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INVESTIGATING STRATEGIES FOR PRESERVING CULTURAL HERITAGE AT IPOH, PERAK

Muhammad Luqman Hakim Sharuddin¹ & Norasikin Bt Hj Hassan^{2*}

***Corresponding**

^{1,2}Programme of Landscape Architecture
Department of Built Environment Studies and Technology
College of Built Environment Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch Campus Seri Iskandar,
32610 Bandar Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes from previous generations, reflecting a group or society's identity, values, and history. Cultural heritage is vital as it preserves identity, enriches education, drives economic growth, celebrates diversity, supports sustainability, empowers communities, and safeguards the legacy of the past for future generations. This study explores strategies for preserving cultural heritage in Ipoh, Perak, a city distinguished by its colonial architecture and historical significance from Malaysia's tin mining era. As rapid urbanisation accelerates, Ipoh's unique heritage faces mounting threats, with new infrastructure and commercial developments encroaching on historically significant sites. This research aims to identify the key challenges faced in preserving cultural heritage in Ipoh. The study also assesses the preservation strategies implemented, such as the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings and the improvement of heritage tourism programs. It uses a qualitative approach, and the research focuses on a content analysis of urban planning policies and conservation reports related to heritage sites. Based on the findings, recommendations are made to expand heritage tourism initiatives and integrate green technology into heritage sites.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage Preservation, Urbanization, Conservation Strategies, Adaptive Reuse, Collaboration

INTRODUCTION

Preserving cultural and historical landscapes is essential in maintaining the identity and heritage of cities, especially amidst rapid urbanisation. Cities worldwide face similar challenges as they try to balance heritage preservation with urban development, a tension observed in various regions (Abebe & Madda Gatisso, 2023; Shafaghat et al., 2017). Ipoh, the capital of Perak, Malaysia, grew rapidly after the discovery of tin deposits in the 1880s (The Wandering Juan, 2014). A major fire in 1892 allowed the city to be rebuilt with a more organised grid pattern, making it the second-largest city in the Federated Malay States by 1895 (EHM, n.d.). Ipoh gained municipal status in 1962 and was declared a city in 1988 (XYZ Asia, n.d.). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Indian workers, mainly Tamils, were brought to Malaya to work on rubber plantations and develop infrastructure to balance the rapidly growing Chinese population (EHM, 2013). The Chinese began migrating to Malaya as early as the 15th century, with larger waves occurring in the 19th and 20th centuries due to opportunities in tin mining and rubber plantations and British policies that facilitated their entry (DPE2S1, 2019). Ipoh is particularly significant in this context due to its rich colonial past and tin mining heritage. Known for its unique architectural style and historical landmarks, Ipoh embodies the cultural narratives of Malaysia's colonial history (Ahmad & Jones, 2013). However, the rapid pace of urban growth in Ipoh threatens to overshadow its historical identity, echoing global issues where modern infrastructure overshadows cultural heritage (Younus, Al-Hinkawi, & Lafta, 2023). This study addresses a critical question: What are the most effective strategies to preserve Ipoh's historical identity while promoting economic growth? Understanding how development pressures impact heritage conservation is essential for sustainable urban planning (Said, Aksah, & Ismail, 2013). This research aims to identify the key challenges faced in preserving cultural heritage in Ipoh. The study also assesses the preservation strategies that have been implemented.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study considered several aspects essential to understanding the need to preserve cultural heritage in the study area. Preservation is vital for

maintaining a society's identity, fostering pride, encouraging sustainable tourism, and enhancing social cohesion. It also contributes to a deeper understanding of a community's history and promotes cultural diversity.

Cultural and Historical Landscapes as Identity Preservers

Cultural and historical landscapes reflect the complex relationship between communities and their environments, embodying layers of cultural practices, historical events, and architectural styles. These landscapes act as “repositories of collective memory” and are critical in maintaining societal identity amidst the pressures of modernisation (Abebe & Madda Gatisso, 2023). Preserving them is vital for aesthetic reasons and sustaining the historical and cultural essence of cities threatened by urban expansion. In this context, cultural landscapes serve as tangible and intangible links between the past and present, preserving historical legacies while promoting sustainable tourism and local economies (Bakri et al., 2015a). In the case of Ipoh, maintaining these landscapes requires finding a balance between modern development and preserving historical authenticity.

Global and Local Approaches to Heritage Preservation

Cities globally have navigated the balance between heritage preservation and development. Cities like Venice and Kyoto have successfully protected historical sites while accommodating tourism through policies integrating heritage conservation and economic development (Aysegul, 2016). Similarly, cities such as Hoi An in Vietnam have implemented community-driven initiatives and adopted the Hoi An Protocols for best conservation practices in Asia, emphasising sustainable tourism, local crafts, and community participation in conservation efforts (A., 2009). These frameworks align with UNESCO's sustainable development guidelines, which promote active community involvement in heritage conservation (de Paolis et al., 2022). However, rapid urbanisation remains a significant threat to heritage sites, as infrastructure expansion and commercial priorities may overshadow cultural conservation, risking the neglect or loss of historically significant areas (Navarrete-Hernandez, Urrutia, & Mellouki, 2024). Stakeholder collaboration is key to preserving cultural assets in rural landscapes, as demonstrated in Ethiopia and Italy (Abebe & Madda Gatisso, 2023; Sardaro et al., 2021).

In Malaysia, cities such as George Town and Melaka showcase effective heritage management through stringent regulations and adaptive reuse of historical sites, allowing heritage buildings to remain relevant while preserving their original character. Recognised as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, these cities demonstrate how urban planning can integrate heritage conservation without hindering modern development. The National Heritage Act 2005 has been pivotal in protecting historical buildings and promoting adaptive reuse (Adabiah Mustafa & Chua Abdullah, 2013). Shafaghat et al. (2017) highlight that “preserving cultural landscapes requires a holistic approach that considers social, economic, and environmental factors” (p. 144). Ipoh can adopt similar strategies to enhance the preservation of its colonial architecture and tin mining legacy while adapting to urbanisation.

Challenges and Opportunities for Heritage Preservation in Ipoh

Ipoh faces challenges similar to other cities undergoing rapid modernisation. Its colonial architecture, including landmarks such as the Ipoh Railway Station, Birch Memorial Clock Tower, and Old Town shophouses, showcases its rich cultural heritage but is increasingly at risk due to urban sprawl and redevelopment. Inadequate promotion, poor maintenance, and the encroachment of modern infrastructure threaten the preservation of these historical sites (Rani et al., 2018). Nonetheless, opportunities exist in revitalising and repurposing these buildings, as seen with the successful revitalisation of Concubine Lane, which demonstrates the potential of transforming heritage sites into vibrant cultural and economic hubs (Ismail & Mohd-Ali, 2011). Leveraging adaptive reuse strategies can offer a balanced approach to preserving cultural landscapes while supporting urban growth (Ahmad & Jones, 2013; Penića, Svetlana, & Murgul, 2015). Technological advancements such as Historic Building Information Modeling (HBIM) have revolutionised the documentation and preservation of cultural landscapes. HBIM allows for detailed digital documentation of heritage buildings, enabling their restoration while accommodating modern needs. Cities like Istanbul have successfully employed HBIM to restore historic structures (Kopuz & Bal, 2023). This digital approach can also assist Ipoh in integrating conservation efforts within urban development frameworks, helping maintain historical identity (Younus, Al-Hinkawi, & Lafta, 2023). Integrating green technology in heritage conservation aligns with the global shift toward sustainable development. Circular economy

strategies, such as adaptive reuse, reduce environmental impacts and enhance heritage sites' economic viability (Foster, 2020). In Sharjah and Southern Italy, cities have effectively incorporated renewable energy and sustainable practices into heritage management (Trusiani & D'Onofrio, 2024; Sardaro et al., 2021). Ipoh can address environmental challenges by adopting similar strategies while preserving its cultural assets and aligning them with global sustainability trends.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach focusing on content analysis to explore strategies for preserving cultural heritage in Ipoh, Perak. By systematically reviewing key planning documents the research aims to identify challenges, opportunities, and best practices for heritage conservation, particularly within urban development pressures. The selected documents include Rancangan Kawasan Khas – Pekan Ipoh – Bandar Warisan Bijih Timah 2020 and Draf Rancangan Tempatan Bandaraya Ipoh – Penggantian 2035. These documents provide a framework for assessing the effectiveness of Ipoh's existing policies and strategies. Using Atlas. Ti software's content analysis is structured around key themes, including policy implementation and governance, adaptive reuse and sustainable practices, community involvement, and development control guidelines (Foster, 2020; Shafaghat et al., 2017). The research systematically examines overlaps, gaps, and differences across these documents, identifying recurring challenges such as weak policy enforcement, limited stakeholder engagement, and urbanisation pressures threatening heritage assets (Shamsuddin et al., 2019; Sardaro et al., 2021). Primary focus sites include the Ipoh Railway Station, Birch Memorial Clock Tower and old shophouses along Jalan Panglima, representing significant cultural and historical landmarks in Ipoh. This methodology aims to comprehensively understand the challenges and strategies for preserving cultural heritage in the context of urban development in Ipoh.



Figure 3. Show Lack of Maintenance

Lack of Maintenance and Preservation of Heritage Buildings

The inconsistent maintenance of heritage buildings, coupled with the pressure of urban development, threatens the authenticity and sustainability of these structures. Although most heritage buildings remain in good condition, a lack of integrated strategies often jeopardises this balance. The competing priorities between heritage preservation and new development underscore the need for a more holistic approach to maintaining historical authenticity while accommodating urban growth. (2:5p104, 2:6p104, 1:9p32, 2:4p103, 1:5p32, 4:68p43, 4:27p39, 4:72p43)



Figure 4. Show Building Effect by Environmental Issue

Economic and Environmental Pressures

Economic constraints, such as high rental costs in commercial areas, create barriers to utilising upper-floor spaces in heritage shophouses for residential purposes, particularly for low- and middle-income groups. Furthermore, environmental factors—such as chemical pollution, structural vibrations, and humidity fluctuations—exacerbate the deterioration of these buildings. A lack of consistent maintenance further contributes to structural vulnerabilities, endangering long-term sustainability.(4:33p39, 4:28p39, 4:29p39, 1:126p44, 4:107p27, 1:8p32, 1:4p32, 2:7p105, 4:30p39, 1:7p32)

Lack of Attraction to Heritage Tourism

Heritage tourism in Ipoh has struggled to gain significant traction due to ineffective promotion and a limited range of unique activities. This issue is further exacerbated by tourism agencies that fail to engage local communities or convey the city’s historical and cultural richness. These shortcomings result in a lack of authentic and immersive experiences for visitors, particularly at the international level. (2:22p77, 2:24p77, 2:2p77, 2:25p77, 2:21p77, 2:26p77, 2:20p77, 2:1p33)



Figure 5. It Shows Unfriendly Pedestrians

Heritage Routes, Infrastructure, and Supporting Facilities

While the Ipoh Heritage Trail offers potential as a tourist attraction, various issues hinder its effectiveness. Traffic congestion, insufficient pedestrian-friendly pathways, and unattractive supporting facilities—such as food courts and children’s playgrounds—diminish its appeal. Additionally,

inadequate streetlights, public parks, and wayfinding signage fail to meet tourists' needs. The lack of key urban design elements, such as gateways and distinct streetlamps, further prevents the city from presenting a cohesive and authentic identity.(1:128p44, 2:5p104, 2:28p103, 1:6p32, 2:10p106, 2:8p105, 1:27p44, 2:27p103, 2:23p77)

Lack of Modern and Digital Integration

Efforts to integrate modern digital technologies into developing Ipoh as a Heritage Smart City remain limited. Physical landmarks are still relied upon as primary navigational references, restricting opportunities for digital enhancements that could enrich the tourist and resident experience. Greater adoption of digital tools is essential to support sustainable heritage tourism and urban development. (2:3p103, 2:9p106).

Strategies Preservation Strategies In Ipoh

Analysing existing preservation strategies in Ipoh helps identify practical approaches to protect its cultural heritage, ensuring sustainability, local engagement, and tourism growth.

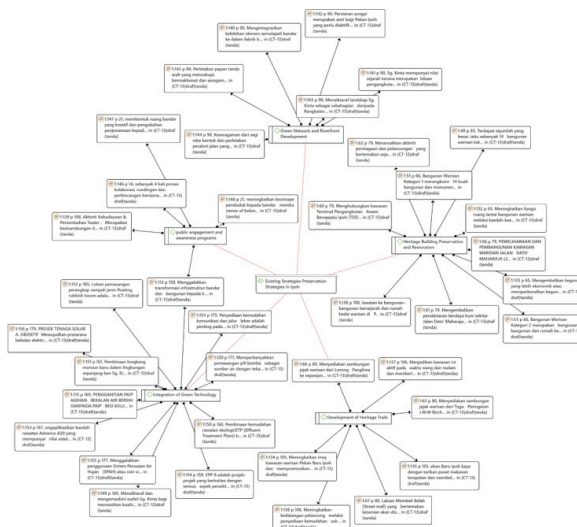


Figure 6. Display Preservation Strategies in Ipoh, Perak

Development of Heritage Trails

Ipoh's heritage trails aim to conserve the city's history and promote cultural tourism by connecting significant heritage sites and developing themed commercial malls. Efforts to revitalize Pekan Baru Ipoh focus on culinary and shopping attractions, supported by improvements in infrastructure such as pedestrian pathways, shaded seating, lighting, and heritage-inspired designs. These initiatives aim to energize activities, celebrate local culture, and safeguard Ipoh's heritage. (1:63p80, 1:66p80, 1:67p80, 1:134p105, 1:135p105, 1:136p106, 1:137p106).

Green Network and Riverfront Development

Enhancing urban areas and preserving heritage require the use of natural features into Ipoh's urban architecture, particularly along Sungai Kinta. As a historically significant transportation route, the riverfront offers substantial potential for transformation into a dynamic hub for social, cultural, and tourism-related activities. Key initiatives such as consistent design, shaded walkways, rickshaw-friendly lanes, and strategically placed street furniture will create a welcoming and cohesive atmosphere. Revitalizing the riverfront as part of a larger green network will celebrate Ipoh's heritage while promoting ecological sustainability, serving as a model for heritage-rich urban development (1:140p90, 1:41p90, 1:42p90, 1:144p90, 1:145p90).

Heritage Building Preservation

Ipoh has 14 Category 1 heritage buildings, protected by various heritage acts, and 785 Category 2 buildings with significant architectural and historical value. This underscores the importance of preservation to maintain Ipoh's status as a Tin Mining Heritage City. Efforts to revitalize areas such as Jalan Dato' Maharaja Lela, Jalan Panglima, and Jalan Bijih Timah focus on creating pedestrian-friendly spaces, promoting heritage-themed tourism, and ensuring the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings for economic sustainability. Activities like heritage tours, boat rides along Sungai Kinta, cultural performances, food trails, and shopping help enhance the area's appeal while preserving Ipoh's historical legacy. (1:49p65, 1:51p66, 1:53p66, 1:56p79, 1:60p79, 1:61p79, 1:62p79, 1:132p65, 1:138p103).

Integration of Green Technology

The integration of green technology in Ipoh's urban infrastructure enhances sustainability and efficiency. Key initiatives include replacing iron water pipes with HDPE pipes, installing fire hydrants in densely developed areas, and upgrading the Sg. Kinta outlet to improve water quality. Environmentally friendly drainage systems, such as the MSMA pilot project along Sg. Kinta manages wastewater through natural infiltration. The use of floating rubbish booms and the A20 treatment method helps improve waste management. Additionally, the installation of rainwater harvesting systems and solar energy projects in new developments, alongside the expansion of free Wi-Fi services, contributes to sustainable energy solutions and ICT growth, fostering a greener and more efficient urban environment. (1:113p158, 1:114p158, 1:115p169, 1:120p171, 1:149p160, 1:150p160, 1:151p161, 1:152p165, 1:153p167, 1:154p175, 1:155p177, 1:156p179).

Public Engagement and Awareness Program

The success of Ipoh's urban transformation hinges on active public engagement and collaboration with stakeholders such as local authorities, residents, NGOs, and developers. Key initiatives include cultural performances, like on-street shows, that strengthen community ties and pride. Locations such as Jalan Mustapha Al Bakri and Jalan Datuk Tahwil Azar host Chinese cultural events, fostering a deeper connection with local heritage. These efforts help promote a sense of belonging, encourage local investment, and support the city's branding as a heritage destination, ultimately contributing to a vibrant and sustainable urban environment (1:113p158, 1:139p108, 1:146p14, 1:147p21, 1:148p21).

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to achieve two primary objectives. First, the challenges in preserving cultural heritage in Ipoh will be identified, and the implemented preservation strategies will be evaluated. The findings revealed several key challenges, including the lack of maintenance and preservation of heritage buildings, economic and environmental pressures, insufficient attraction to heritage tourism, and issues related to heritage routes, infrastructure, and supporting facilities. Despite these challenges, approaches such as

the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, heritage tourism initiatives, and community engagement programs have effectively addressed these issues. The study highlighted that adaptive reuse strategies, such as those implemented in Concubine Lane and Old Town Ipoh, successfully integrate heritage elements with modern needs. Initiatives like the Ipoh Heritage Trail not only enhance visitor experiences but also make a significant contribution to the local economy. However, shortcomings in integrating modern technology and limited community participation remain critical issues that require further attention. This research provides valuable strategic guidance for local authorities and stakeholders in addressing cultural heritage challenges amid urban development pressures. The findings suggest actionable solutions, including more effective tourism promotion, improved accessibility, and stricter enforcement of preservation policies to address site-specific issues. The study encountered several constraints, including limited access to certain official documents, outdated data on the structural conditions of heritage buildings, and challenges in obtaining comprehensive input from various community groups. Future research should prioritise integrating innovative technologies for heritage site preservation, expand studies on heritage tourism strategies' social and economic impacts, and explore collaborative approaches between governments and communities, drawing inspiration from successful models such as Hoi An and Penang. Additionally, there is a need to address the limited involvement of the private sector in preservation initiatives. In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of preserving Ipoh's cultural heritage to safeguard its historical identity and enhance its urban resilience against development pressures. By combining effective strategies, fostering community engagement, and enforcing comprehensive policies, Ipoh can become a model city for balancing modernization with heritage preservation. These efforts will ensure that cultural heritage remains relevant and accessible for future generations.

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