

**Working With the Community on A Mural Coloring and Park Improvement Initiative**Sri Mulyati<sup>1</sup>, Irham Lubis<sup>1</sup>, Izwan Budiana<sup>1</sup>, Jevfri Alexander Situmorang<sup>1</sup>, Kasmizal<sup>1</sup>, Leni Marlina<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup>Riau Kepulauan University, Indonesia.Corresponding Author: [sri@fekon.unrika.ac.id](mailto:sri@fekon.unrika.ac.id)

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**Abstract.** Urban parks serve as public spaces for social interaction, recreation, and improving the quality of community life. However, many urban parks face challenges such as lack of maintenance, low public awareness, and limited creative initiatives to beautify green spaces. Mawar Park in Johor Bahru exemplifies these issues. To address them, the 2025 International Community Service Program initiated the theme Working with Communities through Mural Painting and Park Restoration. The program was conducted by students from Universitas Riau Islands (UNRIKA) and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Johor Branch, supported by the local government and community members. The methods included preparation, mural painting with environmental and sustainability themes, reorganization and greening of the park, and community participation through collective action. The results showed that the murals successfully created a public art space with educational value while enhancing the park's aesthetics. Park restoration improved cleanliness, comfort, and green quality. Moreover, the program strengthened social bonds between students, lecturers, government officials, and the local community while raising awareness of the importance of maintaining public spaces. This initiative contributed physically, socially, and educationally. Physically, the park becomes cleaner and greener. Socially, it fosters solidarity and community ownership of public space. Educationally, murals served as communication media to convey environmental messages. Thus, this activity demonstrates that community service can generate tangible impacts aligned with sustainable development goals.

**Keyword:** Murals, public space, community empowerment, urban parks, community services

**Abstrak.** Taman kota berfungsi sebagai ruang publik untuk interaksi sosial, rekreasi, dan peningkatan kualitas hidup masyarakat. Namun, banyak taman kota menghadapi tantangan seperti kurangnya pemeliharaan, rendahnya kesadaran masyarakat, serta terbatasnya inisiatif kreatif dalam memperindah ruang hijau. Taman Mawar di Johor Bahru menjadi contoh nyata dari permasalahan tersebut. Untuk mengatasinya, Program Pengabdian Masyarakat Internasional 2025 mengusung tema Working with Communities through Mural Painting and Park Restoration. Program ini dilaksanakan oleh mahasiswa Universitas Riau Kepulauan (UNRIKA) dan Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cabang Johor, dengan dukungan pemerintah daerah serta masyarakat setempat. Metode pelaksanaan meliputi tahap persiapan, pengecatan mural bertema lingkungan dan keberlanjutan, penataan ulang serta penghijauan taman, dan partisipasi masyarakat melalui aksi kolektif. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan bahwa mural berhasil menciptakan ruang seni publik bernilai edukatif sekaligus meningkatkan estetika taman. Restorasi taman memperbaiki kebersihan, kenyamanan, dan kualitas penghijauan. Selain itu, program ini memperkuat ikatan sosial antara mahasiswa, dosen, pejabat pemerintah, dan masyarakat lokal, serta meningkatkan kesadaran akan pentingnya menjaga ruang publik. Inisiatif ini memberikan kontribusi secara fisik, sosial, dan edukatif. Secara fisik, taman menjadi lebih bersih dan hijau. Secara sosial, kegiatan ini menumbuhkan solidaritas dan rasa memiliki terhadap ruang publik. Secara edukatif, mural berfungsi sebagai media komunikasi untuk menyampaikan pesan lingkungan. Dengan demikian, kegiatan ini menunjukkan bahwa pengabdian masyarakat dapat menghasilkan dampak nyata yang selaras dengan tujuan pembangunan berkelanjutan.

**Kata kunci:** Mural; ruang publik; pemberdayaan masyarakat; taman kota; pengabdian masyarakat

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## **Introduction**

Community service is a crucial pillar of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, a mandatory requirement for every higher education institution. Through these activities, universities serve not only as centers of education and research, but also as agents of change, engaging directly with communities to make tangible contributions to solving local problems. Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Johor Pasir Gudang has made community service a strategic program that is routinely implemented by involving students, lecturers, and the local community. One form of implementation of the tridharma is realized through a program titled Working Together with the Community with Mural Coloring Initiatives and Park Improvements. Taman Mawar located in Pasir Gudang, Johor Bahru, was chosen as the location for the service because it has a strategic role as a public space used by the community for activities, interactions, and rest. However, the condition of the park is poorly maintained and lacks aesthetic touches, which have reduced its social function.

Some areas of the walls around the park appear dull and unattractive, while the park's facilities and infrastructure are beginning to deteriorate. This situation gives the impression that the park is merely a secondary space that is less popular with the public, despite its enormous potential to become a center for fun and educational community activities. Through this activity, UiTM students, along with the local community, initiated the revitalization of the Rose Park with two main approaches: painting murals on the walls around the park and improving the park's facilities and landscaping. The mural painting was chosen because visual art has a strong appeal in conveying moral messages, establishing spatial identity, and enhancing environmental beauty. Murals not only beautify empty walls but also serve as a public communication medium capable of raising public awareness of the importance of maintaining cleanliness and environmental sustainability. Meanwhile, park improvements focused on rearranging plants, cleaning the area, and utilizing recycled materials as planting media. In addition to aiming to beautify public spaces, this activity has a broader vision, namely fostering a spirit of togetherness, mutual cooperation, and a sense of community ownership of public spaces.

By directly involving the community in every stage of the activity, it is hoped that a collective awareness will emerge that parks are not only the government's responsibility, but are a shared asset that must be preserved. This activity also serves as a social learning tool for students to be able to interact, collaborate, and apply the knowledge gained in college in real life. Furthermore, this program is in line with the principles of sustainable development (Sustainable Development Goals/SDGs), particularly in the aspect of creating inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and settlements (SDG 11), and preserving terrestrial ecosystems through increasing green spaces (SDG 15). Thus, this mural and park improvement activity is not just an aesthetic program, but also part of a global effort to maintain the balance between humans and the environment.

## **Methodology**

The implementation methodology for this community service activity was systematically designed to optimally achieve the program's objectives. The approach used was

participatory action, involving the community from the planning stage through evaluation. This approach was chosen because experience shows that the success of a community service program is determined not only by technical efficacy but also by the extent to which the community feels a part of the activity. The first stage is planning. During this stage, UiTM students, along with their accompanying lecturers, conducted an initial survey of Taman Mawar to identify key issues. The survey involved direct observation of the park's condition, interviews with local residents, and discussions with local government officials.

The survey results showed that the main problems with the park were lack of maintenance, a lack of aesthetic appeal, and low public awareness of maintaining the cleanliness of public spaces. This sparked the idea of painting murals as an aesthetic and educational effort, and renovating the park as a step toward revitalizing the public space. The second phase was technical preparation. Students and lecturers created a mural design with environmental and community themes. The design was then consulted with the community to ensure it aligned with local aspirations. During this stage, various equipment was also prepared, including environmentally friendly oil paint, brushes of various sizes, buckets, and ornamental plant seeds. Utilizing used tires as flower pots was one of the innovations chosen to support the principles of reduce, reuse, and recycle.

The third stage is the implementation of the activity. The implementation is divided into several sessions. The first session is painting the mural on the garden wall. Students and the community work together to paint the wall with the agreed-upon pattern and colors. The mural coloring was done not only by art students but also by students from various departments, demonstrating cross-disciplinary collaboration. The second session focused on garden improvement, which included clearing the area of trash and leaves, rearranging existing plants, and adding new greenery through planting seedlings. This session also served as a platform for mutual cooperation between students, lecturers, and the community. The fourth stage was documentation and reflection. The entire series of activities were documented through photos and videos for publication. In addition, a joint reflection session was held between students, lecturers, and the community to evaluate the results of the activity, discuss challenges encountered, and formulate follow-up steps. This activity was held for four days, from August 28 to 31, 2025. The first day focused on preparation and task allocation. The second and third days were devoted to core activities, such as murals and park improvements. The fourth day focused on evaluation and final completion. With a clear timetable, the activities could proceed effectively without disrupting the community's daily activities.

## **Results and Discussion**

Implementation of community service activities in Taman Mawar, Johor Bahru, has provided significant results in various aspects, both in terms of physical, social, educational, cultural and economic potential. This program, carried out by students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Johor Pasir Gudang together with the University of Riau, Batam Islands, shows that simple activities such as painting murals and repairing parks can bring real change if carried out collaboratively by actively involving the community. The most obvious physical change is the new look of the Rose Garden after the program's implementation. The previously dull walls are now vibrant, featuring murals themed around the environment, sustainability, and community togetherness. The bright colors create a fresh

atmosphere, transforming the garden from a dull appearance to a focal point for the surrounding community.

Furthermore, rearranging ornamental plants and adding new seedlings made the garden appear tidier, greener, and more comfortable to use. Previously scattered plastic waste and dry leaves were successfully cleared through community service. The use of used tires as flower pots not only beautifies the garden area but also serves as a concrete example of the application of the 3R principle (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle). Ecologically, this park improvement contributes to improved air quality, environmental beauty, and the creation of healthier green open spaces for residents. This activity successfully strengthened the relationship between students, lecturers, local government, and the community. The mutual cooperation carried out during the activity created strong social bonds. The community felt proud to be directly involved, not just beneficiaries. Students also gained valuable experience in the importance of building communication, cooperation, and tolerance in a heterogeneous social environment.

A sense of community was evident in the enthusiasm of the residents who volunteered to participate in painting the mural and landscaping the garden. Even local children and teenagers were actively involved, both coloring small sections of the mural and helping plant flowers. This created a harmonious atmosphere and strengthened their sense of ownership of the garden they collectively care for. The resulting murals are not just works of art, but also a means of public education. The messages conveyed in the murals, such as calls to maintain cleanliness, preserve the environment, reduce plastic waste, and the importance of mutual cooperation, are conveyed in a creative and enjoyable way. Children playing in the park can learn visually through the colorful images, thereby instilling environmental values from an early age. Furthermore, the mutual cooperation process also serves as a medium for social learning. Students practice leadership, project management, and communication skills, while the community learns about the importance of collaboration, environmental preservation, and the utilization of used goods. Thus, this activity has a dual educational dimension: academic for the students and socio-environmental for the community.

This program also strengthens local cultural identity through murals depicting unique Malaysian elements, tropical flora and fauna, and symbols of community togetherness. Mural art serves as a medium capable of representing cultural values while simultaneously unifying the collective identity of the community. The presence of students from both countries (Malaysia and Indonesia) adds to the value of cross-cultural interactions, thus enabling the exchange of values, languages, and perspectives among the younger generation of ASEAN. Taman Mawar is now not only a green open space, but also a space for cultural and artistic expression of the community. This aligns with the concept of placemaking, which is building the identity of public spaces through community involvement in their design and use. While the main focus of the activity is on social and environmental aspects, the economic impact cannot be ignored. With a more beautiful and attractive garden, Taman Mawar has the potential to become a family recreation destination and attract visitors from outside the area. This opens up opportunities for the development of small-scale, community-based ecotourism, such as weekly bazaars, art exhibitions, or local music performances, which can increase residents' incomes. Furthermore, utilizing used items such as tires and barrels as flower pots reduces garden maintenance costs while creating a creative circular economy. Communities can emulate this

practice by processing household waste into useful products with both aesthetic and economic value.

Compared to other community service programs in urban areas, the mural and garden improvement activities at Taman Mawar (Rose Park) are unique because they combine art, the environment, and community. Similar programs in other cities typically focus solely on cleanliness or greening, without incorporating art as an educational medium. Murals convey environmental messages more powerfully and are more memorable. This aligns with practices in developed countries that utilize mural art to strengthen urban identity, such as street art in Melbourne, Australia, or educational murals in Singapore. Through these activities, Taman Mawar successfully presents a local concept with global standards. This activity was not without its challenges. The main challenge was time constraints, as all activities had to be completed within a few days. This meant that some areas of the park were not fully restored. Another obstacle was the hot and humid tropical weather, requiring participants to work extra hard to complete the murals and plant arrangements. Furthermore, sustainability was also a concern. Maintaining the murals and plants requires a long-term commitment from the community. Without regular maintenance, the park could potentially revert to its original state. Therefore, one agreed-upon strategy was the formation of a local volunteer group tasked with carrying out regular maintenance.

For this activity to have a long-term impact, follow-up steps are needed. First, establish a Rose Garden Care Community comprised of local residents, students, and environmental organizations. Second, involve surrounding schools in utilizing the murals and garden as a learning medium outside the classroom, ensuring the garden's preservation and functioning as a natural laboratory. Third, encourage the local government to allocate a minimum annual maintenance budget. Fourth, explore collaboration with the private sector to support the program's sustainability through corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds. With this strategy, the garden will not only be temporarily beautiful but will also be maintained long-term as a functional, educational, and sustainable public space.



*Figure 1. Taking photos/pictures of used tires before they were colored by Community Service participants and the local community.*



*Figure 2. The process of dividing work areas and dividing tools.*



*Figure 3. The process of cleaning the area around the used tires that will be colored by Community Service participants.*



*Figure 4. The process of identifying basic color materials before painting used tires.*



*Figure 5. Process of completing coloring used tires by Community Service participants assisted and guided by the local community.*



*Figure 6. Taking a photo together with the Community Service participants and Unrika Lecturers upon the completion of the cheerful garden coloring activity.*

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The community service project, "Working Together with the Community through the Mural Coloring and Garden Improvement Initiative" at Taman Mawar, Pasir Gudang, has had a positive impact physically, socially, and educationally. Physically, the previously poorly maintained park now appears more beautiful, clean, and comfortable for the public to use. Socially, this activity strengthens the relationship between students, lecturers, and the community, fostering a spirit of mutual cooperation and a sense of ownership of the public space. From an educational perspective, the resulting murals serve as an effective communication medium for instilling environmental values. Despite constraints such as limited time and resources, this activity was successfully implemented thanks to the support of all parties. This program also aligns with sustainable development goals, particularly in creating inclusive and sustainable public spaces. As a follow-up, it is recommended that the community form a local volunteer group tasked with regularly maintaining the park. The local government is also expected to provide continued support to ensure the sustainability of this initiative. Thus, the park becomes not only a beautiful physical space but also a symbol of togetherness, caring, and sustainability.

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