty of Built Environment,  
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA, PERAK BRANCH, MALAYSIA*

### **Abstract**

The Malaysian Garden Concept (MGC), introduced by the National Landscape Department (NLD) in 2009, intends to integrate cultural heritage, ecological values, and aesthetic design into urban parks. However, implementing MGC has faced challenges, with many parks prioritising modern aesthetics over cultural and ecological principles. This study aims to assess the level of MGC implementation in two (2) public parks developed by the NLD. The objectives are to evaluate the effectiveness of MGC criteria and identify the challenges in their application. The research employs an observational method, using the MGC guidelines to assess the parks. Findings reveal that both parks partially adhere to the MGC criteria, with significant gaps in cultural and heritage integration. The discussion highlights the need for better enforcement and stakeholder education. Recommendations include enhancing awareness and implementing MGC guidelines more strictly. This study makes a novel contribution to the Malaysian planning literature by translating MGC policy guidelines into measurable, on-site design assessments, thereby linking conceptual frameworks to real-world implementation. Future studies should address long-term sustainability and promote a more proactive approach to MGC implementation in park development.

**Keywords:** The Malaysian Garden Concept, Urban Parks, Cultural Heritage, Landscape Architecture, Park Design Implementation

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author. Email: zamil227@uitm.edu.my

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Malaysian Garden Concept (MGC), established by the NLD in 2009, seeks to embed Malaysia's cultural heritage, ecological values, and aesthetics into urban parks. Despite significant potential, its implementation is hindered by a disconnect between guideline intentions and park realities. Modern aesthetics often override traditional values, diminishing local identity. The main issue is inconsistent enforcement and limited stakeholder awareness of MGC guidelines, which this study examines by evaluating the depth and barriers of MGC application in park design.

This study provides an empirical, site-based evaluation of MGC implementation by analysing two NLD-developed parks. Using field observations, it demonstrates the gap between policy and real-world application, offering insight into both challenges and opportunities. This approach advances planning scholarship by critically connecting theory, policy, and practice within Malaysia's evolving cultural landscape.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The MGC aims to integrate cultural, ecological, and social well-being elements in park designs. However, challenges remain in its consistent application, as many parks prioritise modern aesthetics over traditional and ecological principles. Studies highlight gaps in stakeholder education and enforcement, resulting in parks that fail to reflect Malaysia's cultural identity. The lack of integration of local plants, architectural elements, and cultural heritage undermines the MGC's objectives. Future efforts must focus on enhancing awareness, education, and enforcement to achieve a balanced, sustainable approach to park design.

### **Public Parks**

According to the Town and Country Planning Department of Peninsular Malaysia (2013), "open space" is defined as land for public use, fully or partially. The term "park" is often used as a synonym for open space and is an area intended primarily for aesthetic enjoyment, reserved for the public (Abu Bakar, 2002). A public park is a location for public recreation built by a government agency, designed to meet the size, use, and specific needs of an area, whether in a residential area, city, or region.

**Table 1:** Development of Public Parks in Malaysia 2010-2022 by the NLD

| Type of Park (Hierarchy) | Total Area (Acres) | Total Parks (Nos) |
|--------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Playground Lot           | 5951.28            | 9080              |
| Play Field               | 5229.65            | 2083              |
| Neighbourhood Park       | 3867.14            | 421               |
| Local Park               | 5794.76            | 151               |
| Urban Park               | 3518.34            | 25                |
| Regional Park            | 8594.16            | 13                |

*Source: NLD, 2022*

### **The Malaysian Garden Concept (MGC)**

In this guideline book, the MGC outlines eight (8) design criteria that must be prioritised in the development of public gardens (NLD, 2009). The design criteria are as follows:

1. *Genius Loci* – Its unique spirit and cultural atmosphere determine the style, meaning, and cultural quality, harmonising them within architecture.
2. *Local Plants* – This criterion guarantees the plant selection reflects the region's indigenous flora.
3. *Architectural Structure and Local Elements* – Incorporating traditional Malaysian architectural elements and structures into garden designs helps to maintain cultural continuity and celebrate local craftsmanship.
4. *Cultural and Heritage* – To incorporate cultural and historical context into the garden design, reflecting Malaysia's rich diversity and making visitors proud of their culture.
5. *High Intrinsic Value* – Gardens should be designed to provide high aesthetic, ecological, and recreational value.
6. *Adaptability to Local Weather* – Garden designs must consider local climatic conditions so that the plants and materials reflect regional weather patterns and adapt to this natural environment.
7. *Elements of Security* – Providing a garden layout and lighting, offering visitors an assuredly splendid, comfortable stay.
8. *Manageable and Comfortable* – Creating spaces that are easy to maintain and provide comfort to visitors, including adequate seating, shading, and accessibility features.

During World Forestry Day in 1997, the former Director-General of the NLD announced that such a concept would be developed, emphasising harmony with nature. It would include native trees and flora that reflect our lives, spiritual values, and cultural heritage, which is also Malaysia's.



**Figure 1:** Newspaper article “Designing the Malaysian Garden”  
 Source: *New Straits Times*, 1997



**Figure 2:** The NLD successfully published a guidebook of the MGC in 2009  
 Source: *NLD*, 2009

### Cultural Identity and Heritage Preservation

The MGC aims to integrate cultural heritage and local identity in park designs, reflecting Malaysia’s diversity. Landscape identity, linking parks to their cultural context, is crucial for meaningful spaces (Zakaria et al., 2021). However, modern design often overlooks traditional elements, weakening cultural representation. Incorporating traditional architecture is vital for cultural continuity (Stobbelaar & Pedroli, 2011). Modern trends compromise MGC’s goal, leaving parks lacking cultural depth (Zakaria et al., 2020).

### Ecological and Environmental Considerations

The MGC emphasizes using local plants and materials suited to Malaysia’s tropical climate to enhance ecological value. Native plants preserve biodiversity, reduce maintenance costs, and improve park aesthetics (Rosli et al., 2020). However, many parks use non-native species, compromising ecological value (Zakaria et al., 2020). The Town and Country Planning Department (2013) highlights the need to better integrate ecological factors for sustainable urban parks.

### **Social Engagement and Well-being**

Parks with clear cultural and ecological features promote social engagement and well-being, encouraging longer visits and deeper interactions (Chen et al., 2024). The MGC aims to create parks with recreational facilities, such as jogging tracks and playgrounds, to encourage active lifestyles (Anuar et al., 2018). However, many parks lack these elements, reducing engagement and physical activity.

### **Challenges in MGC Implementation**

Despite MGC's benefits, its implementation faces challenges. Zakaria et al. (2020) note that many parks prioritize modern design over traditional elements, undermining MGC's goals. Lack of stakeholder awareness and education leads to inconsistent application (Zakaria et al., 2021). Modern design trends overshadow cultural and ecological aspects (Stobbelaar & Pedroli, 2011). Resource limitations and weak policy enforcement further hinder MGC integration (NLD, 2022).

### **Awareness and Education**

Effective implementation of the MGC depends on stakeholder awareness and education. However, studies (Zakaria et al., 2021; Abu Bakar, 2012) reveal a limited understanding among practitioners and authorities, leading to inconsistent application. The NLD (2022), therefore, calls for continuous professional training to ensure uniform compliance with MGC guidelines.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted to obtain data through observation of the implementation of the selected public park. The study's objective is to determine the extent of implementation of the MGC criteria in the design of public parks funded by the NLD. In this study, two (2) public parks were sampled, and all were developed by the NLD in 2019. This study employed a qualitative observational method, which allows for a direct, contextual assessment of the physical and spatial characteristics within each park. The observational checklist was structured around the eight MGC criteria to ensure systematic data capture while maintaining interpretive flexibility. This qualitative approach is suitable for examining the visual and design-based dimensions of MGC implementation. However, the method focuses primarily on what is observed rather than why it occurs. Therefore, while the approach is valid for exploratory assessment, this study acknowledges that deeper interpretive insights, such as stakeholder decision-making and user experience, could be further explored through complementary qualitative methods, including interviews or document analysis, in future research. This study focused on public parks within the urban park category as case studies. The following section provides information on the two selected public parks.

**Table 2: Parks Information**

| Park Name                                         | Area (Acres) | Completed (Year) |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------|------------------|
| Taman Awam Bandar Puteri Jaya, Sungai Petani (P1) | 29.4         | 2019             |
| Taman Rimba Bandar Proton, Tanjung Malim (P2)     | 37           | 2019             |

Source: NLD, 2022

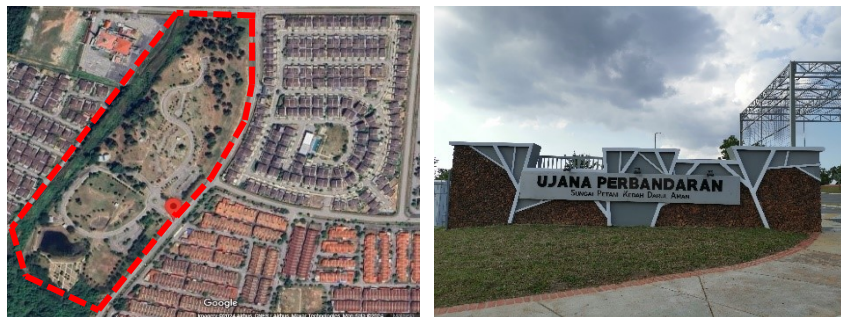


**Figure 3:** Taman Awam Bandar Puteri Jaya, Sungai Petani, Kedah

Figure 3 shows a site view of Taman Awam Bandar Puteri Jaya, Sungai Petani, Kedah. The design exhibits limited integration of native flora and traditional architectural motifs, reflecting a neutral level of MGC compliance (Authors' field observation, 2020).



**Figure 4:** Taman Rimba Bandar Proton, Tanjung Malim, Perak

Figure 4 shows Taman Rimba Bandar Proton, Tanjung Malim, Perak. The park's modern layout prioritises functionality and safety features but demonstrates weak incorporation of local cultural and heritage elements (Authors' field observation, 2020).

Eight (8) criteria of the MGC have been consistently used to evaluate the implementation level of park design. The study used a Likert-scale framework to guide the assessment of MGC design criteria. As noted by Jacoby and Matell (1971), a three-point scale may be sufficient in specific situations, as it captures both directional tendencies and neutral positions among respondents. The

observation method was chosen for this study because the researchers are familiar with landscape design and its evaluation using indicators, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:** The indicators in assessing the use of MGC design criteria

| Point     | Satisfaction  | Description             | Value | Symbol |
|-----------|---------------|-------------------------|-------|--------|
| 36 - 40   | follows       | It's there and dominant | 4-5   | ED     |
| 32 - 35   | a bit follows | It's there, but a bit   | 1-3   | H      |
| 20 - 31.6 | neutral       | None                    | 0     | X      |
| 12 - 19   | weak          |                         |       |        |
| 0 - 11    | not follow    |                         |       |        |

*Source: Authors*

These sites were purposefully selected as they represent benchmark projects implemented after the introduction of the MGC guidelines in 2009. While this purposive selection allows for in-depth contextual understanding, it also limits the extent to which findings can be generalized across all urban parks in Malaysia. Therefore, the results are best interpreted as indicative rather than representative, highlighting patterns and issues that may recur in other parks with similar planning backgrounds.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that both public parks must fully comply with the MGC design criteria. P1 falls under the “Neutral” category, meaning they do not fully meet the MGC design criteria but does not significantly deviate from them. Surprisingly, the P2 had the lowest score among the parks.

### Observational study using MGC Design Criteria

Table 4 provides an in-depth analysis of the adherence of P1 and P2 to the MGC design criteria. This study used the MGC design criteria to evaluate two public parks developed by the NLD. The MGC guidelines have eight criteria: Genius Loci, Local Plants, Architectural Structure & Local Elements, Culture & Heritage, High Intrinsic Value, Local Weather Compatibility, Elements of Security, and Manageable & Comfortable (NLD, 2009). The parks were assessed based on how well they adhered to these criteria.

The findings revealed that both parks partially met the MGC standards. P1 scored well on environmental criteria, including Adaptability to Local Weather and Elements of Security, with scores indicating extensive compliance. However, it scored poorly on Culture & Heritage and Local Plants, with significant gaps in cultural and ecological integration (Zakaria et al., 2020). P2 similarly showed weaknesses in the same areas, particularly with Local Plants, and Architectural Structure & Local Elements, which scored very low. Both parks failed to adequately integrate local flora and traditional Malaysian architectural features, undermining their cultural identity. These results confirm the need for a

more comprehensive approach to applying the MGC guidelines, with a focus on cultural heritage and ecological sustainability in future park designs (Zakaria et al., 2021).

**Table 4:** Observational study using MGC Design Criteria for selected NLD-funded public parks

| No | Garden Project (Funded by the NLD) | The Malaysian Garden Design Criteria |              |              |              |              |              |              |              | TOTAL (Point) | STATUS  |
|----|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------|
|    |                                    | Criteria (1)                         | Criteria (2) | Criteria (3) | Criteria (4) | Criteria (5) | Criteria (6) | Criteria (7) | Criteria (8) |               |         |
| 1  | P1 (2019)                          | ED (4)                               | H (3)        | X (0)        | X (0)        | X (0)        | ED (5)       | ED (5)       | ED (4)       | 21            | Neutral |
| 2  | P2 (2019)                          | ED (4)                               | H (3)        | X (0)        | X (0)        | X (0)        | ED (5)       | H (2)        | H (2)        | 16            | Weak    |

Source: Authors

*Note:* The MGC Design Criteria, referring to the guideline published by the NLD

- |                                             |                                |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1) Genius Loci                              | 5) High Intrinsic Value        |
| 2) Local Plants                             | 6) Local Weather Compatibility |
| 3) Architectural Structure & Local Elements | 7) Elements of Security        |
| 4) Culture & Heritage                       | 8) Manageable & Comfortable    |

### An overview of the site assessments

Table 5 presents a detailed assessment of two public parks (P1 and P2) developed by the NLD, identifying several gaps in adherence to the MGC guidelines. The evaluation was conducted based on the NLD's eight key MGC criteria.

P1, located in a residential area, had the potential for cultural integration but did not fully capitalize on it. While it reflected some local characteristics, it received a “neutral” score for Genius Loci, suggesting it did not fully embrace the cultural and environmental essence outlined in the MGC. P1 also struggled with integrating Local Plants, with a prevalence of non-native species, earning a “weak” score for this criterion. The park lacked significant traditional architectural elements, resulting in a low score for Architectural Structure & Local Elements.

In contrast, P2, situated near natural features such as forests and rivers, had an advantage in terms of surroundings. However, it also received a “weak” score for Genius Loci, indicating missed opportunities to integrate local cultural elements. Like P1, the use of native plants was minimal, and the park faced challenges in incorporating both Local Plants and Cultural Heritage, earning low scores in these areas. The absence of traditional Malaysian architecture further undermined P2's cultural identity, as noted by Stobbelaar & Pedroli (2011).

Both parks demonstrated adequate compliance with environmental aspects, including climate adaptation and visitor safety. However, these strengths were overshadowed by the absence of cultural and heritage integration core

components of the MGC that distinguish Malaysian landscape identity from generic park design. The site assessments stress the need for stronger cultural and ecological integration in park designs.

Despite performing well on environmental factors, neither park fully adheres to MGC's cultural and ecological guidelines. These findings underscore the need to better implement MGC principles to create parks that reflect Malaysia's unique cultural and environmental identity (Zakaria et al., 2020).

**Table 5:** An overview of the site assessments for selected public parks developed by the NLD after the existence of the MGC Guidelines

| No. | The MGC Criteria                                          | Site Assessments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Criteria (1):<br>Genius Loci                              | P1: The park is located between residential areas. It can be categorized as a neighbourhood park in a residential area. The park's users are mostly local people.                                                                                      |
|     |                                                           | P2: The park is a bit further away from the development area. However, this site's advantage is its proximity to natural elements such as forests, hills, and rivers. The park lacks visitors due to being a bit far from residential and quiet areas. |
| 2   | Criteria (2):<br>Local Plants                             | P1: There is little use of endemic plants in design. Non-native plants are widely used in planting design. In a selection of plants, indigenous plants are less prevalent.                                                                             |
|     |                                                           | P2: There is not a significant number of endemic plants used in design. Non-native plants are widely used in planting design. However, their location in the natural element has balanced the population of indigenous plants and introduced plants.   |
| 3   | Criteria (3):<br>Architectural structure & local elements | P1: This does not imply that the park was built strongly to emphasize Malaysian civilization's architecture and use local construction materials.                                                                                                      |
|     |                                                           | P2: It does not imply the park was built, emphasizing Malaysian civilization's architecture and local construction materials.                                                                                                                          |
| 4   | Criteria (4):<br>Culture & Heritage                       | P1: It does not show superior characteristics to the inherited culture.                                                                                                                                                                                |
|     |                                                           | P2: It does not show superior characteristics to the inherited culture.                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 5   | Criteria (5):<br>High Intrinsic Value                     | P1: The authenticity of local art does not have an intrinsic worth.                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|     |                                                           | P2: The authenticity of local art does not have an intrinsic worth.                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 6   | Criteria (6):<br>Local Weather Compatibility              | P1: The use of building materials in the park's design aligns with the tropical climate. Most elements use cement and stone for long-lasting.                                                                                                          |
|     |                                                           | P2: The use of building materials in the park's design is in tune with the tropical climate. Cement is mainly used for long-lasting.                                                                                                                   |
| 7   | Criteria (7):<br>Elements of Security                     | P1: There are safety features regarding construction materials and design specific to park visitors.                                                                                                                                                   |
|     |                                                           | P2: Construction materials have minimal safety features, and unique designs for park visitors are highlighted. The park's location, with a river, forest, and bush elements, could endanger visitors.                                                  |
| 8   | Criteria (8):                                             | P1: The park's surroundings are easy to maintain for visitors' convenience as it is only a local attraction.                                                                                                                                           |

| No. | The MGC Criteria         | Site Assessments                                                                                                                                            |
|-----|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     | Manageable & Comfortable | P2: Because of its location close to the forest, it is not easy to ensure that the park's surroundings are maintained for the convenience of park visitors. |

*Note:* Taman Awam Perbandaran Bandar Puteri Jaya (P1),  
 Taman Rimba Bandar, Tanjung Malim (P2)

*Source: Authors*

Table 5 shows that both parks lacked traditional architectural elements. This may reflect design priorities that favour modern aesthetics over cultural symbolism. Despite introducing the MGC guidelines in 2009, significant gaps remain in their implementation in public parks, as shown in Tables 4 and 5. Both parks, P1 and P2, failed to fully meet the MGC criteria, particularly in cultural heritage, local plant use, and the incorporation of traditional Malaysian architecture. The observational study in Table 4 reveals that both parks scored poorly in Cultural Heritage and Architectural Structure & Local Elements (scoring 0), reflecting a lack of cultural identity integration. While both parks performed reasonably well in Adaptability to Local Weather (scoring 5), this environmental success does not compensate for the absence of cultural depth.

Table 5 further emphasizes these shortcomings by assessing the parks' site characteristics. The Genius Loci criterion, which focuses on incorporating local cultural identity, further highlights the gap in both parks. P1, situated in a residential area, had the opportunity to integrate local cultural elements but failed to do so, missing a chance for community engagement. P2, located near natural features such as forests and rivers, also failed to utilize its environment to incorporate cultural elements. The concept of Genius Loci, representing the spirit of a place, could have enhanced the visitor experience and connection to the park, but this was not achieved in either park.

Both parks also struggled with integrating culture and heritage. P1 lacked local plants and cultural elements, while P2 faced challenges with accessibility and safety, further preventing adherence to the MGC standards. This inconsistency in cultural integration undermines the parks' ability to promote national identity through landscape design. Despite adequate environmental performance, both parks failed to integrate cultural and heritage elements, resulting in generic design outcomes.

In conclusion, while P1 and P2 met some environmental and functional aspects of the MGC, such as weather adaptability and security, they lack cultural and architectural depth. The findings suggest that an overreliance on modern design features has hindered the MGC's implementation, failing to sufficiently integrate local culture and heritage. To address these gaps, the NLD must play a more active role in enforcing MGC guidelines and ensuring that future parks reflect Malaysia's cultural, ecological, and architectural identity. Future developments must integrate cultural and ecological elements, creating public

spaces that serve as landmarks of national identity and reflect Malaysia's unique heritage.

### Challenges in Implementing the MGC

Figure 5 illustrates the key challenges in implementing the MGC across public parks. The challenges outlined are critical in understanding why the MGC has not been fully integrated into park designs.

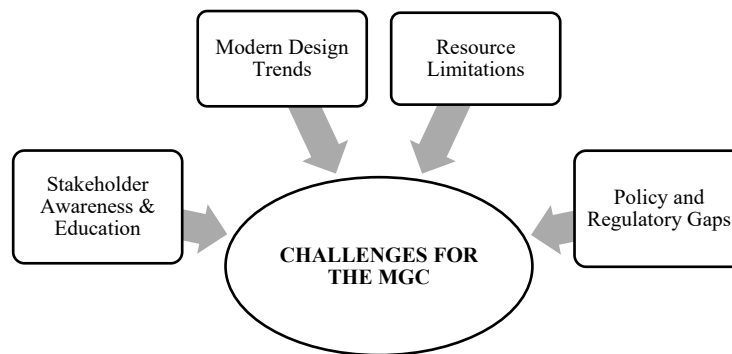


**Figure 5:** Challenges faced in implementing MGC criteria

These challenges align with the issues highlighted in the Literature Review, particularly stakeholder awareness, modern design trends, resource limitations, and policy gaps.

1. *Stakeholder Awareness and Education*

Effective implementation of MGC requires greater awareness and education among stakeholders, including landscape architects and local authorities. Zakaria et al. (2021) emphasize that understanding MGC principles is essential for consistent application. Abu Bakar (2012) highlights the need for professionals and the public to understand MGC's cultural and ecological significance.

2. *Modern Design Trends*

Modern design trends often overshadow traditional cultural and ecological elements in park development. Zakaria et al. (2020) and Rosli et al. (2020) highlight that parks frequently prioritize contemporary aesthetics, which results in a loss of cultural identity and ecological relevance, undermining the goals of the MGC.

3. *Resource Limitations*

Limited resources, including funding and materials, impede the full implementation of MGC. Zakaria et al. (2021) and Anuar et al. (2018) note that financial constraints often prioritize basic functionality over cultural and

ecological elements, resulting in park designs that lack the depth and sustainability intended by the MGC guidelines.

#### 4. Policy and Regulatory Gaps

The lack of clear enforcement frameworks and policy gaps hinders MGC implementation. Zakaria et al. (2020) and NLD (2009) emphasize the need for stronger regulatory oversight to ensure consistent application of MGC guidelines, as inadequate enforcement leads to parks that do not fully reflect Malaysia's cultural and ecological values.

Figure 5 summarises the main challenges hindering MGC implementation according to low stakeholder awareness, dominance of modern design trends, limited resources, and weak policy enforcement. These systemic issues, consistent with literature findings, highlight the need for improved education, funding, and regulation to ensure cultural-ecological integration in future park designs.

#### Framework for Implementing the MGC Design Criteria

Figure 6 is a proposed five-phase framework for MGC implementation, including Assessment, Design, Implementation, Monitoring, and Maintenance, developed from the empirical findings of this study (P1 and P2) and informed by NLD (2009) guidelines. The framework integrates cultural, ecological, and managerial aspects to address observed weaknesses in current park designs. This approach ensures consistent application of MGC guidelines in urban parks, addressing gaps identified in the Literature Review.

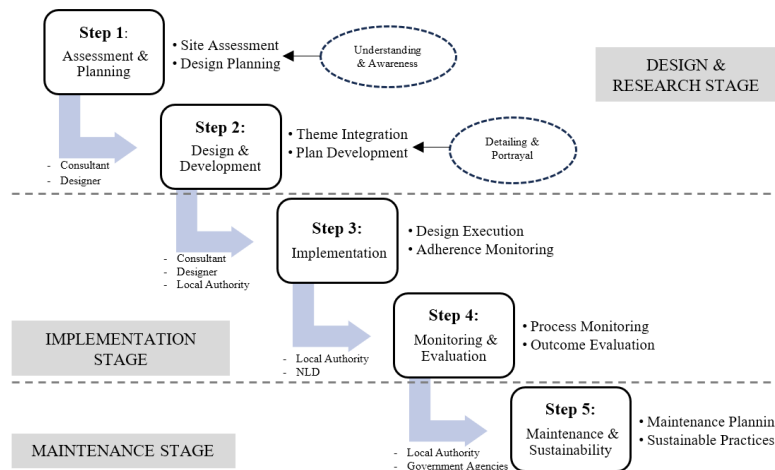


**Figure 6:** Proposed Framework for Implementing the MGC Design Criteria

1. *Assessment and Planning*

The first step in implementing the MGC is a thorough site assessment and planning. Zakaria et al. (2020) emphasize understanding local cultural, ecological, and climatic factors to create parks that reflect Malaysia's identity. This phase helps identify opportunities to integrate MGC criteria, such as local plants and cultural heritage, into park designs. By incorporating these elements early in the planning process, designers can ensure the park meets its functional and cultural goals, creating spaces that reflect Malaysia's heritage and ecological values (Zakaria et al., 2021).

2. *Design and Development*

In the design and development phase, the MGC's key elements, such as local architecture and native plants, must be integrated into park designs. Zakaria et al. (2020) stress the importance of reflecting local culture and ecological values through traditional architectural elements and indigenous flora. This phase ensures that parks meet functional needs and embody cultural identity. By adhering strictly to the MGC guidelines, designers can create parks that celebrate Malaysia's heritage and contribute to environmental sustainability (Zakaria et al., 2021).

3. *Implementation*

The implementation phase focuses on translating the design into reality, following the MGC guidelines. Zakaria et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of ensuring that construction practices align with the prescribed criteria, including using local materials and traditional architectural features. This phase ensures that the park's physical space reflects both cultural heritage and ecological sustainability. Adhering to MGC during implementation guarantees that the park will represent Malaysia's identity and offer a space that is both functional and culturally significant (Zakaria et al., 2021).

4. *Monitoring and Evaluation*

The implementation phase focuses on translating the design into reality, following the MGC guidelines. Zakaria et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of ensuring that construction practices align with the prescribed criteria, including using local materials and traditional architectural features. This phase ensures that the park's physical space reflects both cultural heritage and ecological sustainability. Adhering to MGC during implementation guarantees that the park will represent Malaysia's identity and offer a space that is both functional and culturally significant (Zakaria et al., 2021).

5. *Maintenance and Sustainability*

The maintenance and sustainability phase ensures that parks remain functional and culturally relevant. Zakaria et al. (2020) and Rosli et al. (2020) highlight the importance of using native plants and sustainable

practices to preserve ecological integrity. This phase involves maintaining the park's cultural and environmental features, ensuring long-term relevance. By focusing on sustainable management and regular upkeep, parks can continue to reflect Malaysia's heritage while promoting ecological sustainability, aligning with MGC guidelines (Zakaria et al., 2021).

Figure 6 translates the observational findings into a strategic framework. The five-phase approach directly addresses the weaknesses identified in Figures 3–5, providing a structured pathway to operationalise the MGC more consistently in urban park design. Implementing MGC criteria in public park designs requires a more structured and systematic approach. The proposed framework in Figure 6 provides clear guidelines to ensure that developed parks meet design criteria and reflect Malaysia's national identity. Following these steps will enhance the quality of public parks in Malaysia, helping to introduce Malaysia's culture and heritage to visitors while making the parks more meaningful and attractive as recreational spaces.

### **NEW DIRECTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Future research should explore the long-term sustainability and impact of parks developed using MGC guidelines. This study could assess visitor engagement, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. Zakaria et al. (2022) suggest that understanding how MGC-designed parks affect social well-being and local economies is crucial. Research could also examine the role of native plants and climate-adapted designs in promoting sustainable green spaces. Additionally, attractive, well-designed, beautiful, diverse, and sequential park landscapes can positively influence participants, as mentioned by Chen et al. (2024). These findings could refine MGC guidelines for future park developments, ensuring long-term success and relevance (Zakaria et al., 2021).

### **LIMITATION**

This study acknowledges several methodological limitations. Firstly, the research is based on only two case studies of urban parks developed by the National Landscape Department, which restricts the breadth of comparison. The parks were chosen purposefully for their relevance to the MGC policy context, but they may not capture the full diversity of park typologies, management practices, or regional variations in Malaysia.

Secondly, the exclusive use of qualitative observational methods means that findings are derived solely from visible design characteristics and contextual interpretation. While this approach is appropriate for exploring physical and cultural expressions of the MGC, it does not include stakeholder or user perspectives that could offer deeper explanatory insight.

Consequently, the findings should not be viewed as statistically generalizable. Instead, they provide *analytical transferability* insights that may inform understanding of similar urban park contexts where MGC guidelines are applied. The study's strength lies in offering an interpretive, site-based perspective that can serve as a foundation for future research involving broader samples and mixed qualitative approaches such as interviews or policy document analysis.

## CONCLUSION

The implementation of the MGC in urban parks, as explored in this study, reveals significant gaps in integrating cultural, ecological, and aesthetic principles. Despite the MGC's introduction by the NLD in 2009, many parks still prioritize modern design elements over the prescribed guidelines, resulting in a loss of local identity and cultural relevance. The study concludes that the two examined parks only partially fulfilled MGC requirements, particularly in cultural and heritage integration. These findings underscore the need for stronger policy enforcement and continuous professional awareness among designers and local authorities. The proposed framework for implementing MGC, comprising assessment, design, implementation, monitoring, and sustainability, provides a systematic approach to enhance adherence to the MGC in future park developments. It is recommended that future studies focus on evaluating the long-term sustainability and impact of MGC-designed parks, particularly in terms of cultural preservation, ecological benefits, and public engagement. By addressing the identified challenges and ensuring a more substantial commitment to the MGC guidelines, the concept can better achieve its goal of creating parks that reflect Malaysia's rich cultural heritage while promoting environmental sustainability and enhancing public well-being. The novelty of this study lies in its direct observational analysis of MGC implementation, providing an initial empirical benchmark for future research. This qualitative baseline highlights how landscape identity is expressed in built environments and encourages further studies that integrate stakeholder perspectives to deepen analytical insight. This approach contributes uniquely to planning literature in Malaysia by demonstrating how qualitative, site-based evaluations can inform more culturally responsive and sustainable park planning strategies.

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