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SIMPORA XVI: 2025**

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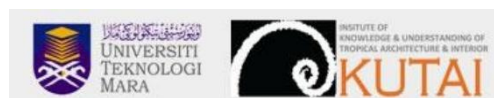
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historical environment (Indera Syahrul Mat Radzuan & Yahaya Ahmad, 2020). This paper provides a comprehensive case study of Kampung Morten, analyzing its historical background, architectural merits, the complex challenges of existing within a modern urban fabric, and the conservation efforts undertaken to safeguard its future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The conservation of historic urban areas requires a balance between preservation and development. The concept of "area conservation" is pivotal, extending beyond individual buildings to encompass the entire cultural landscape, including land use, street patterns, and intangible cultural practices (Pegah Maroofee et al., 2018). This approach is essential for maintaining the *genius loci*—the unique spirit of a place. Research on traditional Malay houses, particularly in Melaka, highlights their sophisticated design, which is responsive to the tropical climate and deeply rooted in socio-cultural and Islamic principles (Roslan Talib & Mzailan Sulieman, 2012; Farah Wahida Ghazali et al., 2018). Features such as timber construction, elevated stilted structures, and decorative elements are not merely aesthetic but are functional and symbolic. However, traditional urban villages face a nexus of issues. Studies on areas like Kampung Bharu in Kuala Lumpur reveal challenges such as poor infrastructure, socio-economic disadvantages, and immense pressure from property development (Norsidah Ujang, 2020). Similarly, community perceptions in Kampung Morten indicate that while there is pride in heritage, concerns over economic opportunities and quality of life persist (Indera Syahrul Mat Radzuan & Yahaya Ahmad, 2020). Effective preservation, therefore, must address these multi-dimensional challenges through a holistic framework that includes community participation, sensitive planning, and sustainable economic models (Mahmoud et al., 2024).

Theoretical Underpinnings: Integrating the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) Approach

While the principles of area conservation provide a foundational understanding, this study is further contextualized within the more progressive and holistic framework of the UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) (UNESCO, 2011). The HUL approach moves beyond the preservation of physical fabric alone, advocating for the integration of heritage conservation within the broader framework of sustainable urban development. It recognizes the dynamic nature of urban environments and emphasizes the layering of cultural and natural values that have accumulated over time.

The HUL framework is particularly salient for analysing a case like Kampung Morten for several reasons. First, it explicitly addresses the critical challenge of managing change (Bandarin & van Oers, 2012). Kampung Morten is not a fossilized relic but a living community undergoing socio-economic transitions; the HUL approach provides a toolkit for guiding this change sensitively without eroding its heritage significance. Second, it champions community engagement as a cornerstone of sustainable conservation, positioning residents not as passive beneficiaries but as key actors and decision-makers in the stewardship of their heritage (Veldpaus et al., 2013). This directly addresses the identified gap in top-down governance models.

Applying the HUL lens to Kampung Morten necessitates an examination of its multi-layered values. These include:

- **Tangible Layers:** The physical structures of the traditional houses, the spatial layout of the village, its relationship with the Melaka River, and the surrounding urban morphology.
- **Intangible Layers:** The living traditions, community bonds, cultural practices, and the knowledge systems embedded in the vernacular architecture and craftsmanship (ICOMOS, 1994).
- **Environmental Layers:** The bioclimatic design of the houses, the local microclimate, and the green spaces within the village that contribute to its ecological and thermal performance.

The pressures faced by Kampung Morten—from infrastructural decay to real estate development—are classic manifestations of the tensions the HUL approach seeks to mediate. It calls for a "landscape-based approach" to urban heritage that views the village not as an isolated island, but as an integral part of the city's ecological, cultural, and economic systems (Ripp & Rodwell, 2016). Therefore, this paper utilizes the HUL approach as a critical theoretical lens to evaluate the existing conservation efforts in Kampung Morten and to propose a more resilient, integrated pathway forward. This framework allows for a critical analysis that transcends mere physical preservation and engages with the complex interplay of social equity, economic vitality, and environmental sustainability in a historic urban setting.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative case study methodology, drawing from secondary data derived from published academic literature, government reports, and archival records related to Kampung Morten and traditional Malay architecture. A descriptive analysis was conducted to synthesize information on the village's historical development, architectural features, and the interplay of conservation pressures. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the context and complexities surrounding heritage preservation in a unique urban setting.

ANALYSIS

The Case of Kampung Morten, Melaka: Historical and Demographic Background

Kampung Morten is a traditional Malay village located on the banks of the Melaka River. Its establishment is officially recorded in 1922 with the formation of a village council, and it was named after Frederick Joseph Morten, a British land revenue collector (Perzim, 2011). Prior to this, the settlement was known as Kampung Jawa, indicating Javanese origins among its early inhabitants. In 1989, its cultural significance was formally recognized when it was declared a heritage village under the Preservation and Conservation of Cultural Heritage Enactment, 1988. The village spans approximately 12 acres and is home to a community of over 600 people residing in 98 households, distributed across more than 100 traditional Malay houses (Indera Syahrul Mat Radzuan & Yahaya Ahmad, 2020). This dense, vibrant community exists in sharp contrast to the surrounding modern urban development of Melaka city, creating a unique urban morphology where a traditional village is enveloped by a contemporary cityscape, Refer Picture 1.



Picture 1: Traditional House in Kampung Morten, Melaka

Architectural Characteristics of Kampung Morten Houses

The traditional Malay houses in Kampung Morten exemplify vernacular architecture masterfully adapted to the tropical climate and cultural norms. Key characteristics, as documented by scholars, include timber construction and an elevated structure raised on stilts, which provide crucial protection from floods and facilitate natural ventilation beneath the living quarters (Roslan Talib & Mzailan Sulieman, 2012). The aesthetic dimension is prominently displayed through decorative elements, particularly the intricate, flower-motif woodcarvings adorning the main entrance staircase and the *varen dah* (verandah), which serves as a vital transitional semi-public space for social interaction (Farah Wahida Ghazali et al., 2018). Furthermore, the architectural intelligence is evident in the emphasis on ventilation and light, achieved through an abundance of windows and openings that ensure cross-ventilation and ample daylight, thereby enhancing thermal comfort. The large, pitched roofs with various orientations, originally constructed from natural materials like bamboo but now often replaced with zinc or tiles, provide essential shelter from heavy rain and intense sun. The interior spatial organization reflects deep-seated socio-cultural and Islamic principles, with distinct zones delineated for guests, family, and private activities, ensuring privacy and social order (Illyani Ibrahim et al., 2020). Finally, the traditional technology of complex joint systems assembled without nails showcases an advanced level of craftsmanship and a profound understanding of timber properties, making these structures remarkably resilient.

Issues and Challenges

The existence of Kampung Morten as a traditional enclave within a city creates a unique set of challenges that threaten its sustainability. Physically and infrastructurally, the village suffers from the decay common to many historic urban areas, including ageing infrastructure, poor housing conditions, and inadequate maintenance. Overcrowding and the presence of derelict buildings further strain the area's historic fabric, leading to a decline in the quality of the built environment. These physical challenges are compounded by significant socio-economic pressures. Issues of poverty, economic inequality, and social disadvantage are prevalent, creating a dilemma for residents who must balance preserving their traditional lifestyle with accessing the better economic opportunities offered by the surrounding city (Norsidah Ujang, 2020). Moreover, the village's prime location near the city center places it under constant urban development pressure, as its land is highly coveted for modern projects that promise to maximize economic returns. This creates a fundamental conflict between preservation and development interests, threatening the village's physical integrity and community cohesion. Finally, challenges related to environmental services, such as efficient waste management, reliable water supply, and general cleanliness, persist, directly impacting the health, well-being, and overall livability for the residents.

Conservation Efforts and Initiatives

The conservation of Kampung Morten operates on two interconnected levels: area conservation and building-specific interventions. The area conservation approach aims to preserve the village's overall character, including its architectural homogeneity, intimate street layout, green spaces, and ongoing cultural activities. The goal is to maintain the village's historical and philosophical identity as a holistic entity, rather than as a mere collection of individual buildings, thereby safeguarding its unique sense of place. At the building scale, housing conservation involves critical activities such as restoration and repair, focusing on the main structure, roofing, walls, windows, and stairs using appropriate materials and techniques to ensure historical accuracy. This is supported by ongoing maintenance and beautification efforts, which include landscaping for individual units and the communal area to improve livability, visual appeal, and the overall visitor experience. These efforts are facilitated by a network of stakeholders. Local government bodies, notably the Melaka Historic City Council (MBMB) and the Melaka State Government, provide essential regulatory oversight and planning guidance. State and federal agencies, such as the Melaka Museums Corporation and the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, are instrumental in promoting and managing heritage tourism. Complementing these official efforts are community and tourism initiatives like Villa Sentosa—a private home converted into a living museum—the Melaka River Cruise, and the Morten Walk project, all of which have been developed to generate economic benefits, raise public awareness, and foster a sense of pride within the community.

DISCUSSION

Towards a Holistic Conservation Model

While current conservation efforts have successfully preserved the physical landscape of Kampung Morten the long-term sustainability of this living heritage site largely requires a more integrated and holistic approach. The challenges identified—ranging from

infrastructural decay to socio-economic pressures—underscore the inadequacy of a model focused solely on architectural preservation. A truly resilient future for Kampung Morten necessitates a holistic model that incorporates several key dimensions. From a technical and planning perspective, this involves implementing sensitive urban design guidelines and adopting appropriate engineering solutions for upgrading infrastructure without compromising the village's historic character. In terms of management and governance, there is a need to strengthen collaborations between the various government agencies and, most importantly, to ensure genuine community representation in all decision-making processes. The social and community engagement dimension is critical; empowering the community through participatory planning and community-led action plans is fundamental for building social resilience and ensuring that conservation efforts align with residents' authentic needs and aspirations (Indera Syahrul Mat Radzuan & Yahaya Ahmad, 2020). Finally, achieving economic sustainability is paramount. This involves developing and regulating sustainable tourism models that directly benefit residents, create local economic opportunities, and prevent the commodification of their culture, thereby ensuring that Kampung Morten remains a lived-in community rather than a static open-air museum.

Integrating Living Heritage, Placemaking, and Cultural Resilience in Urban Heritage Villages

The preservation of Kampung Morten within the rapidly modernizing urban fabric of Melaka exemplifies the global discourse on living heritage, where the authenticity of a site is not merely architectural but also socio-cultural (UNESCO, 2021). The concept of living heritage extends beyond tangible conservation to include the active participation of communities in transmitting traditions, practices, and meanings attached to the built environment (Wijesuriya et al., 2020). Kampung Morten thus functions as both a heritage space and a social organism, where architecture, ritual, and daily life intertwine to sustain Malay identity amid urban modernity.

Framing the village within Cultural Landscape Theory (Taylor & Lennon, 2011) reveals how human interaction and natural setting shape living heritage. Communal practices such as gotong-royong and festive gatherings reinforce collective memory and place identity (Ahmad et al., 2022). However, as heritage tourism intensifies, there is a risk of commodifying the kampung, turning homes into commercialized museums (Aziz & Ismail, 2023). To prevent this, participatory governance must empower residents as active stewards rather than passive beneficiaries. Comparable heritage villages across Southeast Asia—such as Chew Jetty in Penang and Taman Sari in Yogyakarta—face similar tensions between conservation and tourism (Henderson, 2019; Ismail & Rasdi, 2021). These cases emphasize the value of integrated management and local heritage committees. Japan's Machizukuri approach (Okuyama, 2020) offers an adaptable model of community-based planning for Kampung Morten, where collaborative decision-making enhances long-term resilience.

Sustainable tourism and economic resilience are essential pillars for sustaining cultural heritage. Experience-based tourism, when properly managed, can strengthen local economies while preserving authenticity (Garrod & Fyall, 2022). For Kampung Morten, initiatives like Villa Sentosa and Morten Walk demonstrate this potential. Digital technologies such as virtual

tours and augmented reality can further enhance engagement while minimizing physical impact (Marino & Agnello, 2023). Governance fragmentation remains a critical issue, with overlapping responsibilities among Majlis Bandaraya Melaka Bersejarah (MBMB), Perbadanan Muzium (PERZIM), and MOTAC. Implementing a unified Heritage Village Management Plan guided by the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach (UNESCO, 2011) would integrate cultural, economic, and environmental priorities. Establishing buffer zones and zoning regulations (Tan et al., 2022) would safeguard Kampung Morten's historic integrity amid urban pressure. Community empowerment, including women and youth participation, is fundamental (Logan & Wijesuriya, 2021; Chan & Lee, 2022). Capacity-building programs, digital archiving, and cultural entrepreneurship initiatives would strengthen social cohesion and intergenerational transmission. A five-dimensional framework—cultural continuity, participatory governance, economic sustainability, technological innovation, and environmental adaptation—aligns with SDG 11.4 and SDG 8.9 to ensure that Kampung Morten remains a vibrant, living heritage community.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Kampung Morten represents a vital and tangible link to Malaysia's cultural past, simultaneously serving as a critical test case for the preservation of living heritage within the dynamic context of a developing urban area. Its continued survival depends on maintaining a delicate and sophisticated balance between preserving its authentic historical character and enabling its community to thrive socially and economically in the modern world. This study concludes that the future of Kampung Morten hinges irrevocably on the adoption of a holistic, multi-stakeholder strategy that prioritizes meaningful and sustained community engagement at its core. To support this endeavor, further research is recommended in several key areas. First, detailed socio-economic studies on the economic resilience of Kampung Morten residents are needed to better understand the impact of tourism and heritage status on their livelihoods. Second, action research focused on developing, implementing, and evaluating effective participatory planning models would provide valuable practical frameworks for community empowerment. Finally, technical research into sustainable and culturally appropriate materials and methods for the restoration and maintenance of traditional Malay houses in an urban setting is essential for ensuring the long-term physical preservation of the building stock. By addressing these areas through collaborative effort, policymakers, planners, and the community itself can work in concert to ensure that Kampung Morten remains not just a museum of the past, but a vibrant, sustainable, and resilient community for generations to come.

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