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"Warning in Spaces: Blending Heritage, Nature and Design"

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Programme of Landscape Architecture, Department of Built Environment & Technology,
Faculty of Built Environment, UiTM Perak Branch, Seri Iskandar Campus



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"Harmony in Spaces : Blending Heritage, Nature and Design"

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Community Roles In Preserving Cultural Identity For Heritage Tourism At Teluk Intan Waterfront

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Abstract

Teluk Intan's waterfront in Perak is a historic waterfront that embodies a special cultural landscape cultivated over a few centuries of trade, communities, and overseas interactions. A long time ago, this area was a toll for the Admiral to collect boat taxes and it was an important place for the economy of the state of Perak. This also because the area around Durian Sebatang and Teluk Mak Intan has indeed been a focus for the British since their early arrival in the state of Perak. For the colonial authorities, this area was suitable for development to facilitate their administration and trade. This is due of the special geographical factors which the location near the mouth of the Perak River and also because Teluk Mak Intan where it has deep waters, making it easier for large ships to anchor. Further from its tangible landmarks, like the famous Leaning Tower, colonial-era shophouses, and riverside markets, the waterfront stands for intangible cultural values: oral histories, communal traditions, festivals, and collegiality among its residents. However, the speedy urban development, modernization, and varying socio-economic dynamics threaten the perpetuation of these cultural values. This research aims to assess the role of community in in preserving cultural identity for heritage tourism within Teluk Intan's historic waterfront area. There are various method for data collection that will be applied which are information from official document and archival review, site observation and semi-structured interviews to identify key cultural treasures, assess the community's perception of heritage significance, and consider preservation challenges. The findings are expected to contribute towards a deeper understanding of how cultural values can inform sustainable waterfront planning and heritage conservation strategies. Ultimately, this study seeks to support the integration of cultural identity into urban development policies, ensuring that Teluk Intan's waterfront remains a living cultural heritage for future generations.

Keyword: Preserving cultural identity, historic, waterfront, Teluk Intan.

INTRODUCTION

The waterfront in Teluk Intan refers to the area around the historic Leaning Tower, a landmark built in 1885 as a water tank to serve the town and prominent clock tower on top. Waterfront are more than just physical areas. They represent historical memory, cultural identity, and community traditions. Teluk Intan, situated along the Perak River, is a historic town with rich cultural heritage. Along with the nearby riverside shophouses, captures the multicultural influences of Malay, Chinese and Indian communities. Beyond the visible heritage, the waterfront holds significant intangible values through oral histories, festivals markets and shared memories connected to life by the river. In recent years, modernization and

tourism development have raised concerns about cultural continuity. If careful assessment is not conducted, the cultural values connected to the waterfront may be ignored in regeneration projects. Therefore, this study aims to identify and assess the cultural values linked to Teluk Intan's historical waterfront. This will help guide planning that respects heritage and supports sustainable development.

The research also seeks to do more than acknowledge and protect cultural heritage in Teluk Intan. The aims is to provide recommendations providing a cultural vision for invade development, to protect and maintain the qualities and cultural significance of the waterfront with regard to future planning and ensure the waterfront continues to serve as an active cultural landscape the embodies a balance of development and heritage.

2.1 Objectives

The objectives for this research are important because they could directly address the urgent need to safeguard the cultural value heritage of Teluk Intan historical waterfront, which is increasingly threatened by urban development and socio-economic changes. This are the breakdown of the objectives for this research:

1. **To identify the cultural identity elements** both tangible and intangible that characterize Teluk Intan's historic waterfront.
2. **To examine how the preservation of cultural identity** contributes to the development of heritage tourism at Teluk Intan's historic waterfront.
3. **To assess the role of local community participation** in maintaining cultural identity through heritage tourism development at Teluk Intan's historic waterfront.

2.2 Problem Statement

In the light of the above discussion my work aims to what meanings, tradition and heritage association are attached to the waterfront, how do these shape community with more accurate document from the different groups' perspectives. Broadly, my research question will be organized to investigate four main areas:

1. Tangible and intangible: What role does the waterfront play in shaping the identity and sense of belonging of Teluk Intan's community? How do older and younger generations differ in their views on the cultural significance of the waterfront? What traditional practices, rituals or festivals are still linked to the waterfront? What are the main challenges or threats to maintaining the cultural clues of Teluk Intan's waterfront?
2. Cultural identity elements (tangible and intangible) : What are the tangible and intangible cultural identity elements present at Teluk Intan's historic waterfront? How do these elements reflect the historical, social, and cultural significance of the waterfront area? How are these cultural identity elements perceived by the local community and visitors?
3. Which cultural features (architecture, river-based activities, traditional markets, local cuisine, etc.) are most symbolic of Teluk Intan's heritage identity?
4. Cultural identity preservation contributes to heritage tourism potential: How does the preservation of cultural identity elements enhance the attractiveness of Teluk Intan's waterfront as a heritage tourism

destination? What role does community involvement play in linking cultural identity preservation with tourism development?

This question will require consideration of the Teluk Intan's waterfront could develop without losing its cultural soul, making it not just a tourist destination, but a living heritage landscape.

Waterfront hold historical importance as cultural landscapes. They often provide as basis for trade, settlement and cultural exchange. In Malaysia, town like Teluk Intan showcase how socio-cultural identity has developed through both physical and non-physical heritage. The Teluk Intan waterfront features significant sites such as the Leaning Tower, colonial-era shophouses and riverside markets. It also represents non-physical values like oral histories, food culture, traditional festivals and the community's collective memory. These values come together to create a cultural fabric that shapes the identity and sense of belonging for local residents.

However, in recent decades, rapid urbanization, modernization of infrastructure and changes in economic activities have put significant pressure on the cultural values of Teluk Intan's waterfront. The decline of river-based trade, neglect of historic buildings and competition from new commercial centers have diminished the waterfront's importance in daily life. At the same time, cultural practices and traditions tied to the riverfront are slowly fading as younger generation feel less connected to local heritage. Development pressures have often prioritized economic growth and tourism potential, overlooking cultured identity. This has led to a disconnect between conservation policies and community values.

Despite recognizing Teluk Intan as a town with historical significance, there is a little research that clearly identifies and evaluate the cultural values found in its waterfront. Most studies on Malaysian waterfronts concentrate on physical planning, tourism or environmental management. These studies pay less attention to the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage. This gap in knowledge makes it hard for planners, policymakers and communities to protect cultural identity while also embracing modernization.

Hence, being aware of this urgency, the study is needed to help solve these issues by assessing the tangible and intangible cultural values of the historical waterfront of Teluk Intan. It does this through analysing how diverse individuals and groups, as stakeholders, depending on their relationship with the waterfront, this includes the residents and traders, groups involved in. This research contributes to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting the preservation and sustainable use of Teluk Intan's historic waterfront. It aligns with SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by safeguarding cultural heritage and integrating heritage-sensitive planning into urban development. By supporting heritage tourism, the study contributes to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) through the promotion of local businesses and sustainable economic opportunities. The project also supports SDG 4 (Quality Education) by fostering awareness and knowledge of cultural identity among both the local community and visitors, ensuring the transmission of intangible heritage. Additionally, preserving the waterfront ecosystem complements SDG 15 (Life on Land), while emphasizing community participation and stakeholder collaboration reflects SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), ensuring inclusive and effective management of heritage resources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Heritage environments are shaped by the interplay between cultural identity, historical narratives, and tourism activities. Cultural identity forms the core of how communities understand and present their heritage, while heritage tourism relies heavily on authentic cultural expressions to create meaningful visitor experiences. Although many studies have explored cultural identity in major heritage cities, smaller historic waterfront towns remain understudied, especially in the Malaysian context. Therefore, this study examines cultural identity and heritage tourism in Teluk Intan's historic waterfront to inform heritage-sensitive planning.

Cultural identity: Definition, tangible and intangible elements

Immersion involves deep psychological and behavioural engagement of tourists in a destination, where heightened sensory awareness and cognitive absorption lead to a state of full mind-body integration (Lunardo & Ponsignon, 2020; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). In the article from (Satrya, Adityaji, Susilo et al., 2024) found that perceived authenticity and local culture significantly influence revisit intention in heritage tourism. Cultural identity links individuals to their wider community, allowing people to maintain their distinct traditions and perspectives while interacting positively with those from different backgrounds. Across the world, strengthening cultural identity has increasingly become an important public policy goal. In Hong Kong, recent policy initiatives place strong emphasis on fostering cultural and national identity as a core value at all levels of education. These policies particularly highlight early childhood as a critical stage in the formation of cultural identity. As a result, cultural and national identity development has been integrated into the moral education curriculum, a major focus of Hong Kong's educational policy. Research also consistently demonstrates a strong relationship between music, music education, and cultural identity (Chung, 2025). Moreover, based on the (Kevseroğlu et al., 2021) sustaining cultural landscapes involves conserving not only their physical features but also the socio-cultural qualities that define them.

To achieve this, it is crucial to record and protect both the tangible and intangible aspects of heritage in a unified way, since cultural heritage encompasses "the tangible and intangible creations through which a community expresses its creativity." These elements may include social practices, everyday activities, rituals, traditional crafts, knowledge, skills, techniques, historic sites, buildings, public spaces, and objects. Understanding and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and ensuring it is passed on to future generations. It is essential for maintaining tangible heritage and the values it represents. One of those tangible elements are riverfront, which part of the paper research. At the same time, (Lenzerini, 2023) said that given their interdependence, tangible and intangible cultural heritage should not be viewed as two separate types of heritage but as interconnected aspects of a single, unified whole. Both dimensions are contextually essential for cultural heritage to generate the full range of benefits it is meant to provide and to ensure its meaningful transmission to future generations. It is precisely the integration of these two elements that shapes the human dimension of cultural heritage, as both its essence and its material form are rooted in human experience and perception.

Heritage tourism

Heritage tourism is, as noted by (Satrya et al., 2024) it involves travelling to and experiencing places that

hold historical, cultural, or natural importance. This form of tourism plays an important role in fostering awareness, appreciation, and protection of the world's diverse heritage. It is also a key component of sustainable tourism, offering economic, social, and cultural advantages to both visitors and the communities they encounter. The study by (Fu & Luo, 2023) developed a cultural identity measurement model among heritage tourists and found that cultural identity significantly influences travel experience, place attachment and satisfaction. Heritage tourism involves travelling to sites that represent historical heritage and/or locations connected to intangible cultural traditions. It is a branch of cultural tourism and encompasses more specialised forms, such as archaeological tourism or Archaeopteris. This type of tourism is widely popular, attracting visitors with a deep interest in culture as well as those looking for a more casual or surface-level cultural experience (de la Calle Vaquero & García-Hernandez, 2024)

Heritage tourism encompass various elements that contribute to its appeal and effectiveness. Cultural identity and heritage tourism, one of those elements are authenticity. According to (Satrya et al., 2024) tourism heritage refers to the travel and visitation of destinations that possess historical, cultural, and natural significance. Heritage tourism significantly promotes the understanding, appreciation, and preservation of the world's diverse heritage. It is a critical element of sustainable tourism development that generates economic, social, and cultural benefits for both tourists and local communities. In addition to that, heritage tourism could help for cultural preservation. The growing trend of cultural tourism, along with the emergence of tourists specifically interested in cultural heritage, aligns closely with the revitalisation needs of the heritage sector. However, according to (Jelinčić & Mansfeld, 2019) not all heritage sites are equally appealing, nor do they all succeed in developing cultural tourism. Recent research has identified key principles for heritage revitalisation through cultural tourism, which can be applied to enhance a site's attractiveness while ensuring its physical, economic, and socio-cultural sustainability.

Community Participation in Preserving Cultural Identity

Community is important part in preserving cultural identity because according to (Suhartanto et al., 2025) emotional value, conditional value, epistemic value, and a sense of community contribute to the formation of favourable attitudes, which in turn influence behavioural intentions. Additionally, a sense of community has a direct impact on behavioural intention. Cultural identity, however, only moderates the effect of these values on favourable attitudes, while the other relationships remain consistent, indicating that behavioural patterns are similar across different groups. Active community participation is essential for safeguarding cultural identity, as it helps maintain the continuity and vibrancy of cultural practices and heritage. The ongoing practice of local culture helps shape and define the community's identity. Over time, this identity is reinforced by the extent of community participation in preserving their cultural traditions. Conversely, (Yaman et al., 2018) a lack of involvement can lead to a decline in cultural practices, which, in turn, negatively affects the community's local identity. Moreover, according to (Boudebouz et al., 2025) it shows that community empowerment is a multifaceted process, involving access to information, participation in civic activities, a sense of political efficacy, and opportunities for collaborative creation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Selected Method

This study follows a qualitative-dominant mixed method research approach, combining qualitative methods (interview, observations) with qualitative surveys. Such as design is appropriate in that cultural values include into their frame a deep understanding of the meaning, perception, and identity of the community to acquire patterns of measure of stakeholder views in parallel.

4.2 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative case study research design, which is suitable for examining cultural identity, community roles and heritage tourism dynamics within the specific context of Teluk Intan's Riverfront. This case study approaches an in-depth understanding of how cultural identity is expressed, preserved and perceived within heritage landscape. This allowing to capturing both tangible and intangible elements embedded in the site. The method also supports the exploration of complex social interactions such as community involvement, heritage values and tourism activities that cannot be fully measured through qualitative methods.

4.3 Data Collection Procedures

The research will be conducted in Teluk Intan's Waterfront, while focusing on key cultural landmarks such as the Leaning Tower, colonial era shophouses, riverside markets, jetties and Pulau Bangau, as well as surrounding community spaces linked to cultural practices.

4.4 Data Collection:

Interview

Site observation are conducted to identify and document the tangible and intangible cultural identity elements present at Teluk Intan's historic riverfront. The procedures include the following steps:

Research Design and Approach

This study a qualitative research design to investigate the cultural identity of Teluk Intan's historic waterfront and its relationship with heritage tourism development. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate as the research aims to explore meanings, perceptions, experiences, and narratives associated with both tangible and intangible cultural elements. The study focuses on understanding how cultural identity is perceived by individuals who possess long-term familiarity and professional experience related to the waterfront rather than measuring variables quantitatively.

Selection of Respondent

The respondents were selected using purposive sampling, whereby individuals with relevant knowledge and experience were deliberately chosen. A total of three respondents participated in the study. All respondents have long-term connections to Teluk Intan, either through residence, professional involvement, or participation in tourism-related activities. All respondents are affiliated with Historian and two respondents have experience with Persatuan Pelancongan, particularly in promoting river cruise activities along Sungai Perak. This selection ensured that the data collected reflected informed perspectives on waterfront development, heritage value, and tourism potential.

Interview Structure and Instrument

The interview instrument was structured into two main sections. The first section focused on identifying cultural identity elements at Teluk Intan's historic waterfront, covering respondents' background, connection to the waterfront, significant physical landmarks, architectural character, spatial layout, social life, daily activities, and local stories or legends. The second section examined cultural identity preservation and heritage tourism, including perceptions of current development, preservation efforts, the role of local communities and businesses, challenges in balancing development and heritage, and suggestions to improve tourism awareness and appreciation. This structured yet flexible format ensured consistency across interviews while allowing respondents to elaborate on issues they considered important.

Interview Procedure

The interview was conducted face-to-face on 12 November 2022 at approximately 11.30 a.m. Each interview followed the same general sequence of question to maintain comparability between respondents however each interview conducts on separated time. The interviews were conducted in bilingual format, using both Bahasa Melayu and English, depending on the respondents' language preference and professional background. This approach enabled respondents to express their ideas more clearly and accurately. Follow-up questions were used when necessary to clarify responses.

Data Recording and Transcription

All interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the respondents. The recordings were later transcribed verbatim to ensure that the original meaning and context of the responses were preserved. Both Malay and English responses were retained in the transcripts to reflect authentic language use. The transcribed data were then organized and prepared for analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The transcripts were carefully reviewed and coded to identify recurring ideas, patterns, and themes relevant to the research objectives. Themes such as tangible cultural identity elements, intangible cultural practices, social activities, cultural identity preservation, community participation, and heritage tourism development were identified and compared across respondents. This analytical approach allowed for systematic interpretation of qualitative data and facilitated meaningful discussion of the findings.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Participation in the interviews was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the study. All information collected was used solely for academic purposes. Respondents' identities were anonymized, and organizational affiliations were included only to provide contextual relevance to the research.

Observation

Research Setting and Temporal Scope

The site observation was conducted within the Teluk Intan historic corridor, focusing on five key zones that represent the town's cultural and heritage structure: Menara Condong (Clock Tower), the Riverfront, the Market, the Jetty, and the Street corridor. These zones were selected due to their historical significance, concentration of heritage assets, and role in tourism activities.

To capture peak activity and maximise observation of visitor behaviour, the study was conducted on a weekend (Saturday, 6 December 2025) at approximately 1:38 p.m. The observation period coincided with the Chithirai Pournami Festival, a Hindu religious festival. This event-based context provided an opportunity to observe intangible cultural practices, community participation, and local tourist behaviour within an active cultural setting, thereby strengthening the relevance of the observation to heritage tourism analysis.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a structured observation checklist, designed to ensure consistency and systematic recording across all observation zones. The checklist was divided into four main components.

The first component documented general site information, including the date, time, type of visitors (with emphasis on local tourists), and the presence of cultural or religious events. The second component focused on tangible cultural heritage elements, where major landmarks were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *1 (Very Poor)* to *5 (Excellent)*, based on their physical condition and visual integrity.

The third component examined historic shophouses and riverside architecture, emphasising technical and aesthetic criteria such as façade originality, signage appropriateness, material integrity, structural stability, and evidence of water-related damage. The final component assessed tourist interaction, recording visitor volume, behavioural patterns, level of engagement with heritage elements, and the availability of interpretive facilities such as signage and information panels.

Observation Focus and Criteria

The observation prioritised the documentation of physical heritage features to evaluate their relationship with tourism engagement and cultural identity preservation. Particular attention was given to heritage landmarks, with Menara Condong identified as the primary focal point due to its iconic status. Menara Condong was assessed as being in excellent physical condition (rating 5), indicating effective preservation.

Other significant heritage elements observed include the Sri Subramaniam Temple, old mosques, Mahkamah Lama (Old Courthouse), Balai Polis Lama (Old Police Station), and Pejabat Pos (Post Office). In addition to physical condition, the observation assessed functional and accessibility constraints, including public safety measures such as barriers and inclusivity for users with disabilities. Notably, the site was found to be not convenient for wheelchair access, highlighting a limitation in inclusive tourism infrastructure.

The presence and quality of tourism infrastructure, particularly heritage signage and interpretive facilities, were also evaluated. These elements were consistently rated as very poor (rating 1), indicating a lack of effective communication of cultural and historical information to visitors.

Sampling of Observation Subjects

The observation employed purposive sampling, focusing specifically on local tourists. This approach allows the study to examine how domestic visitors engage with local heritage assets and whether the current level of cultural identity preservation supports meaningful understanding or merely visual

consumption. By observing local tourists, the study captures behaviour that reflects familiarity, casual use, and everyday tourism patterns rather than structured guided experiences.

Data Analysis Method

Data obtained from the observation checklists were analysed through integration with thematic analysis using ATLAS.ti, as outlined in the broader qualitative analysis framework of the study. Quantitative ratings related to physical condition, accessibility, and infrastructure were triangulated with qualitative observation notes describing material deterioration, water damage, visitor behaviour, and spatial use.

This mixed qualitative interpretation enables the identification of gaps between existing cultural identity preservation efforts and actual heritage tourism potential. The integration of numerical condition ratings with descriptive field notes strengthens the reliability of the findings and supports a nuanced assessment of how physical heritage conditions influence visitor engagement and cultural understanding.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Background and Local Insight

The respondents has lived and worked in Teluk Intan for approximately 15 to 20 years, indicating a strong level of familiarity with the town and its social–cultural environment. Although the respondent does not express a strong personal emotional attachment to the waterfront project, their long-term residency enables them to recall historical conditions and observe gradual urban changes. This positions the respondent as a knowledgeable local observer, rather than a casual user, which strengthens the credibility of their insights.

From a research perspective, the respondent represents a community-informed stakeholder who bridges local residents, informal community networks, and semi-institutional actors. Their frequent engagement with local communities suggests that the views expressed reflect collective community sentiments, not solely personal opinions.

Respondent	Occupation	Place of Origin/Residence	Length of Residence / Involvement in Teluk Intan	Professional / Community Involvement	Language Commonly Used
Respondant 1	Educational	Teluk Intan (hometown)	Approximately 18 years living and working in Teluk Intan	Historian related background, engages with local community and heritage discussion.	Bahasa Melayu, English
Respondant 2	Tourism Association	Teluk Intan	Living in Teluk Intan since around 12 years old (long-term residence)	Tourism promotion, involvement in river cruise promotion, familiar with waterfront recreational use.	Bahasa Melayu, English
Respondant 3	Tourism Association	Teluk Intan	Approximately 30 years cumulative experience (including overseas, Penang and return	Active involvement in tourism development and river cruise initiatives.	English (mainly)

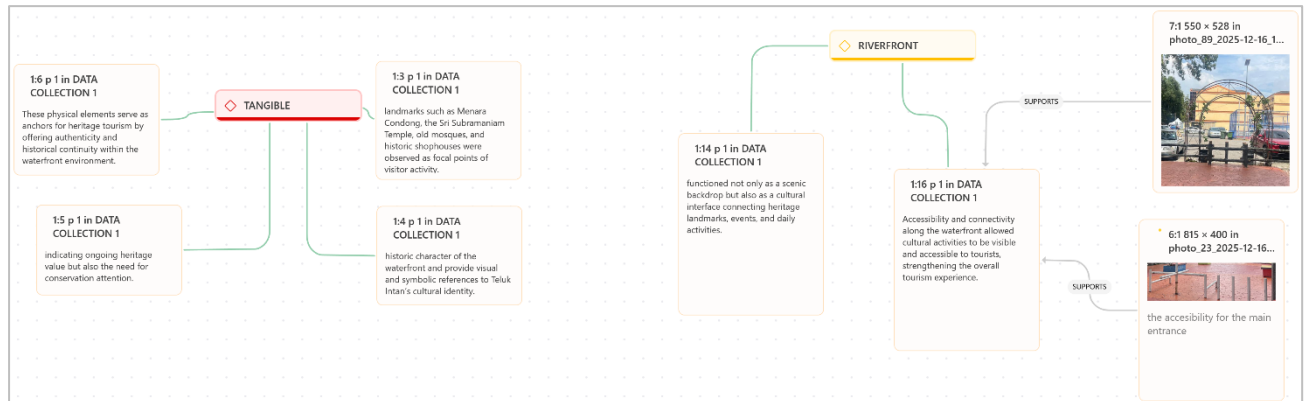


Figure 5.2 Atlas Ti Analysis for Observation

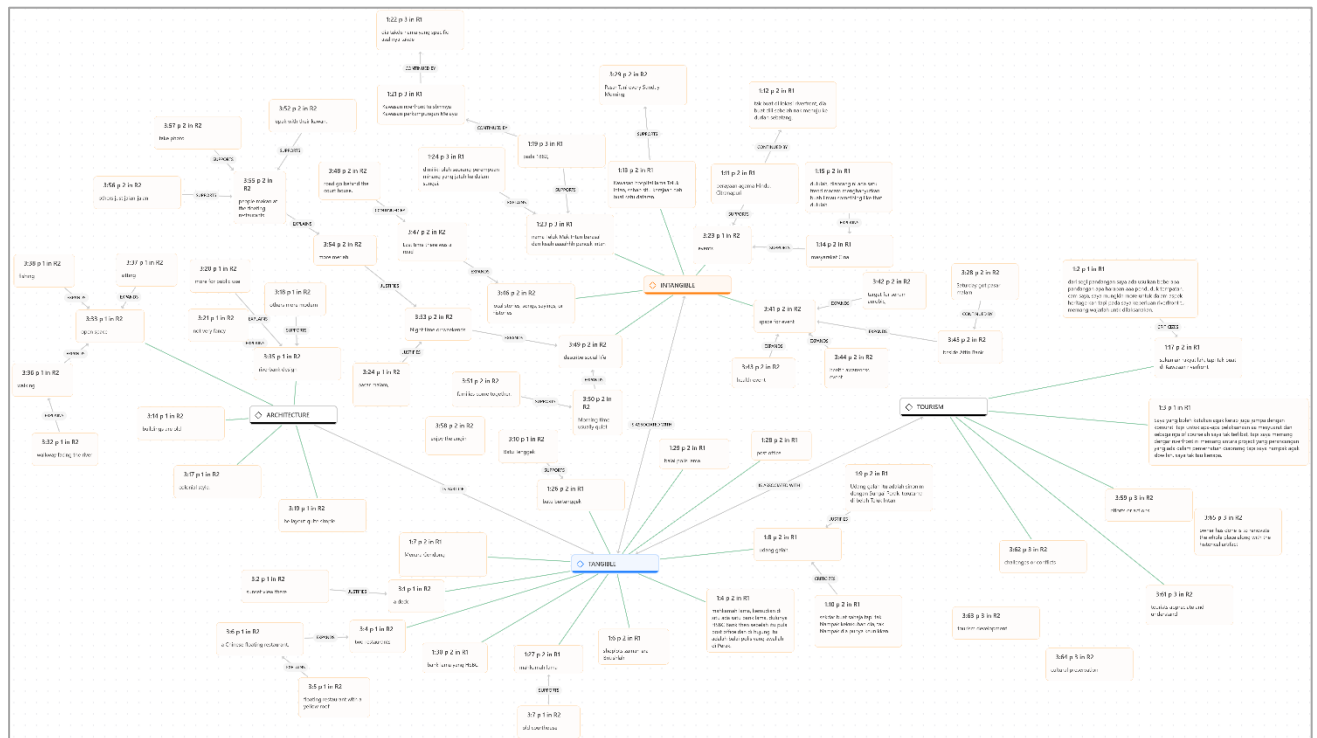


Figure 5.1 Atlas Ti Analysis for Interview

Objective 1: To Identify the Cultural Identity Elements (Tangible and Intangible) That Characterize Teluk Intan's Historic Waterfront

The Atlas.ti analysis clearly identifies both tangible and intangible cultural identity elements that characterise Teluk Intan's historic waterfront. The findings are supported by dense code networks and multiple respondent quotations across R1, R2, and R3.

Tangible Cultural Identity Elements

The Tangible code family (Figure 4.1) reveals a strong presence of physical heritage assets that collectively define the historic character of Teluk Intan's waterfront. Respondents consistently identified colonial-era buildings and landmarks such as the old courthouse, former HSBC bank, British-era shophouses, Batu Tenggek, Meriam Condong, mosque, post office, and traditional restaurants as symbols of the town's historical development (R1: 1:26; 1:27; R2: 3:7; 3:19; R3: 4:24).

These tangible elements function not merely as static historical objects but as visible markers of collective memory and identity. The continued use of shophouses and religious buildings suggests that tangible heritage remains embedded within everyday life rather than being separated from contemporary activities. This supports the notion that Teluk Intan's waterfront retains a strong sense of authenticity derived from long-term continuity of use.

The Architecture code family further reinforces tangible cultural identity by highlighting colonial architectural styles, modest building forms, simple layouts, and river-facing orientations (R2: 3:14; 3:17; 3:19). In the Atlas.ti network, Architecture is shown to explain and support Tangible heritage, indicating that cultural identity is expressed not only through individual buildings but also through the overall spatial structure and relationship with the river. This spatial coherence strengthens the recognisability of the historic waterfront as a culturally distinct place.

Figure 5.1: Atlas.ti code network illustrating Tangible and Architectural cultural identity elements at Teluk Intan's historic waterfront. The analysis of tangible and intangible cultural identity elements at Teluk Intan's historic waterfront reveals a strong alignment between coded networks and field observations. Tangible heritage elements are dominated by Menara Condong (Clock Tower), which emerges as the primary focal point within the Atlas.ti network [1:7, 2], functioning as a significant visual and symbolic reference for the town's identity. This landmark not only contributes to spatial legibility but also reinforces historical continuity within the waterfront setting. Additional tangible elements, including the former courthouse [1:27] and British-era shophouses [1:6], are identified as critical components of the heritage fabric. Field observations confirm their role as anchors of authenticity, reflecting the colonial history and architectural character that shape the cultural landscape of Teluk Intan.

Intangible Cultural Identity Elements

The Intangible code family (Figure 4.2) reveals that cultural identity at the waterfront is equally shaped by non-physical elements such as social practices, atmosphere, temporal rhythms, and shared cultural meanings. Respondents described a clear contrast between the quiet, calm atmosphere in the morning and increased activity during weekends, indicating cyclical patterns of use that contribute to the identity of the place (R2: 3:50; 3:53). Community gatherings, health awareness programmes, informal social interactions, and religious coexistence were frequently referenced (R2: 3:43; 3:44; R3: 4:31). These activities demonstrate that the waterfront functions as a social and cultural platform, where identity is continuously reproduced through interaction rather than preserved solely through conservation measures.

The Atlas.ti network shows strong associations between Intangible and Tangible codes, suggesting that

physical heritage provides the setting for intangible practices, while social activities give meaning to physical spaces. This confirms that Teluk Intan's historic waterfront operates as a living heritage environment, where cultural identity is dynamic, experiential, and community-driven.

Figure 4.2: Atlas.ti code network showing Intangible cultural identity elements and their relationship with physical heritage. In parallel, intangible cultural elements are prominently reflected in ongoing religious and cultural practices associated with the waterfront. The Atlas.ti network highlights festivals such as the Hindu Citranapuri celebration [1:11, 1:12] as key expressions of living culture. Observations conducted during the Chithirai Pournami Festival and Temasya Budaya @ Perak further validate these findings, demonstrating that such events remain actively practiced and publicly accessible within the riverfront interface. These festivals enhance social interaction, reinforce collective memory, and contribute to the experiential quality of the waterfront, thereby strengthening its cultural identity as a living heritage environment.

Objective 2: To Examine How the Preservation of Cultural Identity Contributes to the Development of Heritage Tourism at Teluk Intan's Historic Waterfront

The Atlas.ti findings indicate that the preservation of cultural identity does contribute to the development of heritage tourism at Teluk Intan's historic waterfront; however, this contribution remains uneven and constrained by several structural and interpretive limitations.

The Tourism code family (Figure 4.3) demonstrates strong linkages with Tangible, Architecture, and Intangible themes. Respondents frequently associated preserved historical buildings and landmarks with tourism attraction and destination recognition (R1: 1:9; 1:28; R3: 4:13). The historic character, old-town atmosphere, and riverside setting were perceived as key elements that differentiate Teluk Intan from more generic urban destinations.

Intangible cultural identity further enhances heritage tourism by adding experiential depth. Community activities, informal social interaction along the river, and everyday cultural practices were coded as supporting tourism experience (R2: 3:49; 3:51). These findings suggest that visitors are not only attracted by physical heritage but also by the atmosphere and lived culture of the waterfront, reinforcing the importance of experiential heritage tourism.

However, the Atlas.ti network also reveals several critiques that limit the effectiveness of cultural identity preservation in supporting tourism development. Respondents highlighted inadequate heritage interpretation, lack of storytelling, insufficient informational signage, and tourists' limited understanding of historical significance (R1: 1:10; 1:17; R3: 4:47). As a result, preserved heritage assets are often visually appreciated but not fully understood or emotionally engaged with by visitors.

This indicates a disconnect between heritage preservation and heritage communication. While cultural identity is physically and socially present, it is not systematically translated into meaningful tourism narratives. Consequently, heritage tourism development at the waterfront remains potential-driven rather than fully realised.

Figure 5.1: Atlas.ti code network illustrating the contribution of cultural identity preservation to heritage tourism development. The findings indicate that cultural identity elements at Teluk Intan's historic waterfront actively facilitate visitor engagement and immersion. Observations of tourist behaviour, including photographing heritage landmarks [3:57, 3] and walking along the riverfront promenade [3:56, 3], demonstrate that the colonial-era architecture [1:18] and the scenic river backdrop function as key environmental cues that encourage exploration and sensory engagement. These behaviours suggest that the physical setting contributes to an immersive visitor experience by enabling direct interaction with historically significant spaces, thereby reinforcing the role of tangible heritage in shaping visitor perception and place attachment.

However, the analysis also reveals limitations in the symbolic interpretation of local identity elements. Although *Udang Galah* (giant freshwater prawn) is coded within the Atlas.ti network as a symbolic synonym for Teluk Intan's identity [1:8], field observations indicate an absence of interpretive facilities, signage, or narrative explanations that could communicate its cultural and historical significance to visitors. This lack of interpretive support constrains deeper symbolic interaction and limits visitors' ability to fully understand and appreciate local cultural meanings. As a result, while visual engagement is evident, the experiential depth associated with cultural identity remains partially unrealised.

Therefore, Objective 2 is **partially achieved**, as cultural identity preservation supports tourism development, but its full potential is constrained by weak interpretation, limited storytelling, and fragmented tourism management.

Objective 3: To Assess the Role of Local Community Participation in Maintaining Cultural Identity Through Heritage Tourism Development at Teluk Intan's Historic Waterfront

The Atlas.ti analysis shows that local community participation plays an important but predominantly informal role in maintaining cultural identity at Teluk Intan's historic waterfront.

Community participation is evident through daily use of heritage spaces, operation of traditional businesses, participation in community and health-related events, and continuation of social and religious practices (R2: 3:41; 3:43; R3: 4:31). These activities sustain intangible cultural identity by keeping the waterfront active, socially meaningful, and culturally relevant. The presence of the local community prevents the waterfront from becoming a static or purely tourist-oriented space.

The Intangible–Tourism network (Figure 4.4) illustrates that community-led activities support and expand tourism experience by contributing authenticity, social vibrancy, and a sense of place. This suggests that local community participation is a key factor in maintaining the living heritage character that underpins heritage tourism appeal.

Nevertheless, the Atlas.ti findings also reveal significant limitations. Respondents expressed concerns regarding minimal community involvement in formal heritage tourism planning, decision-making, and management processes (R1: 1:3; 1:9; R3: 4:38). Tourism initiatives were perceived as largely authority-driven, with limited opportunities for community voices to influence development direction or narrative framing.

This imbalance restricts the community's role to passive participation rather than active stewardship. While the community contributes to maintaining cultural identity through everyday practices, it has limited influence over how that identity is represented, marketed, or sustained through tourism development.

Figure 4.4: Atlas.ti code network illustrating community participation and its role in cultural identity and heritage tourism. The analysis indicates that Teluk Intan's historic waterfront functions as a significant cultural and social interface, facilitating interaction between tourists and local communities. Observational data show that the waterfront becomes a shared social space where tourist–local encounters occur organically, particularly during cultural customs and festival periods. These interactions contribute to the experiential quality of the waterfront by reinforcing its role as a living cultural environment rather than a solely touristic setting. The findings suggest that such social exchanges enhance the authenticity of the heritage experience and support the continued relevance of intangible cultural practices within the public realm.

At the same time, the Atlas.ti network highlights several management-related challenges that affect the sustainability of the waterfront. Coded data indicate the presence of conflicts and operational challenges [3:62], alongside a recurring perception that development processes are progressing at a slow pace [1:42]. These concerns are reflected in field observations, which reveal concentrated visitor activity around key heritage landmarks and an apparent lack of heritage-sensitive planning measures to manage crowd distribution and mitigate physical wear on historic structures and public spaces. The absence of proactive management strategies raises concerns regarding long-term conservation and underscores the need for integrated planning approaches that balance social use, tourism demand, and heritage protection.

As a result, Objective 3 is partially achieved. Community participation is essential in sustaining cultural identity at an informal level, but stronger institutional mechanisms are needed to integrate local communities into heritage tourism governance and planning.

Cultural Identity: Tangible and Intangible Elements in Relation to Literature

The findings of this study strongly support the theoretical understanding of cultural identity as an integrated construct comprising both tangible and intangible elements, as discussed in Section 3.1. In Teluk Intan's historic waterfront, tangible elements such as heritage buildings, the riverfront setting, traditional shoplots, and religious structures form the physical manifestation of cultural identity. These elements correspond with Kevseroğlu et al. (2021), who argue that sustaining cultural landscapes requires the conservation of physical features alongside socio-cultural qualities.

However, the Atlas.ti analysis demonstrates that intangible elements—daily routines, social interactions, religious coexistence, local economic practices, and the atmosphere of the waterfront—are equally significant in shaping cultural identity. This aligns with Lenzerini's (2023) assertion that tangible and intangible heritage should not be treated as separate entities but as interconnected aspects of a unified cultural system. The findings further reinforce the idea that cultural identity emerges through lived experiences rather than solely through preserved physical objects.

In relation to immersion theory (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Lunardo & Ponsignon, 2020), the study reveals that the interaction between tangible heritage and intangible practices creates a sensory and experiential

environment that enables visitors and locals to engage more deeply with the place. This supports Satrya et al. (2024), who found that perceived authenticity and local culture significantly influence heritage tourism experiences and revisit intention. Therefore, the findings confirm that Teluk Intan's waterfront functions as a living cultural landscape where cultural identity is continuously produced through everyday use, consistent with global perspectives on cultural identity formation and preservation.

Heritage Tourism and Cultural Identity Preservation

The findings partially align with the heritage tourism literature discussed in Section 3.2. As defined by Satrya et al. (2024) and Fu and Luo (2023), heritage tourism involves experiencing places of historical and cultural significance, where cultural identity plays a crucial role in shaping visitor satisfaction, place attachment, and overall experience. In Teluk Intan, tangible heritage assets clearly serve as tourism attractions, while intangible cultural practices enhance authenticity and sense of place.

However, despite the presence of strong cultural identity elements, the study reveals that heritage tourism development at the waterfront remains underdeveloped. This finding supports Jelinčić and Mansfeld (2019), who argue that not all heritage sites successfully translate heritage value into tourism appeal. The lack of effective heritage interpretation, storytelling, and structured visitor engagement limits the immersive potential of the waterfront, preventing cultural identity from fully contributing to heritage tourism development.

From a theoretical perspective, this gap reflects a disconnect between heritage resources and experiential design. While authenticity exists—as emphasised in the literature—it is not sufficiently communicated or curated to enhance visitor immersion. This limits the ability of heritage tourism to fulfil its broader role in cultural preservation and sustainable development, as described by de la Calle Vaquero and García-Hernandez (2024). Consequently, the findings suggest that cultural identity preservation alone is insufficient; it must be actively interpreted and integrated into tourism planning to achieve meaningful heritage tourism outcomes.

Community Participation in Preserving Cultural Identity

The role of community participation observed in the findings closely reflects the literature reviewed in Section 3.3, though with notable limitations. The Atlas.ti analysis shows that local communities in Teluk Intan play a vital role in sustaining intangible cultural heritage through daily practices, traditional businesses, and social use of the waterfront. This supports Suhartanto et al. (2025), who highlight that emotional value, sense of community, and shared experiences significantly influence attitudes and behavioural intentions.

The findings also align with Boudebouz et al. (2025), who describe community empowerment as a multifaceted process involving participation, access to information, and collaborative creation. In Teluk Intan, cultural identity is maintained informally through community engagement rather than through structured empowerment mechanisms. While this informal participation helps sustain cultural continuity, it limits the community's influence over heritage tourism development.

Furthermore, the findings support Yaman et al. (2018), who caution that insufficient community involvement can lead to the erosion of cultural practices and local identity. Although cultural practices remain active in Teluk Intan, the lack of formal inclusion in tourism planning raises concerns about long-term sustainability. Without institutionalised participation, there is a risk that tourism development may prioritise economic outcomes over cultural values, potentially weakening the very identity that attracts visitors.

Overall, the findings are largely consistent with existing literature on cultural identity, heritage tourism and community participation. The research confirms that cultural identity at Teluk Intan's historic waterfront is shaped by the integration of tangible and intangible heritage, as theorised by (Lenzerini, 2023) and (Kevseroğlu et al., 2021). It also demonstrates that cultural identity contributes to heritage tourism by enhancing authenticity and visitor experience, in line with (Satrya et al., 2024) and (Fu and Luo, 2023), although this contribution remains underutilised due to limited interpretation strategies.

Finally the findings reaffirm the critical role of community participation in preserving cultural identity, as discussed by (Suhartanto et al., 2025) and (Boudebouz et al., 2025) while also highlighting the need for more formal empowerment structures to ensure sustainable heritage tourism development.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the Teluk Intan waterfront represents a significant cultural landscape, where the interaction between tangible heritage landmarks and intangible cultural values forms a distinctive historic urban fabric. Recent studies emphasise that cultural landscapes should be understood as living systems shaped by both physical form and ongoing social practices, rather than as static heritage objects (Guillén-Peñafiel et al., 2024; Meng et al., 2024). By addressing the three research objectives, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of Teluk Intan's cultural identity and its potential to support sustainable heritage-led development.

Identification of Cultural Identity Elements

The study successfully identified that the cultural identity of Teluk Intan's waterfront is anchored by prominent tangible elements such as the Menara Condong (Clock Tower), the old courthouse, and colonial-era shophouses, which collectively reflect the town's historical and administrative development. These physical structures are inseparably connected to intangible cultural elements, including the legend of Mak Intan, oral histories, and religious practices such as the Chithirai Pournami Festival. Recent literature supports this integrated perspective, emphasising that tangible heritage gains meaning through intangible practices, memories, and rituals that continue to activate historic spaces (Meng et al., 2024; Guillén-Peñafiel et al., 2024). Thus, Teluk Intan's waterfront functions not merely as a physical setting, but as a living environment where cultural identity is continuously reproduced.

Contribution to Heritage Tourism

The findings indicate that while the preservation of cultural identity significantly enhances the attractiveness of Teluk Intan as a heritage tourism destination, this potential remains underutilised. Visitors are primarily drawn to the waterfront for its colonial architecture, riverside scenery, and iconic landmarks; however, the absence of effective interpretation, storytelling, and heritage signage limits deeper cultural engagement. Recent studies highlight that heritage tourism can only become immersive when cultural

narratives and interpretive strategies are clearly communicated to visitors (Wang et al., 2025; Yusof et al., 2025). Without such mechanisms, tourist experiences remain largely visual and superficial, rather than educational or emotionally meaningful. This research therefore confirms the need to bridge the gap between heritage resources and experiential communication to strengthen Teluk Intan's heritage tourism offer.

The Role of Community Participation

The assessment of community participation reveals that local residents play an essential yet largely informal role in sustaining the cultural atmosphere of the waterfront through everyday social interaction, religious activities, and small-scale economic practices. However, the study identifies a lack of formal institutional mechanisms to integrate community participation into heritage planning and tourism governance. This finding aligns with recent research which stresses that sustainable heritage tourism depends on structured community involvement and local stewardship, rather than top-down development approaches (Abdul Aziz et al., 2023). Without empowering local stakeholders, there is a risk that rapid modernisation and authority-driven development may lead to the gradual erosion of traditions, particularly among younger generations.

Future Implications and Policy Alignment

Overall, this research supports the integration of cultural identity into urban development policies, in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, which promotes inclusive, resilient, and culturally rich cities, and SDG 8, which recognises heritage tourism as a driver of local economic growth (Wang et al., 2025; Discover Cities, 2025). The findings suggest that for Teluk Intan to remain a “living cultural heritage”, future planning must extend beyond physical conservation towards a holistic cultural vision that balances modernisation with heritage protection. By strengthening heritage interpretation, formalising community participation, and enhancing cultural narratives, Teluk Intan's waterfront can continue to function as an authentic and sustainable cultural landscape for future generations.

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