New horizons for Malaysia’s landscape education: Gate project across cultures and continents

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Abstract

GATE is an Erasmus Mundus mobility project funded by the European Commission (2012-2016). This programme has opened up an opportunity to the Asian university students/staff to further study in European countries and to enhanced university partnerships. GATE is quite new, thus landscape students/staff need to grasp this opportunity for their better future prospect. This paper highlights the GATE project possibility in enriching the environment for landscape study and contributing to the academic excellence of Malaysia’s landscape education. GATE project acts as a new horizon in landscape education, enhances the skills, qualifications and benefits linguistically and culturally the respective universities.

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1. Introduction

Landscape education has been taught for long years in western countries such as United States of America (US) and European Countries (EU). Landscape education in Asia including Malaysia could be considered as a new field. Today, landscape architecture profession is growing in the Asian region. It also undergoes a radical transformation regarding its order of size and
other particularities (Bartfai 2013). An intense pressure of competition coming from other disciplines has urged landscape architecture students, especially from Malaysia, to get ready for new challenges in their international skills, experiences and knowledge. This is very important in order to enable them to get recognized and employed in any parts of the world.

The European Commission has initiated a new strategy called “European higher education in the world” (Bartfai 2013). This initiative aims to offer university students (especially from Asian region) international experiences, enhanced skills, and broaden their mind. GATE (knowleGe mAnagement Technology transfer and Education programme) is one of the projects under this programme that focus to students at all levels from Asian countries including Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Mongolia and China. Indirectly, GATE has opened a new landscape education access to the Asian countries that helps in increasing learning and teaching quality (Thomas, Chang & Abt 2007). Landscape architecture students/staff from Malaysia need to grab this opportunity for their better future. They should recognize that in order to become a good landscape architect and to produce good landscape designs, they need to get experiences abroad for gaining knowledge and skills learned from other professionals.

Photo 1: In order to become a good landscape architect and to produce good landscape designs, it is necessary for students to get experiences abroad for gaining knowledge, skills learned from other professionals.

Previously, Malaysia’s university students/staff further their study overseas on landscape fields via governmental scholarships, private and/or family budget. Today, GATE project supports them in finding scholarship and solving their financial problems. However, they need to compete with other university students, but at least the project has broadened their chances or choices of scholarships.

2. Objective of the Paper

This paper was written from the view of the authors based on their involvement in the project. The aim of this paper is to share and highlight the GATE project as a new horizon in landscape architecture education for Malaysia. Specific objective is to explain and encourage landscape architecture students/staff to take the opportunity of the GATE project and to enhance their benefits towards increasing skills and qualifications of landscape education.

3. Gate Project

GATE is one of the projects under Erasmus Mundus programme, and being prepared by a consortium of leading European universities together with the partner universities in Asia. Johannes Kepler University Linz, Austria (JKU) is coordinator for the project. The GATE project is open to students at all levels; Bachelor, Master, PhD, Post-doc researchers and staff with scholarship.

The designed project's idea was to improve higher education cooperation and develop teaching and learning to benefit social development. It was believed that interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary orientated development could give quality to the education and serve society and higher education level. GATE programme delivers significant help to landscape architecture students and academic staff in landscape field by offering a new window to the world. The programme enables them to set up learning and working relationship with international academic faculties concerned, and acquire experience and knowledge in the field according to their needs. According to JKU/Gate (2013), objectives of the projects are as follows:

i. to supports institutions' international co-operation advancement via Erasmus exchange principles (such as the Learning Agreement) to the mobility activities between the partner institutions.
There are several European universities participating the Gate project. These universities included Johannes Kepler University Linz, Austria, University of Tampere, Finland, Université Pierre et Marie Curie, France, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany, Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary, Università degli Studi dell’Aquila, Italy and Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Spain (JKU/Gate 2013).

For Asia, there are thirteen universities taking part in Erasmus Mundus programme as listed by the JKU GATE 2013. The name of the universities are University of Battambang (Cambodia), Universitas Gadjah Mada (Indonesia), National University of Laos (Laos), Universiti Putra Malaysia (Malaysia), Thammasat University (Thailand), Hanoi University of Science and Technology (Vietnam), Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology (Vietnam), Shandong University of Technology (China), Tongji University (China), Indian Institute of Technology Madras (India), The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (India), Mongolian University of Science and Technology (Mongolia) and National University of Mongolia (Mongolia).

4. Gate As A New Landscape Education Horizon

Even though GATE project is not exclusive for landscape education, authors consider this project as a new horizon in landscape education. This means that a new space, chance and support has been established. GATE has provided a space for landscape architecture students/staff to get involved in the project by offering them full scholarship to study abroad. Previously the chances for them (especially from Asian region) to study overseas were limited with difficulties in getting scholarship, but now GATE has opened up the opportunity and provides them space for study.

New horizons in landscape education also relate to strategies in improving landscape education quality. Since landscape architecture education is a professional programme, it concerns about the student quality after graduation as well as other study fields take into custody. GATE is gearing to this and improves the transparency of studies and recognition of landscape education and prepares the students/staff to the world standard and recognition. Therefore, presumably student/staff who take part in this project will be easily recognized in any parts of the world.

GATE project can also be considered as an “old institution helps a younger institution programme”. European universities, with many of them established long time ago, are well-known for their reputation and excellence in education and research. On the contrary, universities in Asian region, especially in Malaysia, could be considered as new and in lack of funds. Thus, the initiative taken by the European Commission benefited lots to universities in Asian countries, especially in terms of funding. Therefore, GATE project also be seen as a process of “rich institutions help the poor institutions” for their development. Also, is clear that a new pattern in education system was born in the world where there are no more boundaries in searching for knowledge and experience – an idea that corresponds with the “world without limits” slogan.

GATE could be a platform for a broad discussion among landscape lecturers and students between European and Asian countries. They can distribute as well as share their opinions, suggestions and arguments with a professional. This leads to a positive learning process and enriches the landscape education system at greater levels of institutional collaboration. This can also reinforce the commitment and ambition to further improve landscape education quality.
5. Landscape Architecture Education in Hungary

Landscape education in European countries dates back to 1919 when the first landscape architecture programme was established at Ås in Norway (Holden & Tutundzic 2008). Elsewhere in Europe this happened later, and became general only in the 1960s. As Vries (2003) claimed, the roots of the institute highly influenced the professional content of the programmes. Looking at the roots, one can observe the multiple disciplines that gave birth to the profession (Table 1). This kind of background has also determined the main approach, based on the strength, ability, expertise and experiences of the schools.

Table 1: The Roots of the Institute in European Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tradition</th>
<th>Examples of Institutes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horticultural</td>
<td>Budapest, Larenstein, Vilvoorde, Versailles, Weihenstephan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture / Forestry</td>
<td>Evora, Wageningen, Zagreb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts</td>
<td>Edinburg, Hamburg, Leeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>Amsterdam, Barcelona, Genua, Greenwich, Helsinki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Planning</td>
<td>FH Neubrandenburg, Newcastle, FH Nuertingen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Planning</td>
<td>TU – Vienna, TU – Delft, ETH Zurich</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Vries 2003)

In Hungary, the first courses in landscape design appeared as soon as 1896 at the then Hungarian Royal Institute of Horticulture (Mőcsényi 2008). However, it was only in 1963 when a full programme in landscape architecture started. Although the roots of the institute were clearly horticultural, the academic activity of Béla Rerrich, an architect, between 1908 and 1923 was highly influential on the complex nature of the discipline in Hungary, including also the aspects of architectural and urban planning approaches (Jámbor 2009). In 1992 the Faculty of Landscape Architecture was established, and is probably the only independent faculty of the discipline all over the world.

Nowadays part of the Corvinus University of Budapest, the Faculty is still the only institution for landscape architecture programmes in Hungary. This situation provides a special role to the school as a kind of national centre of the profession. Currently, the programme is offered at bachelor's (BSc), master's (both MSc and MA) and PhD levels. From this year (2014), the MA programme will also be available to international students in English.

Being a small country, international relations and cooperation are essential to Hungary. This is also true for the field of education. Thus the Faculty of Landscape Architecture is keen on learning new experiences of international schools advanced in certain subjects of the profession, and shares its experience with others. The increasing number of incoming students reflects growing interest towards the school, where there are currently 27 different courses offered in English yearly. Currently, most of the international students arrive from Europe and South America. Therefore, beyond the exchange of professional knowledge, the Faculty also regards the GATE programme as an opportunity to establish links towards potential new educational markets in Asia.

6. Malaysia’s Landscape Education - Learned From European Universities’

In Malaysia, landscape education started when Diploma in Landscape Design programme was offered in 1985 by the Department of Landscape Architecture, Universiti Teknologi Mara, Malaysia (UiTM), 66 years behind the European countries. There are many things to learn and information to gather from European universities in this field. Lots of knowledge, experience and ideas can be shared. GATE project has opened up the door for Malaysia’s landscape architecture students for this purpose. Authors strongly believe that learning from experts in special landscape disciplines is necessary to strengthen landscape education programme in Malaysia.

In the meantime, landscape education has evolved in Malaysia. Many public universities as well as private universities offer landscape architecture programme at all levels (Diploma, Bachelor, Master and PhD). Table 2 lists the name of university/college that offers landscape courses in Malaysia.

Table 2: List of University Offered Landscape Education in Malaysia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the University</th>
<th>Levels of Study</th>
<th>Status of the University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)</td>
<td>Bachelor, Master, PhD</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM)</td>
<td>Diploma, Bachelor, Master, PhD</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)</td>
<td>Bachelor, Master, PhD</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)</td>
<td>Master, PhD</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)</td>
<td>Master (Horticulture Landscape)</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM)</td>
<td>Bachelor, Master, PhD</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lim Kok Wing University</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The appearance of landscape education in Malaysia was not based on the institutionale roots, like in European countries. Basically, landscape education in Malaysia was based on the need and demand from the industry. Malaysia is a developing country experiencing rapid development growth. As a result, many natural areas, such as forests and wetlands, have been transformed to allow for housing and new town developments. Therefore, it is argued, that landscape architects can become leaders in gearing environmental movement among land designers and planners towards conservation that can lead towards healthy city development in Malaysia (Mohd Kher & Suhardi 2007). Realizing on this matter, landscape education has been strengthened and spread out in Malaysia in order to produce more qualified professionals in landscape architecture in order to fulfill the country’s demand.

A well established landscape education in European countries has encouraged Malaysian government to send their students/staffs abroad, especially to United Kingdom at the beginning. Writers believe, this is because Malaysia has strong relationship with UK government due to the country’s ex-British colonization. At the same time, the government also encourages the students/staff to go to other European countries for enriching the landscape educational environment. The most important thing is to develop new links in landscape education between academic institutions in Malaysia and European countries.

The opportunity opened by the European Commission via GATE project must be snatched by Malaysian students. They can gain many benefits from the project such as learning new ideas, experiencing different education system, improving their language skills and sharing their professional interests. Indirectly, GATE can act as a new horizon in putting Malaysian landscape architecture students in the world map and get to be renowned globally.

7. Gate Benefits To Malaysia’s Landscape Education

It was reported that Erasmus Mundus has significantly contributed to the development of participants’ home countries and benefited to their people (Hadas et al. 2009). Authors believe that there are also many benefits that Malaysia’s landscape education can gain from GATE project. Generally, academic staff involved in the GATE project will be able to study and learn the European landscape education system, especially in learning and teaching process that can be adopted to Malaysia’s education. They can understand and get know how the subjects, studio and field works were carry out.

Malaysia’s landscape educators who participate in GATE project can help in improving landscape education syllabus. Their knowledge gained from the study as well as the teaching and learning methods they experience can be utilized in syllabus revisions. This is very important in order to ensure compatibility of standards, qualifications and learning outcomes within and outside of Malaysia.

Regarding students, authors believe that they can develop their skills in terms of critical thinking related to future landscape, globalization and the environment via GATE project. Their mind would be more “open”, and they return home with higher level of understanding of the world system. Knowledge that they gain from other landscape professionals at the host university can be used for improving landscape education and practices where ever possible. Students involved in GATE project have to manage things on their own during the programme, thus it increases their ability to look after themselves and sort of own interaction with others. This will be useful when they return and start to work in competition. Whether they realize or not, they
are preparing themselves to become landscape architects who are capable and skillful in the aspects of planning, designing and managing landscapes toward establishing a quality, healthy and balanced environment for human needs.

Regarding the institutional benefits, the university involved in the programme will have a chance for better landscape research collaboration in the future. Since the roots of landscape architecture in Europe derive from six different fields, thus there are many research opportunities. For instance, research on sustainable design informatics that relates with design and information technology for achieving sustainable living environment could be suggested. Experienced landscape researchers from European universities can share their expertise and technology with Malaysian students/researchers on that particular topic. Those who are involved in GATE project could also use their experience and knowledge to further develop university landscape education programmes.

Discussing about research collaboration, Katz and Martin (1997) claimed that research collaboration should be encouraged amongst the international universities because it benefits both parties. Integrating resources and engaging a critical mass of people with diverse backgrounds are useful to make significant impact on critical landscape education development (Hamrita 2012). Furthermore, most of the governments have been keen to increase the level of international collaboration engaged in by the researcher whom they support in the belief that this will bring about cost saving (Katz & Martin 1997). Therefore, Malaysia’s researchers/students from landscape architecture background need to take this opportunity because authors strongly believe that GATE project is towards that effort.

8. Conclusions

GATE project can be considered as a new horizon in landscape architecture education. It provides students/staff high-quality education and practical training opportunity. The project helps in developing their expertise, skills, gain practical experience and increase their network of contacts. All this can be of great benefit to the future development of landscape architecture profession in Malaysia, and generally in the world. The project successfully diffuses the knowledge and researches among students and academics and leads to development in landscape architecture education.

Students/staff gain a level of confidence in their abilities, return with new knowledge, have cultural understanding, mature in study field and find lifelong friends from the host university. For the staff, participating, the project helps endorsing their academic status. For lecturers, benefits include not only work experience, but also an endorsement and advancement of their academic status.

If possible in the future, it is recommended here that GATE secretariat can increase the number of post doctoral participants for Malaysia and extended the minimum duration of the post doctoral from 6 months to 12 months. Nevertheless, the most important is that the project has increased the international cooperation in landscape education and suitable to raise the understanding and recognition of landscape architecture profession in the world.

9. Acknowledgement

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