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Digital Approach towards Community-Based Activities with Culture and Heritage during COVID-19: Knowledge Transfer A Narrative Experience

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Abstract: Culture and heritage activities have always relied heavily on assembling a group of people to bring the event to life. However, during the pandemic COVID-19, these events cannot be held due to the restrictions and the danger it could bring in spreading the diseases. As a result, new options should be made available to ensure that cultural and heritage activities can continue in the face of adversity. This study describes the researcher's experience in a knowledge transfer project on the long-term sustainability and conservation of community-based cultural and heritage activities during the COVID-19 epidemic. To preserve and sustain cultural activities, the article suggests a digital approach to culture and heritage activities. The research is based on the researcher's observations and fieldwork experience. The result indicated that Lambo Sari and the research team kept track of each participant's progress during the monitoring phase, which was the fourth step of this effort. In addition, the WhatsApp messaging service was used to track the project leader's core communication with the participants. Apart from the monitoring phase, the fifth phase consists of a webinar delivered by the researcher and team to the general public and participants to increase awareness about the importance of cultural and historical preservation. In conclusion, cultural heritage conservation has been rendered extremely difficult due to the epidemic. If physical preservation of cultural heritage was done back then, revolutionization is required to stay up with the present period and make use of new technologies.

Keywords: cultural heritage; sustainability; conservation; COVID-19 pandemic; knowledge transfer.



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1. Introduction

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and a global outbreak of the COVID-19 deadly virus in March 2020 triggered an unprecedented economic and social lockdown, with far-reaching economic, political, and social consequences, as well as educational consequences (Bretas & Alon, 2020; Nicola et al., 2020). As a result, to prevent the sickness from spreading, this new rule restricts all meetings and lectures. Initiatives, as well as adaptive measures, must be taken. It is quite difficult for craft industry players to ensure their activity's survival during this pandemic because of their uniqueness, history, and tradition. Many virtual tours are conducted with a 360° camera and a digital single-lens reflex camera, which improves accessibility for heritage practitioners and facilitates future applications to aid the tourism industry while also introducing heritage to younger generations (Mah et al., 2019). The original purpose of utilising technology was to raise awareness of these local cultural heritages while also assisting local businesses in their efforts to make a living.

A community's cultural heritage is a collection of customs, practices, artefacts, creative expressions, and values that have been passed down from generation to generation (Du Cros, 2001). The terms intangible and tangible cultural heritage are used to define different types of cultural heritage (Du Cros, 2001, Harrison, 2015, Pongsrirojana, 2021). Culture and tradition are all around us. It is only up to us to observe and acknowledge it. A community-based approach entails engagement from all levels of stakeholders. This is a collaborative method of research that includes all stakeholders throughout the research process, from selecting a study topic to devising data collection equipment to analysing and disseminating findings.

The meaning of community-based tourism (CBT) has been promoted as a strategy of development in which tourist products satisfy the sociocultural, environmental, and economic needs of local communities (Strydom, 2019). This is due to a desire to ensure that the tourist industry benefits the local community directly. The notion is that the tourism experience at tourist destinations creates opportunities for other domestic enterprises to profit from tourism, like the craft industry and cultural activity centre. CBT is a sustainable development that preserves traditional culture and livelihoods while simultaneously giving revenue to inhabitants (Walter, Regmi et al., 2018). Traditional community-based is a natural, indigenous, and homogenous gathering of people with a shared language and customs that occur within an organised structure in the country and is usually recognised as having a distinct and distinctive character (Stringer, Agnello, Baldwin, Christensen, & Henry, 2014). This community assists in ensuring that information is successfully passed down to future generations before the culture dies in vain, with no one to inherit it.

By introducing a new approach to cultural heritage activity, facilitating knowledge transfer, and hosting a convenient and safe workshop on culture and heritage during the COVID-19 era, the project aimed to be one of the first to offer a novel strategy for preserving cultural activities during the pandemic era. *Lambo Sari* was chosen as the perfect collaborator for this project due to the nature of the activity. This center's regeneration and preservation work are well-received on a national and international level, contributing to the resurrection and preservation of local wisdom.

2. Lambo Sari: A Cultural Interactive Centre

Lambo Sari Resources is an interactive cultural centre under the Teluk Ketapang Homestay Cooperation business unit, established in 2019 and based in Terengganu, Malaysia. Here at *Lambo Sari*, visitors can experience hands-on cultural interactive activities such as *batik* weaving, making kites, using antique cooking tools such as coconut grinders, wooden blenders, and grinders, and playing traditional Malay games on-site. *Lambo Sari* also provided a traditional costume for the visitors to try on. They can wear these clothes and take pictures. This concept is interesting for the visitors because they can try on the traditional costumes complete with accessories and headgears as a way to embrace the Malay traditional clothes, especially costumes from the Malacca Sultanate era. Cosplays were always interesting and attracted many people as they were one way to display their other identities and interact with different cultures (Crawford & Hancock, 2019, Winge, 2019). The visitors were also treated to side activities such as traditional food sampling, traditional games, and an appreciation of traditional house architecture.

Lambo Sari created the website to guide and give potential visitors a sneak peek of activities at the centre. Apart from that, *Lambo Sari* actively shares their activities on its Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/LamboSariTerengganu>, which provides frequent updates on cultural heritage-related activities and events. This centre provided a package of interactive activities as its main attraction. These packages were held as a way for the centre to reach out to the outside world and enhance the number of tourists who come to Terengganu. *Lambo Sari* also created a collaboration with a Singaporean entrepreneur to supply a *batik* painting kit to a Singaporean school for their art lesson to increase *batik* recognition.

Out of all the activities, the researcher and *Lambo Sari* agreed to enhance the *batik* and *wau* as this item in the *Wau Batik* kit consists of *wau* in a *batik* pattern. *Batik* is believed to have originated in Indonesia (Lusianti & Rani, 2012) and was selected on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list in 2009 (UNESCO, 2009). Nevertheless, it should come to mind that Malaysian *batik* has very different motifs and colours from Indonesian *batik*. Still, the processes from the preparation of fabrics until the final results and packaging are 99% the same (Aisyah et al., 2018).

In some regions of Malaysia, the kite, which is thought to have originated in China (American Kitefliers Association, 2021), is known by several nicknames. Kites were known as *wau* in Kelantan and Terengganu on Malaysia's East Coast, and *layang-layang* in the northern region of the country (Zainuddin, 2021). The kite was invented in Melaka by a Crown Prince descended from the Sultan of Melaka, and there are three notable forms of kites: *Wau Bulan*, *Wau Kucing*, and *Wau Jalabudi*, according to Malay history (Mohd Sidek, 2019).

Since *Lambo Sari* collaborated with their partner from Singapore, they faced certain constraints in meeting their collaborators' demands. Sometimes, *Lambo Sari* has problems finding the people experts in *wau* makings and *batik canting*. Thus, this might affect their production of the *Wau Batik* kit. Therefore, they collaborated with the researcher to look for the participants and train them to be experts in any of the skills (see Figure 1, 2 and 3).



Figure 1. Making a *Wau* Frame.



Figure 2. *Canting* the *batik* on the *Wau* frame.



Figure 3. Pasting the cloth to the *Wau* frame.

3. Materials and Methods

Using a qualitative research approach, this article tries to demonstrate how *Lambo Sari* maintains their cultural preservation. Its benefits are in producing rich and complex explanations of the subject (Upadhyay & Lipkovich, 2020). Furthermore, a qualitative research technique tries to provide thorough and illustrative data to grasp numerous elements of the issue at hand (Odoyo & Nixon, 2020). As a result, archive research, observation methodologies, and naturalistic observations will be utilised. In addition, secondary data will be acquired from the samples. Finally, the spirit of the place is recognised as the basic conceptual foundation in implementing systems (Mah et al., 2019). *Lambo Sari* was chosen for the sample because it is a self-contained cultural heritage institution. Note that the fieldwork observation took place in September 2021 and was broken into five sections. It was used to collect data about the study's issues on a regular basis. This centre was designated as one of Terengganu's most active cultural interaction centres. Fifteen homemakers and single moms in the B40 category were recruited by collaborating with *Lambo Sari* and Koperasi Homestay Teluk Ketapang, a local entrepreneur cooperative management, and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. B40 stands for the bottom 40% to classify the income of Malaysian households. Participants were invited to learn and choose either *batik canting* or *wau* making as one of the methods to be their speciality and expertise.

4. Results

4.1. The Approach: A Digital Ways

The initial step of the project, the first phase, which is the demonstration session, was carried out by *Lambo Sari* with the assistance of a UMT researcher. This phase is critical since this demonstration will be utilised in the fourth week of September 2021 for an online *batik* and *wau* creation session. Experts in the crafts were summoned to demonstrate how to make *wau* step by step. The experts' demonstrations were videotaped and packaged as audio-visual content for the participants later in the project's second phase. A person with a high level of knowledge or expertise in a particular field is referred to as an expert (Cambridge University Press, 2021). To keep up with the millennium era, oral traditions and stories should be preserved in digital archives (Shiri, Howard, & Farnel, 2010). Furthermore, technology should be used to create virtual interactive storytelling (with strong consumer appeal and edutainment value) (Selmanovi et al., 2020). *Guru Wau* and *Guru Canting* mean 'the kite teacher' and 'Canting teacher,' respectively. *Canting* is a Malay words literally means as drawing, therefore in this case, *canting batik* means drawing the batik patterns



Figure 4. The five phases of the knowledge transfer program.

Figure 4 displays the five phases of the knowledge transfer program. Before the second phase started, all participants were provided with bamboo, measuring tape, glue, knife, scissors, white cotton cloth to be pasted on the kite, and rope to make the kite frame in the second phase. All of the materials were collected by the participants at

Lambo Sari. The second phase was an online workshop using Webex with the experts. *Guru Wau* and *Guru Canting* were involved as well as 15 selected participants from various backgrounds but must be in the B40 category. B40 refers to the bottom 40% of the income classifications used to categorise Malaysians by their household income.

The goal of this workshop was to teach participants about *wau* making and *canting batik*, as well as to select potential participants who could be experts in *wau* making and *canting batik*. *Lambo Sari* will purchase any *wau* and *batik* created by the participants that meet the required standards. This online workshop will help participants improve their abilities while also assisting them in earning money. Simultaneously, this may assist *Lambo Sari* in maintaining demand for the *Wau Batik* kit. During the online workshop, *Guru Wau* taught the participants how to create a kite frame and make kites during this course. *Guru canting* exhibited various *canting* techniques, which the participants were able to see online. The *Guru Canting* also advised on how to do a good *batik canting*. There will be a question-and-answer session after each online session so that participants can connect directly with the teacher. *Lambo Sari's* collaborator from Singapore was invited to express his wishes and share his experiences at the end of the online workshop. Only one online workshop was conducted for the participants in the kite-making processes. The face-to-face and hands-on *canting* sessions will be conducted in the third phase. Participants were encouraged to attend the physical workshop and continue their learning process at the *Lambo Sari* for the next phase (third phase).

The third phase started right away after the online workshop finished. This was a practical session where participants learned directly with the *Guru Canting*, continuing the online workshop. *Wau* inspection and *canting* sessions were done physically by the previous experts. A face-to-face session was needed as it is quite hard to virtually show the *mencanting* (drawing the *batik* pattern) process. In this session, direct interaction with the teacher by the participants was done to carefully melt the wax and control the flow of the wax. In each session, only five participants could attend to comply with the current Malaysian Ministry of Health Standard Operating Procedure. The *Lambo Sari* and the research team kept track of each participant's progress during the monitoring phase, which was the fourth step of this effort. In addition, the WhatsApp messaging service was used to track the project leader's core communication with the participants. Apart from the monitoring phase, the fifth phase consists of a webinar delivered by the researcher and team to the general public and participants to increase awareness about the importance of cultural and historical preservation. This webinar was held on March 20, 2022, with 159 people attending, including several Indonesians.

This knowledge transfer program generates knowledge innovation, technological innovation, and social innovation at diverse levels. Through this project, the collaborators gain new knowledge on using information and technology to promote the culture and heritage activity despite the constraint of the COVID-19 pandemic. Simultaneously, the empowerment of community income in creating new skills was highlighted through this project, and this could ensure that these crafts are continuously done and more competitive. Having cultural heritage experts and owners of the centre sharing their efforts in preserving the cultural heritage should open to the locals' perspectives in making sure the cultural heritage is still there for the next generation to see. Allowing the heritage to diminish is like allowing the identity of ethnicity, community, or race to be replaced and eaten by the modern world (Lypak et al., 2019). It is not easy to continue being active and promoting the culture and heritage activity in the current pandemic situation. However, with this grant's initiative and the collaborations with the local cultural activist and the community, this program was carried out successfully. This small effort can shape a more glorious future by upholding the nation's heritage and culture. *Lambo Sari* should be applauded for the effort in preserving the culture and heritage and should be given proper support to ensure the sustainability of this cultural centre activity.

5. Conclusions

Cultural heritage conservation has been rendered extremely difficult due to the epidemic. If physical preservation of cultural heritage was done back then, revolutionization is required to stay up with the present period and make use of new technologies. Collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or government agencies in charge of cultural heritage preservation should be done on a regular basis. Increase the number of interactive cultural centres and the centre's activity level to encounter this problem as a start. In particular, the older generations, which we refer to as "experts," should be receptive to sharing their knowledge of the original culture to hand down skills as a legacy. Some older generations underestimated the eagerness of the younger generation to learn. The cultural legacy will be appreciated by younger generations as well. The majority did not hesitate and were eager to participate in historical and cultural activities in cultural villages and museums. Furthermore, when trends emerge, the teenager begins to embrace aesthetics and historical values, beginning with representing historical characters in films and dramas (Mokhtar & Kasim, 2011; Fatin Nur Wahida Idris, 2019). In addition to recognising their roots, cultural heritage is a means to ensure that earlier mistakes are not repeated by allowing the next generation to be the next craftsmen, using skills learnt from the original cultural artisans of the preceding generation. More efforts should focus on social, creative, sustainable, and conservation lenses.

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