



Be on the same page

Mini library: A book kiosk has been set up at the DBKL headquarters on Jalan Raja Laut, Kuala Lumpur, for the public to have access to reading materials.
— SAMUEL ONG/The Star

While DBKL wants the public to embrace its near-RM4mil book kiosk initiative, the project's feasibility is in the balance due to vandalism and indifference

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TAKE A book, read and return it. That is the idea behind Kuala Lumpur City Hall's (DBKL) book kiosk project, which is aimed at instilling the reading habit among city folk.

At least that is what Kuala Lumpur mayor Datuk Nor Hisham Ahmad Dahlan hopes for.

But sadly, a number of these book kiosks were vandalised barely two days after being installed.

Nor Hisham, though disappointed, said he was willing to give city folk a second chance so they could find joy in reading once again.

"They can take the book home if

they like it. But bring it back.

"In fact, bring more books so others have material to read," Nor Hisham said, adding that the book kiosks would be placed in public parks, bus stops and commercial areas where there was foot traffic.

"The idea is to get people to pick up a book and read while waiting for the bus or having their coffee.

"They can take the book home but we hope it will be returned."

He said parents, when taking their children to the park, could choose a book to read while the young ones enjoyed themselves.

The mayor's excitement over the project is understandable as he is not only an avid reader but his

time as a librarian in Universiti Teknologi Mara (UTM) in his 20s had set the foundation for his love for books as well.

"I loved reading as a child and my favourite books back then were those by Enid Blyton.

"It was not easy to get Enid Blyton books unless you went to the library," he said, adding that as a youth he had wished there were more libraries around his neighbourhood.

So when Kuala Lumpur was named the World Book Capital for 2020 by Unesco in 2018, the mayor saw the possibility of realising his dream by having mini libraries in the city.

"I saw a lot of them in Europe.

"There were many book kiosks everywhere and people were using them," he said.

With that idea in mind, DBKL, through its Project Implementation Department's special infrastructure committee, worked on setting up book kiosks in various parts of the city in an attempt to tempt people to read.

The project, which was supposed to be ready to meet the launch of the year-long Kuala Lumpur World Book Capital (KLWBC) 2020 on April 23, was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was revived when the movement control order went into the conditional phase.

Repurposing items

The team involved in the project were tasked with sourcing for old refrigerators and telephone booths from dump yards to be repurposed into book kiosks.

Repurposing disused fridges and telephone booths is popular in Europe.

"We never stopped working despite the pandemic.

"Our creative team of architects were designing the kiosk despite the challenges faced," said DBKL Project Implementation and Building Maintenance Department deputy director Mohd Fadzil Noh.

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Mohd Fadzil (right) and Emilea at the book kiosk set up at the Menara 3 DBKL bus stop on Jalan Raja Abdullah in Kuala Lumpur. — Photos: LOW BOON TAT/The Star

Doors smashed and power cables pulled out at some kiosks

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"We aimed to set up 65 kiosks of various sizes in 19 locations and I am proud to say that on Aug 26, we managed to surrender the last kiosk."

The project was divided into three phases, with the first phase kicking off last December and the third phase seeing completion last month.

Thirty architects from the department were given specific locations to design the kiosks.

"We decided to go for areas that had the most foot traffic and were popular with tourists," Mohd Fadzil said.

"Out of all the designs, we short-listed eight that we felt were suitable for our location and climate, and set them in place," he said.

DBKL's book committee identified 19 locations for the project and these were mostly the city's Heritage Trails as well as the River of Life (RoL) areas, including Taman Tasik Titiwangsa, Taman Botani Perdana, selected DBKL buildings, Kampung Baru, Chow Kit and Bukit Bintang.

The kiosks were then set up at Dataran DBKL, Jalan Ampang, Tiong Nam, Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Jalan Bunus 6, Jalan Masjid India, Jalan Munshi Abdullah, Masjid Jamek, Sultan Abdul Samad building, Jalan Ampang, Jalan Petaling, Jalan Panggung, MRT Pasar Seni, Dataran Medan Pasar, Jalan Cenderasari and Jalan Sultan Hishamuddin.

The biggest kiosk, measuring 2m in height and 1.8m in length, was put up in Taman Tasik Titiwangsa.

"The challenge was to make it durable while minimising the cost and of course, it had to be aesthetically pleasing," he said, adding that the overall cost for the project was RM4mil but the team managed to complete it below the target.

Each kiosk comes with signage and lighting.

Those interested to donate books can drop them off at the Kuala Lumpur Library and DBKL Tower 3 on Jalan Raja Abdullah in the book drop-off bin.

Struck by vandals

Barely a few days after the first kiosk was set up in May, it became the target of vandals.

DBKL Book Kiosk Locations

- Heritage Trail 1
- Heritage Trail 2
- Heritage Trail 3
- Heritage Trail 5
- Heritage Trail 6
- Heritage Trail 7
- Heritage Trail 8
- River of Life Precinct 7
- River of Life areas
- Taman Tasik Titiwangsa
- Menara DBKL 1,2 & 3
- Lorong Bandar
- Bukit Bintang
- Kampung Baru
- Chow Kit
- Taman Botani

TheStar graphics

A repurposed fridge that was turned into a book kiosk on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman caught the attention of children in the area.

It did not take long for the door to be broken. The books, too, were gone.

Several children were seen playing with the door handle and a video on the incident revealed a child hiding inside the kiosk as seemingly part of a game.

Meanwhile, the book kiosk at Medan Tuanku has become a cupboard for a homeless man.

The books are nowhere in sight and the kiosk is being used to store his clothes, shoes and other personal belongings.

In Taman Tasik Titiwangsa, the book kiosk was vandalised with the hashtag sign removed and power cables ripped out.

In areas like Bukit Bintang and Kampung Baru, the kiosks' acrylic doors were smashed and power cables also pulled out.

In addition, vandals have scribbled on the kiosks.

Over at Menara Wawasan DBKL 3, the kiosk which is part of a bus stop, is being used by the public to park their motorcycles.

"It is quite disappointing to see something so beautiful being destroyed," said DBKL architect Emilea Norzarina Tajodin.

"Some of the book kiosks were installed one or two days before



A group of students using the book kiosk located on Jalan Tun Perak the right way.



One of the DBKL book kiosks that was vandalised not long after being installed. (Right) This kiosk in Medan Tuanku has been claimed by a homeless person, who is using it to store his personal belongings.

and they have already been vandalised.

"We are monitoring the kiosk but we had hoped that the public would take charge of the kiosks and care for them."

City folk are appalled at the condition of the newly installed book kiosks and the vandalism committed against it.

"The concept of having books for everyone to read is good but it seems that the book kiosks were built at the wrong time.

"Many Malaysians are still unable to appreciate this free service and use it wisely," said Chi Zhou Han, a student from Segambut.

"It is shocking to see this type of behaviour, especially in this time and age when people are supposed to be more enlightened," said Veena Shastri, a medical student from Cheras.

A cendol stall owner in Bukit Bintang, who goes by the name Ah

Boo, was happy to see a book kiosk near his stall.

"It was very nice to see people stopping by, taking a book and sitting down to read.

"But last week, I noticed that the books were gone and someone had pulled out the wiring for the lights and broken the acrylic door.

"I was so disappointed and angry over the selfish act of some people," he said.

DBKL has given the project until next April to gauge its viability.

"We cannot keep repairing the kiosks and spending money unnecessarily," said Emilea.

"So we hope the community, sooner rather than later, will accept the book kiosks as an asset belonging to the city.

"How the public cares for it will determine whether DBKL will maintain and keep the kiosks.

"We hope it will become a permanent and memorable fixture in the city," she added.