

THE PERCEPTIONS OF NATIVE COMMUNITY IN SAFEGUARDING OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: THE CASE STUDY OF UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE CITY AT GEORGE TOWN, PENANG

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ABSTRACT

The standing of intangible cultural Heritage (ICH) to the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted from one generation to the next ones. Intangible cultural Heritage (ICH) is expressed through progression, expressions, knowledge, and abilities that include associated objects and cultural spaces that people differentiate as a component of their cultural heritage. Spread through generations and continually recreated, it ensures humanity with a sense of identity and continuity. The Convention also speaks about the significant role of communities and groups of tradition bearers in a non-specific way. This field is unusual, as it is characterized by the urgency to preserve and disseminate some of the strangest intangible creative expressions, especially those at risk of vanishing. So far, these cultural terminologies have been passed down mainly through imitation and oral tradition. Thus, this paper provides an insight into the perspectives of the local community in the involvement of safeguarding (ICH) present in this region. This is a case study using a detailed interview as a method to collect data. The result showed that the current framework for safeguarding (ICH) is limited in scope and lacking local people's perspectives, though there are efforts in the safeguarding mechanism by the relevant authority.

Keywords: safeguarding, Intangible heritage, UNESCO, community involvement

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Introduction

This study delivers an inspection of the perspectives of the native community in protection of Intangible culture heritage (ICH) in one of the UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS), which is George Town Heritage city or Site, Penang. One of the three assortment standards that George Town satisfied as a (WHS) it is tinted on the (ICH) expressed by a diversity of multiethnic activities of the traditional community in Malacca (UNESCO, 2008). Intangible culture heritage (ICH) refers to human skills, practices, expression and instruments which form the transmitted practices of local cultures through generations and provide senses of identity, continuity, admiration, diversity and creativity particularly to the involved local communities (UNESCO, 2003). To safeguard the (ICH), community involvement approaches were significantly indispensable. Their fundamental role in the implementation of the Convention is already included in the definition provided in Article 2.1 of intangible cultural heritage. Articles 11, 13 and 15 of the Convention provide, among other things, that States Parties are required to take the compulsory measures to ensure the safeguarding and protection of the intangible cultural heritage present in their area and to include communities, groups and relevant NGOs in the identification and definition of elements of that intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003). They shall attempt to certify the widest possible participation of communities, groups and individuals that create, preserve and transmit intangible cultural heritage within the framework of their safeguarding activities and dynamically involve them in its management. Buckley, K., (2017).

Although the Convention underlines the importance of community participation in the identification and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, recent research has exposed that such heritage designation initiatives are often driven in a top-down manner by cultural bureaucrats or authority rather than traditional bearers and experts of (ICH) Smith et.al (2009) justified that intangible cultural heritage can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, preserve and transmit it, without their recognition, nobody else can decide for them that a given expression or practice is their heritage. One of the main success factors for sustainable protection of cultural heritage is the level of awareness and appreciation of the heritage value of the resources by stakeholders, mostly the local communities. N. Azman, Abdul Halim & Ibrahim Komoo, (2009). Thus, this research presents the views of the native communities exist in in a Core Zone and Buffer Zone of the (WHS) on their appreciation of the George Town as a (WHS) and their understanding of the benefits and opportunities afforded by the (WHS) and the level of their involvement in the implementation of safeguarding ICH's activities by the authority to match the local community's needs and ambitions. Deacon, H. and Smeets, R., (2013); Bortolotto, C. (2015);Suki and azman, (2016).

This research presents the issues faced by the community about their involvement in safeguarding (ICH) at (WHS). The findings and with the support of relevant literature reviews identified the community issues faced by George Town cultural community in safeguarding their (ICH). The findings also provided justifications to generate guidelines on the improvements of the preservation of (ICH) among the community members, preservation, organizations and tourism agencies.

Literature review

Community involvement in the safeguarding of (ICH) refers to fetching members of a concerned community to generate, re-form, transmit and sustain their (ICH). Intangible culture heritage (ICH) refers to the indicators of the range of community-based heritage products which individuals or a community recognized as their cultural heritage. Deacon, H. and Smeets, R., (2013). UNESCO (2003) classifies the heritage products under five areas of ICH. They are oral tradition and expression, performing arts, social practices, knowledge and traditional craftsmanship. Intangible heritage is a comparatively new concept in the cultural property protection domain emerging at the interface of international law and concerns about the loss of local traditions and cultural practices. UNESCO's effort of safeguarding and protection (ICH) begun since (1952) Before then (ICH) was referred as folklore Smith, (2006); Smith & Akagawa, (2009). In (2003) UNESCO adopted the Convention for the

Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage with the view of establishing an international instrument for justifying the effects of globalization on traditional cultures. Singh, J.P., (2014).

There are two challenging questions raised by conservators to The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) regarding safeguarding (ICH). The first question is if the living heritage is to be passed on to the future generation, what are the forms of living heritage to be documented and how are they documented? The second question is if the forms of living heritage were the practitioners of the heritage itself, what are to be transmitted to the next generation and why are they transmitted? UNESCO (2003) emphasizes that practitioners of the(ICH) are more important to be protected over the (ICH) itself; without the practitioners, transmission of (ICH) is impossible to be accomplished. The protection of (ICH) requires more than just attention towards the arts and artifacts but also the artists, craftsmen and practitioners. Unlike tangible heritage, (ICH) is alive and needs to be transmitted. Hence to ensure the sustainability of (ICH), the entire system of living heritage transmission must be observed and protected. This means that the responsibility of safeguarding (ICH) greatly subjected to the concerned community, which a certain ICH belongs to Smith and Akagawa, (2009) & Deacon, H. and Smeets, R., (2013).

To ensure that the concerned communities generate, recreate, transmit and sustain their ICH, the approaches of community involvement are indispensable. Community involvement is a process of engaging individuals of a community to accomplish a determined activity. The purpose of the activity is to resolve issues in the community or the surrounding context of the community. The activity also indicates potential assets to benefit the physical and the social aspects of the location. Haus, (2004) & Mathbor, (2008). In this research, the activity refers to safeguarding (ICH). Among commonly discussed community issues of George Town cultural community are socio-economic inequality, strong ethnic enclaves, disconnection of youth from the traditional knowledge and impact of modernization. These issues contributed to the decline of (ICH). Nordin Hussin (2008) highlights the issue of socio-economic inequality that resulted in the social exclusion of community members. The social exclusion contacts to how much the family earned. Therefore, community members faced difficulties to work cooperatively in safeguard their (ICH). Deacon, H. and Smeets, R., (2013).

Moreover, Penang Heritage Thrust (PHT) (2009) reported that there are 30 types of traditional art and crafts in danger of extinction in Penang. The reason is that the entrepreneurs had no descending to continue the legacy. The lack of interests from younger generations to carry on the heritage became one of the major restrictions for the (ICH) to sustain Saleh et. al, (2007). One of the outcomes of modernization is the adaptation of popular cultures into the lives of the community members, particularly the youth Endon Mahmood, (2004), Saleh et al., (2007); MStar Online, (2008); Noriah Mohamed, (2009); Z. Samadi & R. M Yunus, (2012); Lada, S., Suki, N. M., & Sidin, S. M. (2014). Across the globe, youth are easily absorbed into the western way of life and cultural form which pays attention to materialistic elements. This has eclipsed many local cultures. As a result, local cultures have increasingly lost grip with the community they belong to and gradually declines along with generation change. Nayak, (2003); Abu Sadat, (2008). Other than the highlighted issues, family institution and metaphysical force of(ICH) influence how the community members behave towards their(ICH). Other issues include conventional over indigenous knowledge input and finally interest and convenience. Lack of attention on the community issues lead to insensitivity on how the quality of life of the (ICH) practitioners affects their behavior towards involvement in (ICH).

Research Methodology

This research is drawn from the field of anthropology Abdel-Hadi (2012) believes that, 'cultural anthropologists' focus on the ways people express their view of themselves and their world in symbolic forms and the cultural frameworks that impact local cultural frameworks that live. This ethnographic research method collects the data through fieldwork observation and in-depth interview method. Fieldwork study involves researchers to experience and observe the activities of the society such as rituals, social behavior and the cultural practices closely. In addition, to see the activities they perform

and interviewing those involved, obtaining information through their experience. This research was carried out in Penang and study visits focused on the famous tourist destinations in the world; Georgetown, as a World Heritage City. In addition, the research samples were obtained through snowball technique. The informers for this research are officers from the Department of National Heritage specifically under the Division of Intangible Heritage, NGO's officers from Penang Heritage Thrust (PHT) and practitioners or artisans which officially recognized by the Government State of Penang and they are (the practitioners) listed under the program of PAPA (Penang Apprenticeship Program of Artisan) by Penang Heritage Thrust (PHT) - a membership-based non-government organization. The overall numbers of informers are 30 people.

Findings

Transmission of (ICH): Conventional over Native knowledge

It is tough for the traditional knowledge or practices to survive in the age of globalization without any proper mechanism to protect it. Some cultural practices are difficult to learn and to transmit. The nature of (ICH) appearances such as dance, performing arts, crafts, ceremonies, oral tradition, or music is non-documented and most of the time is passed down from one generation to another. The risks of elderly are dying without transmitting it to the younger generations contribute to the cultural extinction. Apart from that, youth are increasingly becoming more disconnected from their traditional communities without an interest, or in most cases, access to these knowledge systems and contemporary way of thinking cannot adapt to traditional cultural practices or beliefs. Some of the respondents claim that their younger generation is only able to understand the ethnic language but fail to reply in the same ethnic language.

There is an issue of traditional and indigenous knowledge that influenced the contribution of the community in safeguarding (ICH). Some highly educated members were successful with conventional education input, but the conventional education pays less attention to the learners' local context De Young, (1995). Thus, it is a doubt if they could adapt the knowledge in their native social context. Vice versa, low educated members who were more involved in (ICH) and were likely flourished with indigenous knowledge, they were unqualified to teach in the conventional education system

Funding Intangible Culture Heritage

It is unquestionable that preserving or safeguarding cultural heritage is costly and managing (ICH) forms cannot be the same way that tangible heritage has been managed because the nature of (ICH) from is they are changing frequently and developing as well. According to Smith (2009), (ICH) is often not expressed in a permanent physical form where every presentations or expression of intangible heritage are different. Changes can, however, be documented and communities can be encouraged to continue working and passing on the traditions. Heritage only retains its worth through performance or use. Still, a majority of the community interviewed claimed that issues of resources to produce and manifest the culture are expensive is the main reason that leads to lack of contribution in making the resources. Apart from that, problems of small financial encouragement by the public or authority, lack of support from the public and authority, expensive cultural equipment and practice of certain culture is costly to play a role in delaying the transmission of (ICH) to be safeguarded among the community. Emma et. al (2011) claimed that economic motivations to safeguard intangible heritage (ICH) will probably play the leading role of all in encouraging transmission and rebuilding of intangible heritage and stressed that simply creating a heritage product for sale to foreigners, however, will not necessarily safeguard intangible heritage or be economically sustainable.

Convenience and Interest

Cultural practices are time-consuming and these days public are busy with other life priorities such as careers and businesses. There exists a subject of convenience and interest that influenced the participation of the respondents in (ICH). Some respondents were an inconvenience to mutually involve in (ICH) due to school and working hours while some easily involved in (ICH) as (ICH) surrounded in their everyday routine. Convenience and Interest contributed by professional field and working hours influenced the awareness and availability of the memberships to be involved in (ICH) manifestations.

Respondents who were government personnel, housewives and retirees, were possible to feel involved in (ICH) than respondents of the remaining occupations Suki, N. M., Suki, N. M., & Gumbang, B. (2010). Housewives unintentionally manifested most of their local cultures in everyday tasks such as indigenous cooking skills, genetic tips and day-care. Similarly, the retirees manifested most of their local cultures in everyday routine such as spending time with family and friends, hobbies, volunteer work and common activities. Frank and Lewis (2004) declared that government employees were more interested in shared benefits, which indirectly value the (ICH) instead of personal benefits such as improvement opportunities. On the other hand, the students, private employees, sole traders and businesses were professionally occupied in the working environment.

Beliefs and Religion

Beliefs and Religion are continuously inter-related when it comes to cultural practices. Old generations that believed in Hinduism are more involved in safeguarding (ICH). Since spiritual practices contribute metaphysical force to cultural practices the result suggested that Hinduism encouraged the respondents to be extremely involved in their cultural activities. But, it was unfair to suggest that the other religions did not encourage their believers to be involved in cultural practices, but purely religion as a metaphysical force to cultural practices poorly understood by some members of the cultural communities. Moreover, some religions such as Islam forbid cultural practices, which persuade polytheism and distraction of one from his Creator such as magic and sorcery as well as sing and dance Azlina Musa & Yusmilawati Yunos, (2011). Most of cultural practices are against religious belief and community prefers religious laws over traditional cultural rules.

Alternatively, for the Hindu believers, most of their cultural practices were usual activities in temple activities, religious ceremonies and family worship practices. Therefore, it was likely for the Hindu respondents to feel extremely involved in their cultural heritage as compared to respondents of other religions. There exists an issue of the metaphysical force of cultural practices, which prejudiced the involvement of the respondents in (ICH). Moreover, it was vital to recognize that some religious laws forbid certain cultural practices that indirectly led to a decline in certain indigenous cultures.

Individual preference of dominant culture over native culture

The continuance of cultural heritage is depending on the curiosity of future generation to practice the heritage. But, the preference between adapting the popular culture over the local culture in everyday life, especially the youth is contributing to the spreading and continuation of their cultural heritage. The investigation discovered that the youth respondents were unlikely to feel involved in (ICH) than respondents of retirement age. Meanwhile, youths often supposed as the prey of westernization and popular cultures. It was expected to suggest that the youths of the cultural communities experienced the same pattern of cultural preferences.

Most of the respondents claimed that their younger generation, especially the youth are no longer interested and do not believe in the traditional cultural beliefs. The youth has ignored and are unaware of cultural values. Many of them (youth) have no aptitude of traditional craftsmanship and the modern lifestyle with superficial activities has taken over the traditional lifestyle of philosophical cultural values. Apart from that, new and better original style of performing arts, certain cultural products are no longer

produced in traditional ways and cultural practices are not suitable for modern lifestyle especially for the young generation are among the justification of why it is a great challenge in safeguarding and protecting (ICH). Others claimed that technology is taking over traditional methods, modern way of living cannot adapt to traditional cultural practices and beliefs and some cultural beliefs are nonsense and unbelievable in the present-day. The most major factors are elderly experts passed away without successfully transmitting the cultural legacy and the descendants of elderly experts cannot continue the legacy.

There exists a question of preference of popular cultures over traditional cultures Din, W. A., & Bidin, S. J. A. (2014). which influenced the public involvement of the respondents in (ICH), mostly the youths. Additionally, the middle age respondents who vary between 40 to 60 years old were either too engaged with work commitment or increasingly uninterested to be involved in (ICH). On the other hand, the insignificant number of retired community members with most experiences and skills in native cultures were slowly decreasing.

Discussion

The outcome from the observation participated and in-depth interview with the respondents, several issues are recognized in terms of the perspectives of the local community in safeguarding (ICH). There are Conventional Over Indigenous knowledge, funding mechanism, interest and convenience, religion and beliefs and personal preferences between local and popular culture.

Recommendation

The conclusions discovered that there was an absence of soft substructure or a structured organization that provide issues affecting the community quality of life as (ICH) experts. The soft substructure should act as an effective mechanism to safeguard (ICH) in Malaysia and at the same time, it should be receptive to the cultural variety of the community that sustains the heritage. Community involvement initiatives are to involve the community in safeguarding their (ICH) with the assist of the existing close efforts, especially the authorities and NGOs. The community involvement is important to indicate suitable methods to improve the management of (ICH) in Malaysia.

According to Haus et al (2009), three aims of community involvement are;

To speech view on decisions upon public concerns which affect the community, To take responsibility in the changes transpire in the community, and To rise and exercise control over resources and institute.

Like the aims, four phases of community involvement in cultural heritage management are identified and the key aim of these four phases is to develop a comprehensive engagement within the community. Smith et. al (2010) justified that comprehensive engagement refers to safeguarding that community members and shareholders are involved in cultural heritage assessments and in management decisions as well as referred on impacts and opportunities. It is also to confirm that cultural awareness is promoted internally, and that information is shared and combined across operational functions.

The four phases are recognized and understand, plan and implement, monitor, evaluate and improve, report and communicate Ilias, A., & Razak, M. Z. A. (2007).

Table 1. Four Phases of Cultural Heritage Management

Phase	Justification
1. Recognize and Understand	<p>Establish the knowledge base needed to shape and drive the operation's cultural heritage management approach and cultural heritage management system.</p> <p>Identify and understand cultural heritage values, their significance and appropriate management options, through cultural heritage assessment and surveys with the community (including within the operation's socioeconomic knowledge base, social impact assessment and social risk analysis).</p> <p>Identify and understand the operation's potential impacts upon cultural heritage values.</p> <p>Understand appropriate management options by drawing on the knowledge base in consultation with community members, heritage experts and other stakeholders.</p>
2. Plan and Implement	<p>Develop cultural heritage management procedures and systems appropriate to the operational and cultural heritage context.</p> <p>Use Cultural Heritage Management (CHM) planning tools such as Communities multiyear plans and specific cultural heritage management plans to implement the operation's cultural heritage management system effectively.</p> <p>Ensure cultural heritage management considerations are integrated into all relevant operational plans and procedures, such as ground disturbance permit systems, human resources policies, health and safety procedures and environmental management programs.</p> <p>Contribute to the socioeconomic development of the region and meet communities' target by effectively implementing cultural heritage programs.</p>
3. Monitor, Evaluate and Improve	<p>Set targets and indicators to monitor the impact of the operation on cultural places, objects and practices, and the overall performance of the cultural heritage management system.</p> <p>Use the results of Communities site managed assessments, cultural heritage management system audits and complaints mechanisms to continually improve performance.</p> <p>Develop participatory monitoring and evaluation processes that include community's employees, heritage experts and the community custodians of the heritage.</p>

4. Report and Communicate	<p>The Community is broadly approached. That is, no minor groups of the community are left out.</p> <p>Explanation of Vision of the Program in which to find a strong vision which predicts the positive future of ICH practices of the cultural community.</p> <p>Founding of Course-plotting Committee in which to acknowledge that community leaders are important assets to the programs, but new leadership need to be familiarized to improve the sense of self-reliance within the community members.</p> <p>Publish the cultural heritage management results, the cultural heritage and its standards more broadly through academic or public means, while respecting intellectual property or privacy requirements of the proprietors.</p>
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The four phases of community contribution rules deliver an approach to establish a soft substructure which provides an active mechanism that helps to safeguard (ICH). Since (ICH) is part of native practices of the cultural community, community involvement is an important inventiveness to ensure involvement of the concerned community in representing, implementing and safeguarding their (ICH). Community involvement initiatives give an important impact to the effectiveness of policy making and policy implementation in the (WHS). Attention given to community opinions, ideas, issues and conditions contribute to more effective and responsive framework for the development of the City of Existing Culture.

Conclusion

This research article provides an analysis on the perceptions of the community involvement in safeguarding and protecting (ICH) in one of the inscribed World Heritage Site or city, which is the George Town, Penang. The findings and with the support of relevant literature reviews recognized the community issues faced by George Town cultural community in safeguarding their (ICH). The findings also provided explanations to generate guidelines on the improvements of the preservation of (ICH) among the community memberships, conservation organizations and tourism agencies.

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