SENSORY GARDENS: ASSESSING THEIR DESIGN & USE

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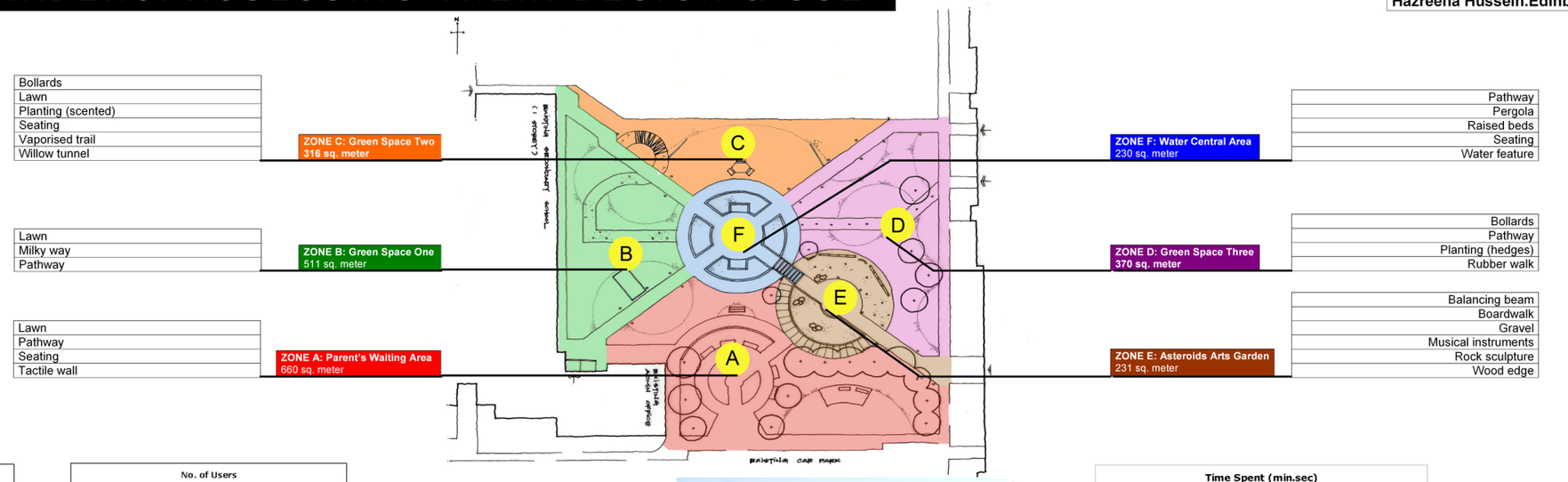

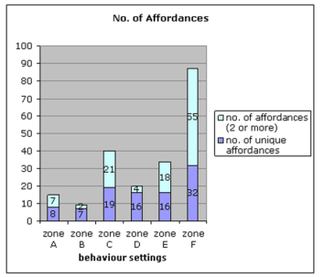

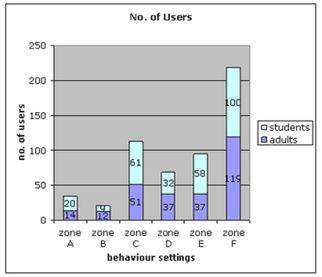

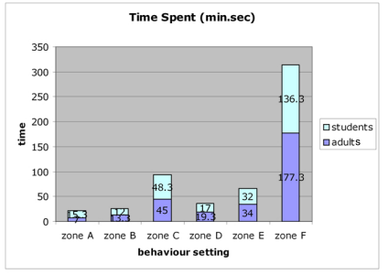

ZONE A: Parent's Waiting Area

ZONE B: Green Space One

ZONE D: Green Space Three

ZONE C: Green Space Two

ZONE F: Water Central Area

ZONE E: Asteroids Arts Garden

Background Study

This study will look into the design and use of sensory gardens by evaluating the garden's functional zones that are utilized by users, especially children with special needs and adults in special schools. These users have been observed experiencing and engaging with the multi-sensory environment. Preliminary site studies have been carried out in fourteen sensory gardens around the United Kingdom, acquiring personal observations of the usability of these gardens and conducting individual interviews with teachers and key experts. The research aims to evaluate spaces in sensory gardens by examining their usability, the users' behaviour and their perceptions in engaging with the outdoor multi-sensory environment. Specifically, the research will:

- Understand the design process undertaken and intentions of the disciplinary team;
- Observe the variety of patterns of use;
- Find out what users really favour in their sensory garden;
- Discover spaces that are utilized by users and the frequency of this use;
- Look at the opportunity for users' physical action in the sensory garden.

Further data collection will include in-depth interviews and behavioural mapping. A theory that will be studied in conjunction with this is environmental affordance. The findings will then be developed into design recommendations for sensory gardens on the selected case studies. Research done by Moore and Cosco is also believed to be beneficial to this study in terms of the methodology and approach they advance.

What is presented here is the initial data collected from May and July 2007, looking at two sensory gardens. The analysis is still in progress. So far the data shows the link between the physical design with the number of affordances, the number of users and the time spent on use in the behaviour settings. These sensory gardens are also illustrated in the photographs.

* *Images by Hazreena Hussein*