



## **CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN TANGIBLE HERITAGE CONSERVATION STRATEGIES IN TERENGGANU**

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### **Abstract**

Heritage upholds high values in a society. Arts and culture passed down by the previous generations have a significant influence on the identity formation of a particular race. In Terengganu, much of its heritage and relics left by its ancestors were abandoned and forgotten by modernization. The impact of globalization is feared to sink local heritage if it is not well taken care of and lack of sustainable actions to maintain these heritages. Generally, heritage can be classified into two categories; tangible heritage and intangible heritage. Tangible heritage can be further divided into two – static and mobile. Historical landmarks, monuments, buildings, tombs and mines are some examples of static tangible heritage and possess their values in the identity formation of the local citizens. In order to preserve the tangible heritage assets in Terengganu, integrated and proactive solutions need to be taken by various parties by taking into account all the factors that would form a sustainable model that can be referred to as means to preserve the heritage. This study employs a mixed methodology approach; qualitative method and supported quantitative method. The researchers have conducted a few series of in-depth interviews with respondents identified to be able to provide the necessary information, then widened further to the sample population through instruments of questionnaires in certain locations with tangible heritage. Several locations identified were Bandar Bukit Besi, Bukit Tebuk in Dungun, Pura Tanjung Sabtu and Duyong Island in Kuala Terengganu. Research data were then analyzed using Nvivo software for qualitative data and SPSS software in descriptive design to support the findings of the research. This study would make a huge impact on society, particularly on the aspects of tangible heritage preservation, to ensure that they can be inherited by the younger generations to maintain their strong identity as local citizens.

**Keywords:** Preservation, tangible heritage, cultural heritage, community attachment

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Heritage is an invaluable asset to a city, district, territory or society and is considered as the utmost important component for a sustainable development of the society and its economy. Heritage is regarded as a core element that has escentric value in a society. A society's civilization that has transformed from one phase to another new phase would leave its own historical traits. There are parts that can be preserved but there would also be some parts that will eventually be vanished by modernization.

Heritage preservation, be it tangible or intangible, have since gained appropriate attention by the responsible bodies, locally and abroad. Several methods have been implemented to ensure sustainable heritage. In the context of tourism for instance, the industry has always been dependent on long term planning which taking account the importance of sustainable and responsible tourism (Mohd Rasdi et al., 2022). Based on this premise, the tourism industry plays an important role in promoting heritage as a product to motivate and attract tourists. Besides, the tourism industry is dependent on long term planning In any parts of the world, the growth of the tourism sector (see Azinuddin et al., 2022a) has witnessed many forms of attractions to tourists. Tendencies and passions toward heritage and cultures of certain communities have encouraged positive growth of the heritage-related tourism industry. This phenomenon has given a good impact to these heritages to be preserved and maintained.

Every culture consists of many practises and activities in the society that create cultural elements and thus passed down from one generation to another. These cultural elements, whether tangible or intangible, such as monuments and knowledge from the past, were evaluated presently based on different criterias, knowledge, beliefs and purposes, and thus defined as heritage (Jasna 2016). Heritage comprises of several categories. Heritage can also be defined as the results of previous actions used by the present society and became part of their life tools to survive (Yuszaidy et. al 2011). There are few types of heritage owned by the locals; some are in the forms of physical assets and some are abstracts.

In the effort of preserving this heritage, society needs to know what is meant by heritage. Comprehension is the key to understand the definition used to explain its meaning. Generally, the definition of heritage is something that is accepted by individuals in a certain group of society from their ancestors for generations. This explanation is also supported by the definition proposed in the Antiquities Act 1976 that stated any object of heritage that is movable or immovable, man-made or natural and visible or invisible.

Meanwhile, the National Heritage Act 2005 (Act 645) highlighted that heritage is considered as cultural heritage; any heritage site, heritage object, underwater cultural heritage or any living person declared as a National

Heritage. Provision mentioned in the Act also categorized two cultural heritage – intangible cultural heritage and tangible cultural heritage. Intangible cultural heritage refers to all cultural practices existed through the inventions and ideas based on the observations of the universe to fulfil everyday life. It is often connected to the knowledge and expertise possessed by humans, accepted through the process of experiences inherited through dreams or through learning. This heritage can be passed down from one generation to the other and can be inherited by descendants of the ancestors. It is formed through the cultural activities, thoughts and philosophies embedded in the previous society. Intangible cultural heritage also creates human civilization based on knowledge and life experience to form heritage that becomes a self-symbol and icon for the next generation. UNESCO regards intangible cultural heritage as a tradition or life expression, inherited from the previous generations. Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage held in 2003 by UNESCO pointed out five domains of intangible cultural heritage. They are; (i) Oral traditions and expressions, (ii) Performing arts, (iii) Social practices, rituals and festive events, (iv) Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and (v) Traditional craftsmanship (Idris, et.al, 2017).

Tangible cultural heritage, on the other hand, can be divided into two; static and movable. Tangible cultural heritage refers to physical artefacts that can be transmitted intergenerationally with its own add-on value. It comprises of landmarks like mosque, temple, buildings, monuments, towns, tombs, beaches, manuscripts, ancient scripts and new scripts that have been given high value by the society, historical artefacts, and museums. They belong to the category of sites, monuments, and buildings. Humans perform tasks related to economy and current social activities in the effort to fulfil their needs in life. These created buildings, monuments, landmarks and artefacts such as arches, sculptures, statues, clothing, tombstones and beads that are seen in the architectural aspects and motive-engraved decorations and patterns on walls and building pillars (Yuszaidy, 2015). Historical sites such as Lembah Bujang, Pusat Bandar Lama Melaka, Sg. Lembing mining areas, monuments like castles, forts, bunkers, tombs, towers as well as natures like forests, mountains, caves, rivers, flora and fauna are also accounted as tangible cultural heritage. These heritages are important as they preserve history and the beliefs of the society, protect the importance of architectures and cultures, portraying the value of historical buildings and are able to reflect the town's image and identity (Nawi, et.al, 2020).

## **RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

Heritage, as defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2005), is "our heritage from the past, what we live with today, and what we passed down to the future generations" (Mensah,

2022). Heritage conservation gained universal attention when it was listed in one of the SDG 11 targets, referred to as the goal to create sustainable towns and societies. Cultural heritage is currently in the verge of extinction caused by the modernization of the local citizens. Cultural heritage is a traditional legacy bestowed by the previous generations to the present generation not solely as a reminder but more on the aspect of identity construct of local citizens. Traditional culture includes practices and way of life of various races including clothing, food, customs, arts and can be seen on its cultural art heritage. These cultural heritages need to be maintained for their own unique identity. According to Yuszaidy (2018), cultural heritage must be protected so they can be preserved for future generations and their identity.

Malaysia has taken proactive approaches in conserving its cultural heritage through the legal systems improvised from time to time. In the initial phase, Malaysia relies on the laws enacted since the British colonial era taken from Treasure Act 1957 (Act 524) (Yuszaidy, 2015). However, this Act has flaws in terms of its allocation and is only limited to treasures as opposed to other matters related to protection and conservation of heritage. Act 524 was then abolished and replaced with Antiquities Act 1976 (Act 168) and was in enforcement until 2005 (Azizi, 2011). It was since then that the National Heritage Act 2005 (Act 645) was enacted and acted as the main Act in relation to heritage and treasure. This shows that from the legal aspects, the government is providing necessary attention in its effort to preserve cultural art heritage in the country. This Act has been the guideline in all legal aspects to the administration and management of the cultural heritage. This Act is comprehensive in all aspects to rescue and protect the various kinds of cultural heritage regardless of races and ethnics. (Yuszaidy, 2011).

Commercialization is one of the steps to safeguard the cultural heritage. This means to promote cultural heritage as tourism products or known as heritage tourism. Heritage tourism is regarded as one of the fast growing form of tourism. In general, heritage tourism is based on culture in the form of architectures, craft sites gazetted as historical remains and artefacts (Ugong & Bilcher Bala, 2017).

As mentioned by Samsudin M. & Mohamad S. (2013), Malaysia has also developed historical sites as tourist attractions. It is therefore undeniable that the major tourist attraction is to visit historical sites. MacCannel (1992), for instance, considered that “*tourism is not just an aggregate of merely commercial activities; it is also an ideological framing of history, nature and tradition; a framing that has the power to reshape culture and nature to its own needs*”. Thus, tourism activities in relation to historical heritage have indeed getting more important particularly with the progress of heritage tourism (Urry, 1990). Commercialization of tangible heritage is set to be one of the attractions in the tourism industry and can be seen in the effort to preserve it from threats of

extinction. Therefore, it can be summarized that through the effort of sustaining cultural heritage in the country, it has got to be done through integration of laws, government roles, citizen awareness, education, commercialization, and tourism. Nevertheless, the conservation of arts and cultural heritage cannot be implemented only with law enforcement on its own. It has to be complemented with efforts from various sectors and institutions. As an approach to cultural heritage conservation, education is considered to be the best medium to instill love towards cultural art heritage in a society. Heritage education is learning through seeing, touching, listening and holding (experience) through series of collections or artefacts exhibited in museums. Aside from heritage education, public education also plays key role in ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage. Public education can be carried out through various ways including printed media, radio, television, internet and group activities like demonstrations and workshops, formal education, co-curricular activities and experiential learning in schools. Formal education as well as informal education used to provide exposure about cultural heritage can actually raise the awareness of the society towards the issue.

The level of community awareness will affect the local community's involvement in heritage conservation (Halim& Tambi, 2021). Public awareness on the extent of the values of heritage is very important in the effort to conserve and preserve cultural heritage. The definition of awareness is referred to as the behaviours of individuals that recognize, understand and appreciate the existence of cultural heritage around them. A society that possesses the awareness is predicted to be able to control and manage their daily activities without endangering and threatening the cultural heritage especially the tangible cultural heritage. As proposed by R Dharmasanti & S P Dewi (2020), the awareness level of individuals that influence their engagement in the conservation of cultural heritage is seen through several criteria. Firstly, they have basic knowledge on cultural heritage and are able to gather information on plans and rules to preserve the cultural heritage. Secondly, that individuals need to have a sense of belonging towards the cultural heritage. Third is the willingness to preserve cultural heritage, fourth is to possess a sense of concern and noting the tangible cultural heritage around them while the fifth criteria is to continuously support the government's efforts by abiding all laws related to the conservation of cultural arts heritage particularly on tangible cultural heritage.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a mixed-methodology qualitative research that combines quantitative method to obtain data. The implementation of qualitative method preceding the quantitative method in data collection process has enabled the researchers to explore and understand the issues thoroughly and to view it from

a wider scope and perspective (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Data collected in this study were gathered from primary source and secondary source. Among the techniques used to collect the data include unstructured interviews from selected and identified respondents to support the data. Apart from that, a set of questionnaires consisted of several items identified based on the research objectives were distributed to 130 respondents selected through random sampling method. This questionnaire was distributed to residents living within the area of each research location consisted of residents in Bandar Bukit Besi for Bukit Besi Mine and Bukit Tebuk Tunnel, residents in Kampung Manir for Pura Tanjung Sabtu, and residents in Kampung Duyung for Kota Lama Duyung. This questionnaire is divided into two parts; namely Part A that consists of demographical information and Part B which comprises of several indicators of society engagement in the process of conserving the tangible heritage in their villages and includes few aspects such as concern, knowledge, engagement, and responsibility. Qualitative data obtained through the interview process were then transcribed and analyzed using Nvivo software while quantitative data gathered from the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS software.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The research findings are aimed to explicitly show how diversity, creativity, and collaborative engagement from the local citizens can be utilized in the effort to preserve the tangible cultural heritage. In this sense, it reflects the importance of stable network and collaborations between the different stakeholders in sustaining the tangible cultural heritage as tourism products that are rare, inimitable or irreplaceable (see Azinuddin et al., 2022b; 2020; Mior Shariffuddin, 2020). Through series of interviews conducted to respondents, it can be seen that the element of local citizen's engagement is vital in the issue of conserving the tangible cultural heritage. Local citizens are the closest entities to these heritages. Negligence of heritage by the local citizens would make conservation efforts by responsible parties even harder. Interviews conducted with few parties representing local administration and villagers found that the element of citizen engagement from aspects of awareness, education, volunteering and responsibilities greatly affected the conservation efforts. For instance, the Pura Tanjung Sabtu heritage building in Kampung Tanjung Sabtu, Kuala Terengganu. According to a few respondents that were interviewed, this area was once an attraction when many festive events and programs were held in the area. This heritage building was a combination of seven Terengganu traditional wooden houses from lands nearby the Sungai Nerus river bank. Pura Tanjung Sabtu is owned by an individual who is fond of arts and detailed engravements on buildings. According to the respondents, Tanjung Sabtu was a homestay founded by a member of the Terengganu royal family, the late Tengku Ismail Tengku Su,

about 30 years ago, around the 1990's. Pura Tanjung Sabtu was even popular among tourists, local and abroad, particularly the VIPs and royalties.



**Figure 1:** Condition of Pura Tanjung Sabtu that has been abandoned.

Nevertheless, researchers' observation in this historical site found out that Pura Tanjung Sabtu is seen to be obsolete and abandoned. As a matter of fact, many break-ins and burglaries by irresponsible individuals were reported over the years. Valuable items such as doors, vases, and furnitures were stolen through land and river route. According to the nearby villagers, these actions have ruined the heritage building as time went by.

Condition is a bit contrary in Bandar Bukit Besi, which holds the remains of the mining area and the memories of the impacts of colonization towards the sosio economy of the local citizens in Bukit Besi around the 1930s. As an iconic and historical town, tangible cultural heritage in this area are well-maintained and well preserved under the attention of the local government through Central Terengganu Development Board or Lembaga Kemajuan Terengganu Tengah (KETENGAH). From the interviews conducted with several local residents and leaders, the conservation efforts done by the local government are crucial to preserve the heritage in their village. Citizens in Bukit Besi were mostly aware on the importance of heritage but admitted that they hardly join the conservation efforts and considered those as the responsibility and tasks of the government. For the respondents, conservation efforts involve huge financial allocations and to them, it is certainly the role of the government to fund the efforts. However, few respondents interviewed expressed that citizen engagement in the conservation effort can be further intensified through Non-Government Organizations or NGOs. One of the respondents who is also a representative from Dungun Historical Association or Persatuan Sejarah Kawasan Dungun highlighted that citizens' role through NGOs can greatly assists the cultural heritage conservation efforts in general. In the context of tangible heritage conservation in Bukit Besi, Persatuan Sejarah Kawasan Dungun also contributed in advicing the responsible parties for the tangible heritage

conservation in Bukit Besi until the Bukit Besi Museum was built that has since becomes the center for the historical references of the mining era before. This association even involved in the effort to gather and collect information and evidences so they can be kept and preserved as historical items.

**Table 1:** Interview summary on respondents of the study in relation to citizen engagement in cultural heritage conservation

Issue	Respondent
<i>Concern and care towards cultural heritage in their surrounding area</i>	R1, R2, R5, R6, R7,
<i>Education and awareness on the issue of tangible cultural heritage conservation</i>	R2, R4, R5, R8,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Responsibility in preservation and conservation</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Role of older generation in instilling the value of cultural heritage to the younger generation</i></li> </ul>	
<i>Role of local leaders in maintaining tangible heritage in their area</i>	R1, R2, R3, R7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Control and protection</i></li> </ul>	
<i>Citizen preparedness to engage in conservation efforts</i>	R1, R2, R4, R7, R8

Heritage conservation in few research areas are faced with local citizen awareness on the heritage in their villages. The elderly in the society can play roles as they have much more experiences and knowledge regarding the tangible cultural heritage in their area. Several respondents felt that the role of the older generations is vital to instil love towards the heritage. Nevertheless, they also admitted that younger generation nowadays could not care less about the history at their own place including its heritage. When concern and awareness are limited, citizens are insensitive of what is happening to their heritage. The vandalism issues at heritage sites proved the lack of concern and sense of belonging towards cultural heritage that is supposed to be taken care of. Respondents residing the nearby area of Bukit Besi Mines told that before the government enforcement, this area is freely accessible to be visited. Unfortunately, few irresponsible individuals had tarnished the relics and even stole and sold them. This situation is almost similar to what happened in the case



Pura Tanjung Sabtu. Because of that small profit, these actions have actually harmed and destroyed the value and originality of the tangible heritage.



**Figure 2:** Parts of the remains in Bukit Besi mining site

Researchers also distributed questionnaires to citizens living the nearby research areas. A total of 130 individuals residing near the heritage building responded to the questionnaires that include citizen engagement in cultural heritage conservation consisting elements of concern towards tangible cultural heritage in their area, their knowledge on tangible cultural heritage and its conservation efforts, their engagement in the conservation efforts and their inner responsibility towards cultural heritage close to them.

**Table 2:** Citizen Role in Local Heritage Conservation

Role	Mean Value
Concern	3.91
<i>Aware on cultural heritage existence</i>	3.5583
<i>Consider conservation as crucial</i>	4.1000
<i>Concern about heritage</i>	3.8417
<i>Love heritage for its historical value</i>	4.1500
Knowledge	3.75
<i>Possess in-depth knowledge</i>	3.4667
<i>Keen on reading facts and history about heritage</i>	3.6417
<i>Know facts and history about heritage</i>	3.5333
Engagement	3.831
<i>Easy to visit heritage site</i>	4.2833

<i>Frequently visit heritage site</i>	3.5083
<i>Join heritage program</i>	4.0000
Responsibility	3.933
<i>Heritage conservation is my responsibility</i>	4.2417
<i>I am willing and ready to engage in any heritage conservation efforts</i>	3.9750
<i>Citizen is responsible to conserve heritage</i>	4.2917

As shown in Table 2 above, research findings depicted that elements of responsibility and concern scored highest mean with 3.93 and 3.91 respectively, followed by citizen engagement with 3.83 average mean value and knowledge with mean value of 3.75. Responsibility relates to the willingness of individuals to perform tasks and obligations appropriately. In this research context, citizen role under the element of responsibility refers individual perception that regards the conservation issue as mutual responsibility be it as individuals or as a society. It is parallel with the element of concern where, as individuals residing nearby the research area, it is vital that they concern and care about heritage in their area. The findings of the study found that community is one of the social dimensions in the formation of heritage preservation strategies. There are still many options to ensure the engagement of the community in implementing social actions and involvement to preserve cultural heritage. Local communities share a sense of proximity to heritage monuments (Bruku, 2015). Although the community does not represent official positions in the government, their views should be taken into account in sustainable heritage management. Their ideas, views, and involvement either individually, in associations, or as community representatives can be integrated with other cultural heritage preservation measures. The community needs to be educated and aware of the issue of the preservation of significant cultural heritage.

## CONCLUSION

The cultural heritage inherited by previous generations should be preserved to be appreciated by future generations to maintain the identity of the nation. Various strategies can be implemented to ensure that cultural heritage continues to survive in the current modernity. The cooperation of all parties through various channels and parties is a concerted effort required to succeed in the mission of preserving this cultural heritage. In the context of this study, whether in tangible or intangible form, the role of the community is the dominant factor in the effectiveness of heritage preservation efforts. The discussion and findings of this study can be

used as valuable information and insights for academics, destination managers, and policymakers in the preservation of tangible cultural heritage in Malaysia.

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