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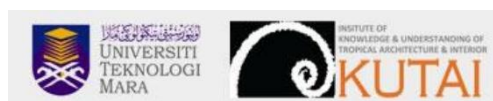
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THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC ART ON TOURISM AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PEKAN PARIT, PERAK

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Abstract: This study explores the role of public art in promoting tourism and community engagement in Pekan Parit, Perak, a small Malaysian town with a rich cultural heritage. Public art, encompassing murals, sculptures, and installations, offers an avenue for preserving cultural identity, enhancing urban aesthetics, and revitalizing local economies. However, challenges in maintenance, community participation, and sustainable integration hinder its full potential. This mixed-methods research investigates the current state of public art in Pekan Parit, its impact on residents and tourists, and the potential for improved engagement and conservation. We collected data through surveys with 103 residents, supplemented by site observations to assess awareness, perceptions, and preferences regarding public art initiatives. Despite the widespread recognition and value of public art for its aesthetic and cultural significance, challenges arise due to maintenance issues and limited public involvement. The study emphasizes the need for structured public art master planning that includes diverse stakeholders, ensuring that art installations contribute to both cultural preservation and tourism development. Recommendations include establishing maintenance protocols and promoting public art as a tool for community pride and identity, creating an integrated approach to heritage conservation and urban development in Pekan Parit.

Keywords: Public Art, Cultural Heritage, Community Engagement

INTRODUCTION

Public art, a multifaceted concept with evolving interpretations, is generally regarded as any artwork displayed in public spaces, from murals and graffiti to statues and monuments. It functions not only as a form of aesthetic enhancement but also as a platform for social,

cultural, and political expression. Public art brings art outside formal gallery walls, engaging people in everyday environments (Hunting, 2005). In this study, “public art” refers to artistic works created collaboratively by recognized artists and community members, showcased in locations accessible to the public. Urbanization has spurred new architectural and cultural expressions, especially in areas with rich histories such as Perak, Malaysia. As cities and towns develop, public art becomes an essential element in defining the cultural landscape, creating a visual dialogue that interacts with local identity, heritage, and community values. In Pekan Parit, Perak, the integration of public art has introduced new points of interest, yet there is ongoing debate regarding its role and appropriateness within historically sensitive areas. Concerns are often raised over how adaptive modifications might compromise heritage, as seen in previous studies which argue that inappropriate adaptation of historical sites can diminish their cultural integrity (Jasmi & Mohamad, 2016). The drive to cultivate art appreciation within communities is growing, with public art seen as a mechanism for uniting residents and fostering cultural pride. This study will explore how public art can serve as a vehicle for community involvement, evaluating public and artistic perspectives on its role in adaptive reuse. Such perspectives can shed light on public art’s role in preserving local history while also encouraging creative cultural experimentation. Pekan Parit, with its historical value and ongoing modernization, presents a unique case for examining these dynamics, as the region seeks to balance heritage conservation with urban renewal.

In Malaysia, smaller towns like Pekan Parit often struggle to attract tourists and businesses, largely due to a reduction in cultural and creative offerings that characterize larger cities. Public art has the potential to transform such towns, revitalizing them into culturally rich, vibrant spaces that attract both residents and visitors (Jasmi & Mohamad, 2016). However, challenges remain in managing community involvement, gaining approval for art projects, and ensuring accountability for maintaining these artworks. Given these concerns, there is a need to explore structured approaches for integrating public art in small towns, fostering partnerships between artists and community members, and celebrating local heritage through creative expression. In Pekan Parit, the role of public art as a driver for economic and community revitalization is complex. While urbanization has brought new architectural developments, it also raises concerns about preserving the cultural identity tied to historical townscapes. Furthermore, without effective maintenance, public artworks risk degradation, with faded colors and deteriorating structures compromising their impact. This study seeks to address these issues by examining the status, impact, and potential improvements for public art in Pekan Parit.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public art has long been recognized as a vital component of urban development, widely acknowledged for its role in enhancing the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of public spaces. Public art can serve as a visual narrative that reflects the history, culture, and identity of a place, contributing to a sense of belonging among residents and offering an authentic experience to visitors (Miles, 1997). The integration of public art into tourism strategies has gained traction, particularly in regions seeking to differentiate themselves in a competitive

market. The broader concept of cultural tourism, which leverages a place's unique cultural assets to attract visitors, aligns with this approach (Richards, 2018). Research by Mathews (2014) highlights the transformative potential of public art in revitalizing declining urban areas. Public art installations can attract tourists, generate media attention, and stimulate economic activity by creating vibrant public spaces that encourage social interaction. This is particularly relevant in small towns like Pekan Parit, where tourism is a crucial driver of economic sustainability.

The success of public art in such contexts, however, hinges on the degree of community involvement and acceptance. McCarthy (2006) noted that the community is more likely to embrace public art that resonates with local values and identity, thereby enhancing its appeal to tourists. The literature also explores the critical aspect of public art's role in fostering community engagement. According to Cartiere and Willis (2008), public art can act as a medium for social dialogue, bringing diverse groups together and fostering a sense of collective identity. Utilizing social practice theory, we can further understand how public art engages communities and promotes collaboration, which is particularly important in multicultural societies. Here, public art can bridge cultural divides and promote social cohesion. Such engagement can enhance the visitor experience in tourism by providing deeper insights into the local culture and fostering connections between tourists and the local community (Eshun & Madge, 2012).

However, the literature also highlights the challenges associated with public art in tourism development. Perceiving public art as inauthentic or disconnected from the local context, especially when imposed without sufficient community input, is a significant issue (Evans, 2005). In such instances, people may perceive public art as a cultural imposition instead of a genuine expression of local identity. This challenge aligns with the Experience Economy Theory, which posits that the value of tourism experiences hinges on authenticity and emotional engagement. Additionally, the maintenance and sustainability of public art projects are critical factors that influence their long-term impact on tourism (Zebracki, 2012). In summary, the literature underscores the importance of public art as a tool for tourism revitalization, particularly in culturally rich regions like Pekan Parit. However, effective public art requires thoughtful integration into the community, reflecting local values, and fostering genuine engagement. This approach not only enhances the cultural appeal of a destination but also contributes to sustainable tourism development.

STUDY AREA

Parit, a small town in Perak, presents an intriguing opportunity to investigate the potential and reception of public art in the process of urban rehabilitation, particularly in relation to tourist developments; refer to Figure 1. Mosaics and other forms of public art have the capacity to attract tourists and visitors; therefore, they provide a significant economic stimulus to the region. Through the analysis of the influence of public art on tourism in Parit, scholars may evaluate the potential of these projects to provide economic stimulation to the local community. Moreover, public art has the potential to significantly contribute to the development of a distinctive character for Parit, therefore enhancing the attractiveness of the

town to tourists; refer to Figure 2. The goal of this study is to investigate the role of public art in shaping the town's character and enhancing its appeal as a tourist destination. Moreover, public art has the potential to greatly augment the visual allure of public areas, making Paris a more captivating and welcoming destination. The project will investigate how these aesthetic enhancements may also augment the town's accessibility and navigation, therefore increasing its appeal to tourists. Parit, a tightly knit town, provides an ideal environment for involving residents in the process of rehabilitation through public art. This study aims to investigate ways in which public art promotes community pride and involvement in tourist development initiatives. Indeed, Parit, Perak, is an excellent location for exploring the many advantages of public art in the process of urban rejuvenation. The municipality's capacity for tourism expansion, distinctive identity development, aesthetic enhancement, increased accessibility, and active community involvement make it a captivating and enlightening subject for analysis within the wider framework of public art and urban development.

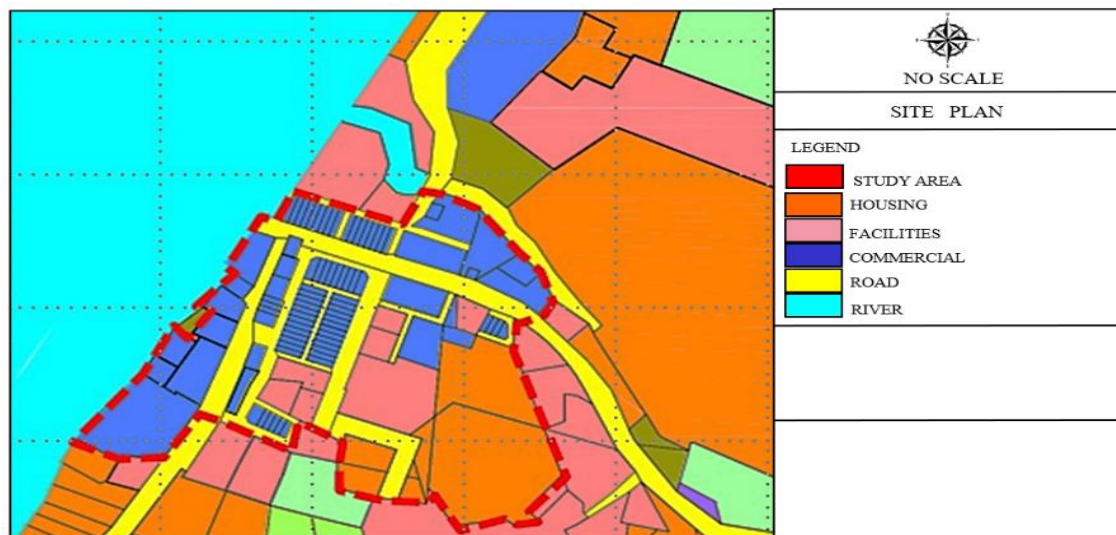


Figure 1: Site Plan



Figure 2: Public Art & Mural at Memory Lane in Pekan Parit

Source: Study Field (2024)

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed methods approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of public art on tourism in Pekan Parit, Perak. Mixed-methods research integrates both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a more thorough investigation of the research issues (Creswell, 2014). This approach combines statistical analysis with contextual insights to examine the community's reception of public art.

1. Quantitative Data Collection

A questionnaire was developed to collect primary data from residents. The questions aimed to assess their views on the influence of public art on cultural identity, economic growth, and its appeal to visitors. Convenience sampling during site visits selected a sample size of 103 respondents, targeting a diverse demographic including various age groups, occupations, and lengths of residency. While convenience sampling may limit generalizability, the sample size offers valuable insights into community perspectives.

2. Survey Instrument Validation

To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of participants. This helped refine the questions for clarity and effectiveness. The survey questions were also based on established scales and prior studies to maintain consistency and reliability in measuring the targeted variables.

4.1 Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative aspect of this study involves direct observation as a method for collecting secondary data. Observations were made during site visits to assess the current state of public spaces, the positioning and reception of existing public art, and the interactions between residents and tourists. This helped identify areas needing aesthetic improvements and opportunities for increased community engagement.

4.2 Data Integration

Both primary and secondary data sources were integrated to provide a comprehensive perspective. The quantitative data from the questionnaire offered quantifiable insights, while the qualitative observations added contextual depth. Survey data alone might not fully capture the full picture of community interactions with public art and their emotional responses, but the qualitative findings complemented it.

4.3 Analytical Approach

A statistical analysis was conducted on the quantitative data to identify patterns, correlations, and trends. This helped determine the general level of acceptance of public art within the community. The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings enabled a more detailed

evaluation of public art's role in revitalizing tourism, informing practical recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders involved in cultural and tourism development.

FINDINGS

The analysis of the survey data reveals several important aspects of community perceptions and experiences regarding public art in Pekan Parit.

5.1 The respondent came across public art in Pekan Parit.

91 (88.3%) of the total questionnaire respondents reported having encountered public art in the research area. This demonstrates that most locals are aware of and have direct contact with the public art in the area. However, just 12 (11.7%) of the respondents said they had never come across any public art in the research area, refer Table 1. The information shows that even with major attempts to introduce public art, a small percentage of citizens have not had the opportunity to see it. Given this, there is an opportunity to increase public awareness and involvement through public art, potentially enhancing the research area.

Table 1: Respondent encountered public art in Pekan Parit

Respondent encountered public art in Pekan Parit		
Do you have encountered public arts in Pekan Parit	Total respondent	Percent %
Yes	91	88.3
No	12	11.7
	103	100

5.2 Respondent's Experience on Public Arts In Revilitasing In Pekan Parit, Perak

a. Awareness of Public Art

An analysis of public awareness and acceptance of public arts in Pekan Parit, Perak, reveals a strong correlation between the presence of public art installations and the revitalization of local tourism activities. Out of the seven questions about awareness of public art, the local community in Pekan Parit prefers to respond to questions about public art, which have a mean value of 4.13 and raise awareness of the sustainability of the region's culture and heritage, refer Table 2. In addition to fostering a stronger sense of community, public art that highlights aspects of the local way of life and legacy also makes people feel prouder of their birthplace. Additionally, this promotes tourism, which benefits nearby communities on an economic and social level. Apart from that. The local community prefers not to respond to inquiries about public art in Pekan Parit that does not reflect the history, culture, or values of the city, as they perceive such art to be less relevant and meaningful. The lowest mean value of 2.5 indicates this. Furthermore, the belief that public art can enhance Pekan Parit's cultural atmosphere

has the second-highest mean value; each value for public art in Pekan Parit adds to the city's aesthetic worth. The community's perception that public art can enhance Pekan Parit's cultural milieu and that its presence raises the city's aesthetic value accounts for the second-highest mean value in this survey. When artwork is present in public areas, it increases the attractiveness of tourism by fostering a more appealing and visitor-friendly environment.

Table 2: Awareness of Public Art

ASPECTS	LIKERT SCALE					Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	
	F	F	F	F	F	
Aware of the concept of public arts	1	3	11	84	4	3.84
	1.0	2.9	10.7	81.6	3.9	
Believe public arts can enhance the cultural ambiance of Pekan Parit	1	0	0	88	14	4.12
	1.0	0	0	85.4	13.6	
The presence of public arts in Pekan Parit adds aesthetic value to the town.	0	1	0	88	14	4.12
	0	1.0	0	85.4	13.6	
Public art in Pekan Parit contributes awareness to the sustainability of local culture and heritage.	1	0	1	84	17	4.13
	1.0	0	1.0	81.6	16.5	
Public art in Pekan Parit is neglected or poorly maintained	4	8	6	84	1	3.68
	3.9	7.8	5.8	81.6	1.0	
Public art in Pekan Parit in the city does not suitable in this current place	2	54	26	21	0	2.64
	1.9	52.4	25.2	20.4	0	
Public art in Pekan Parit does not reflect the history, culture or values of the city.	3	66	16	16	2	2.5
	2.9	64.1	15.5	15.5	1.9	

a) Perception of Public Arts

An analysis of Pekan Parit, Perak, public art perceptions reveals a positive response from both residents and visitors, which is essential to reviving the town's tourism industry. We posed eight questions about the local community's perception of public art in Table 3. Respondents with a mean value of 4.34 say that Pekan Parit can draw tourists and visitors. This is due to their understanding of the potential benefits that increased tourism can bring to the local economy and society. More tourists will boost the local economy by supporting small companies, gift shops, and dining establishments. Other advantages for the local communities include the opportunity to engage with visitors, share their customs and culture, and boost community pride. Apart from that, the average score is 4.26. Because well-integrated art enhances the city's distinctiveness and attractiveness and serves as a venue for cultural and

social events that foster interaction between locals and visitors, the community believes that the use of public art may resume. Next, with the lowest mean (2.33) and (24.6), it indicates that many locals disagree that increasing tourist numbers will make the surrounding residents uncomfortable, and public art in this area has contributed to safety hazards for drivers and pedestrians due to the increased nuisance if Pekan Parit's public art is increased. Public art also does not have a negative impact on them, like traffic jams or any hazards to people around them. Instead, they see it to introduce the town to outsiders and help them get to know a town with a rich history.

Table 3: Perception of Public Arts

ASPECTS	LIKERT SCALE					Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	
	F	F	F	F	F	
The idea of using public art can revive Pekan Parit	1	1	0	68	32	4.26
	1.0	1.0	0	66.7	31.4	
Public arts can attract tourists and visitors to Pekan Parit	1	0	0	64	37	4.34
	1.0	0	0	62.7	36.3	
Public arts can positively impact the overall economic growth	1	0	0	65	36	4.32
	1.0	0	0	63.7	35.3	
Existing public art installations in this area are not attractive.	2	30	30	37	4	3.11
	1.9	29.1	29.1	35.9	3.9	
Public art installations in this area have caused increased traffic congestion and delay	2	60	36	3	2	2.45
	1.9	58.3	35.0	2.9	1.9	
The area has seen a huge rise in visitors due to the public art	1	14	44	40	4	3.31
	1.0	13.6	42.7	38.8	3.9	
Public art in this area has contributed to safety hazards for drivers and pedestrians due to the increased nuisance.	2	56	40	3	1	2.46
	2.0	54.9	39.2	2.9	1.0	
The arrival of more tourists will cause the surrounding residents to be uncomfortable if public art is increased in Pekan Parit	4	63	33	1	1	2.33
	3.9	61.8	32.4	1.0	1.0	

DISCUSSION

The survey findings reveal that the local community in Pekan Parit largely appreciates public art, viewing it as a valuable contributor to the town's cultural identity and tourism potential. A significant portion of respondents (88.3%) have encountered public art, demonstrating

widespread awareness. However, a small minority (11.7%) have not, suggesting that while the current public art is visible, further efforts could enhance accessibility and visibility, fostering greater community engagement. The community's awareness of public art's role in sustaining local culture and heritage is notably high, with a mean score of 4.13. This suggests a positive sentiment towards public art as a means of cultural preservation, aligning with perceptions that public art enhances the town's aesthetic and cultural ambiance. Respondents, however, expressed lower appreciation for art installations that don't reflect Pekan Parit's history, highlighting the importance of culturally relevant artwork. In terms of public art's influence on tourism, respondents believe that it can attract visitors and support economic growth, with a mean score of 4.34. They see public art as a means of community pride and cultural expression. Importantly, the survey suggests that most residents do not feel burdened by increased tourism or safety concerns related to public art. This suggests that the expansion of public art initiatives could occur with minimal disruption, highlighting its significant role in revitalizing Pekan Parit as a cultural and tourist hub.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the study highlights the significant role of public art in enhancing both the cultural and economic vitality of Pekan Parit. The findings reveal that the majority of the local community is not only aware of but also positively engaged with the public art in their area, which they see as a reflection of their cultural heritage and a driver for tourism. Respondents acknowledge the potential of public art to draw visitors, foster a sense of pride, and stimulate the local economy, with strong support for installations that resonate with the town's historical and cultural context. The study also identifies areas for improvement, particularly the need for regular maintenance and culturally aligned public art that reflects the values of Pekan Parit. While some respondents voiced concerns about non-representative artwork, there is minimal indication that increased tourism or the presence of public art will negatively impact residents. This reinforces the idea that thoughtful expansion of public art can be a sustainable strategy for urban revitalization. As Pekan Parit continues to develop, integrating public art into its urban landscape can create a more vibrant, culturally rich environment. By promoting culturally significant, well-maintained public art, the town has the potential to grow as a meaningful tourist destination while enriching the lives of its residents.

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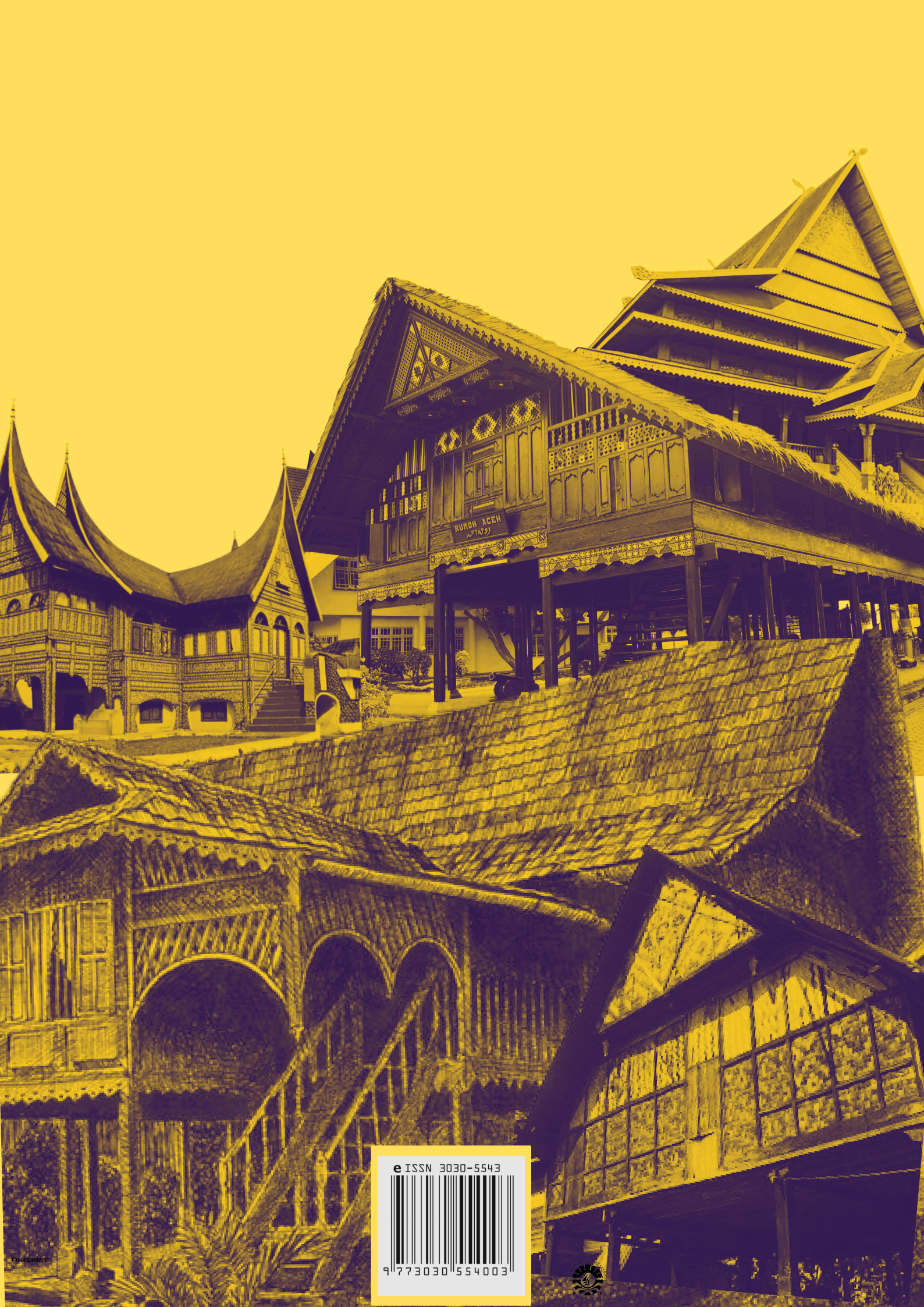
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