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Editorial
When Cities Begin to Dream Through AI

Bussakorn Binson[+] Executive Director

Cities have always told stories. They speak through architecture, street food, music drifting from alleyways, old shop signs fading under sunlight, graffiti on concrete walls, public rituals, festivals, and the everyday movements of ordinary people. Urban culture has never belonged solely to governments, planners, or institutions. It belongs to collective memory.

Today, however, a new storyteller has entered the city: Artificial Intelligence.

Generative AI now creates images of cities, writes cultural narratives, designs public campaigns, recommends destinations, archives heritage, composes music, and even predicts what citizens may prefer to see or experience. Increasingly, urban culture is no longer only lived by people; it is also interpreted, filtered, and reproduced through algorithms.

This transformation raises an important question:
Who will define the identity of future cities – communities or machines?

AI offers remarkable opportunities. It can help preserve endangered cultural knowledge, translate local wisdom into accessible digital forms, and connect younger generations to traditions that may otherwise disappear. Communities once overlooked by mainstream media may suddenly gain visibility through digital platforms. Small cultural voices can now travel globally within seconds.

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Yet visibility itself has become political.

Algorithms do not merely "show" culture neutrally. They select, prioritize, simplify, and aestheticise. Certain images become more visible because they are visually attractive, emotionally engaging, or commercially profitable. Other realities – poverty, displacement, loneliness, disappearing neighborhoods, ageing communities, or fragile local traditions – may remain unseen because they are less marketable within digital systems.

In this sense, AI does not only reproduce culture; it reshapes cultural memory.

The danger is not that AI will erase culture entirely. The greater danger may be that it creates beautifully polished versions of cities while disconnecting them from lived realities. A city may appear vibrant online while local communities quietly disappear beneath rising economic pressures and rapid urban development.

Urban culture scholars therefore face a new responsibility. We can no longer study only physical spaces, architecture, or traditional cultural practices. We must also examine digital urban imaginaries – how cities are reconstructed through AI-generated images, narratives, soundscapes, and online emotional experiences.

Equally important is the ethical question of ownership. If AI systems are trained using community histories, local artistic styles, indigenous motifs, or collective memories, who owns the resulting cultural production? Can communities consent to becoming data sets? Can urban memory be commercialized without returning benefits to the people who created it?

These questions are no longer futuristic. They are already here.

At the same time, AI may also become a powerful cultural partner if guided responsibly. Rather than replacing human creativity, it could amplify overlooked voices, document endangered traditions, support multilingual storytelling, and create new forms of participation between citizens and cities. The future of urban culture may therefore depend not on rejecting AI, but on ensuring that human values remain at the centre of technological development.

Cities are more than smart systems.

They are emotional ecosystems built from memory, grief, celebration, migration, conflict, resilience, and hope. If AI becomes part of urban cultural life, then empathy, ethics, and community participation must evolve alongside innovation.

Otherwise, our cities may become increasingly intelligent – while gradually forgetting how to remain human.

Reviewing Tourism and Urban Development in the United Arab Emirates

Adriaan De Man,[+] Robert Bridi[++] (United Arab Emirates) & Sérgio Guerreiro[3] (Portugal)

Abstract

Cities are emerging as tourist hubs and heritage-based leisure is central to economic diversification strategies that improve conditions to residents and visitors. Within this context, urban tourism has gained prominence in the international travel market. Considering the expansion of tourism in the Arabian Gulf States, it is important to reflect on the role it can play in the expansion strategies of cities, building on global practice. This paper explores a particular aspect of this reality, namely the incorporation of heritage elements and their commodification in the urban setting of the United Arab Emirates. It elaborates on recent sources and addresses related issues such as cultural preservation, destination branding, and economic impact. The results consist of an overview of the balance between benefits and drawbacks when using urban heritage features as a tool for tourism development.

Keywords: *Tourism, Communities, UAE, Urban Planning*

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Introduction

Urban heritage is routinely mobilized by local administrations as a competitive placemaking asset, even though its effective economic advantages remain unevenly understood, particularly in the context of tourism. A destination can be simply defined as the location tourists are attracted to and where they spend the night. The combined arrangement of cultural tourism supply, demand, and governance instruments, however, involves such a multitude of interacting players and features that a destination experience becomes subjective and contextual. This has been a mainstream perception for at least a quarter of a century (Cooper, 2008; Buhalis, 2000) and was progressively applied to urban heritage, from the angles of neighborhood regeneration (Lak, Gheitasi, and Timothy, 2020), digital conservation (Ocón, 2021), and smart governance in destination management (Mandic and Kennell, 2021). More specifically, this integrated concept of a heritage tourist destination refers to several urban setups used for providing visitor services such as tour guiding, leisure programming, retail and dining, and accommodation to tourists (Ashworth and Page, 2011; Ashworth, 2000; Page, 1995). The seminal and currently acknowledged idea of distinctiveness in the urban tourism product was conceptualized a generation ago (Jansen-Verbeke, 1988; Pearce, 2001; Selby, 2003; Edwards, Griffin, and Hayllar, 2008, to indicate but a few of the prolific outputs of the time). All such references include, in some form or shape, the combination of historic buildings, urban landscapes, museums and art galleries, theatres, sports, and events. Against this backdrop, the proposition developed below is that the most sustainable uses of urban heritage occur when (i) UAE heritage significance is defined with, by, and for local communities, (ii) correlated branding incorporates place-specific attractions, and (iii) planning aligns with both tourism strategies and conservation. This claim is corroborated through comparative international frameworks, adapted to the UAE market via governance practice in urban settings. In addition to sociocultural benefits, potential risks such as museumification, intra-city displacement, and over-commodification need to be taken into account.

A simplification of the rationale is graphically represented in Figure 1. Tangible built resources and their associated intangibles produce enablers (the management of rapid progress through governance, funding, and infrastructure development), physical interfaces (dependent on overlapping and intersecting scales), and outcomes (commodification, livability, visitor value, conservation status). Arrows represent feedback loops towards future resource performance, in the form of public administration, state-led heritage delivery, and market impacts.



Figure 1. Synopsis of the reviewed concepts and their articulation.

Discussion

Following a long period during which coastal destinations represented the main sources of tourist attraction, cities have emerged as increasingly important destinations in the international context, through affordable transport, increased mobility, travel facilitation, digital platforms for property renting and hospitality services (UNWTO, 2020), gaining significant market share in the global tourism market. This led to a reframing of current urban tourism, more process-based and co-productive, including the transversal learning experience of all participants (Koens, 2021). More than half of the world's population lives in urban areas and this proportion is expected to rise to 68% by 2050 (WTTC, 2019). Such growth in urban tourism created a need in the literature to align tourism development models with the livability and sustainability of cities, essential for all stakeholders – residents, visitors, and local communities (Yoopetch, 2022). Traditional development of urban tourism (through Western-inspired models that tended to prioritize historic centers, flagship museums, and event led regeneration to shape urban tourism appeal; see Page, 1995; Ashworth and Page, 2011) took form especially in Europe and North America, yet the globalized emergence of cities in Asia and the Middle East has created hotspots for attracting international heritage-sensitive visitors. Recent rankings based on arrivals, overnights, and spending show twelve of the top 20 cities are in Asia, including Dubai (Mastercard, 2023), which reflects a geographic rebalancing of urban tourism demand. Common regional challenges in the Gulf include conserving fast-eroding built fabric, engaging high-turnover expat majorities with narratives of place, mitigating overcrowding at hyper-branded heritage clusters, and balancing mega-project timelines with conservation (Maxim, 2020; Malek and Badaruddin, 2014). The wider Asian urban reality indeed produced multiple national and local studies, including on increasingly relevant second-tier destinations (Keitsch, 2020; Dolezal, Trupp, and Bui, 2020; Ludwig, Walton, and Wang, 2020; Fakfare, Talawanich, and Wattanacharoensil, 2020; Hitchcock, 2021).

For heritage, the COVID-19 pandemic ended up accelerating digital forms of interpretation, and resident-first programming aimed at domestic tourism (Guerreiro, 2022; Ocón, 2021). Cities worldwide performed rather differently in terms of travel and tourism results and some long-haul destinations had to cope with challenges in demand (Anguera-Torrell, Vives-Perez, and Aznar-Alarcón, 2021). Still, comparative analyses of Asian tourism destinations demonstrate the sector's structural complexity and overall economic growth potential, as evidenced by participatory governance, growing diverse source markets, and transnational connectivity that, in combination, illustrate a resilient demand (Nguyen and Nguyen, 2021). This affirmation of the entire continent in terms of urban tourism and urban reconfiguration justifies a summarized review of knowledge, still neglected in the literature (Hua and Wondirad, 2021), to address key topics from the perspective of Sustainable Development Goals (Trupp and Dolezal, 2020) by taking a well-known western Asian territory, namely the United Arab Emirates, as a case study. In urban contexts, cultural heritage tourism operates by activating combinations of tangibles and events. These variables can be seasonal or temporary in the UAE's historic districts, even if buildings are to be maintained permanently and are therefore costly to maintain in low seasons such as the peak of the summer. Al Fahidi / Al Shindagha in Dubai and the Heart of Sharjah are documented examples in which public management needs to be complemented by private entrepreneurship.

Locality

The geographic reality is a strong determinant for a successful integration of urban heritage and cannot be replicated beyond generic universal agendas and legal guidelines. Geological features, coastline morphology, hydrological systems, and temperature variations condition both visitor carrying capacity and conservation of built structures. In the case of the UAE, the conjugation of seemingly uneven dynamics, opposing rapid progress and tradition, creates permanent challenges for urban planning. Timelines for land development and new construction in sensitive areas need to consider extensive surveying, use of traditional materials, and community consultation. This slows down real estate and public infrastructure expansion. A result of this tension is the formation of heritage clusters, some of which display features of organic expansion while others are fully pre-planned (De Man and Hassan, 2023). The underlying concern is that of preserving elements of architectural authenticity, even heavily staged and fabricated ones, while simultaneously pushing forward ultramodern construction, without losing beacons of identity. Despite the substantial inherent limitations (Saleh et al., 2022), this process of ensuring sustainable city growth has been well studied in metropoles such as Dubai (Pineda, 2020), Abu Dhabi (López Reus, El Amrousi, and Paleologos, 2020), as well as Sharjah (Jumah, 2020), where large-scale areas function as protected cultural heritage attractions. Most towns and cities, however, are subject to a much lower demographic pressure and find location-specific solutions for traditional spaces serving contemporary needs. These are the result of substantial changes in the urban fabric throughout the UAE since the mid-1970s, before which communities lived in concentrated, high-density, and walkable spaces, whereas recent evolution disrupted traditional forms. Historically, fareej neighborhoods consisted of clustered courtyard houses that favor shade and airflow, connected by narrow sikkas (passages) that led towards mosques and communal spaces. Car-oriented plans caused the disruption of previous environments (Shublaq et al., 2022). Attempts to reinvent old-style pedestrian and proximity layouts in cities such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi have had mixed results. While projects did improve wayfinding and tangible heritage conservation, the retention of residents and neighborhood retail activity was a challenge (Alawadi, Khaleel and Benkraouda, 2021). Urban regeneration planning in core areas, as is the case with Deira, to be followed by Al Karama and Al Satwa, ought to target not only transportation and building infrastructures, but social and cultural ones as well (Awad and Jung, 2022). Parallel efforts include the Qasr Al Hosn complex and Saadiyat's cultural cluster, both in Abu Dhabi; the Heart of Sharjah; the Dhayah and Al Mareer old town initiatives in Ras Al Khaimah and Ajman, respectively; the fort area in Fujairah; and the old town waterfront in Umm Al Quwain (Hilal et al., 2015; Vij and Verma, 2016; Boudiaf et al., 2020; Salameh and Touqan, 2023). All these types of heritage investment are to be articulated with purely residential and professional expectations of the community, comprising Emirati citizens, long-term Arab and South Asian residents, temporary expatriate workers, heritage practitioners, cultural entrepreneurs, and domestic visitors. Gentrification and touristification worldwide can affect the lifestyle of migrant laborers and low-income renters when regeneration raises costs, and this is a process to be monitored in the UAE as well.

Governmental efforts to stimulate domestic real estate expansion in the UAE within a pattern of sustainable economic growth have been coupled with other sectors such as finance and tourism (Adel, 2022), fitting an increasingly complex academic debate on the influence of leisure and tourism on urban change (Khater and Faik, 2025). It centers on whether cul-

tural tourism produces inclusive regeneration or if it leads to displacement and monoculture instead. The UAE is able to expedite execution through top-down delivery and avoids an over-programming of heritage visitor attractions at the expense of other spaces (Page and Duignan, 2023) by expanding boundaries. The translation of federal directives into emirate-level and urban realities has direct implications on urban spatial strategies, in the scope of economic decentralization (Arif and Aldosary, 2023), in which the principles of collaborative urban planning (Meetiyagoda et al., 2023) assume a significant function. Cultural stakeholder consultations, such as those carried out for historic districts (Awad and Jung, 2022; Karakus and Hasan, 2023), allow for participatory feedback. In this regard, quite some attention has been given to the link between traditional culture and urban development, especially through energy-efficient and ecological communities. Passive cooling methods, mixed-use clustering, and walkability are often reinvented heritage elements applied to the design of Masdar and the Dubai and Sharjah Sustainable Cities (Ibrahim, 2020; Pineda, 2020). These eco-cities stem from the same framework that produces urban tourism initiatives (El Shafaki et al., 2024) and replicate traditional ways of life in a modernized setting. Sustainability is transversal to all these projects and some formulas are replicated locally, with emirate-level strategies converging on energy codes, retrofit standards, and heritage buffers (Labadi et al., 2021; UNWTO, 2020).

Municipalization is a comparatively recent phenomenon in the UAE and was, to a large degree, developed to cope with the fast-developing urban environment (Assi, 2020). Without exception, municipal efforts adhere to the stipulated guidelines for optimizing traditional features within a very transformed layout. Urban heritage revivalism, based on certain aesthetics and planned iconography, has been regularly used for consumer-ready tourism but is instrumental as well to narratives on local identities (Frymoyer, 2023). Conspicuous examples are the revamping of traditional quarters within historic centers, even if most surviving components are entirely contemporary in date. Many traditional elements are in fact reconstructions based on archaeological or archival plans and therefore maintain limited original fabric. This common regional conservation practice privileges form and narrative at the expense of strict materiality (Wakefield, 2020). The central heritage districts and other historic areas in Ajman (Salameh and Touqan, 2023), Ras Al Khaimah (Hilal, Kennet, and Humble, 2015), Fujairah (Vij and Verma, 2016), and Umm Al Quwain (Boudiaf, Awad, and Mekky, 2020) are all deemed strategically relevant to the advancement of heritage tourism, with the specific aim of providing additional sources of income to the population, among other resolutions related to improving destination experience for suppliers and visitors. This immediate community accelerator becomes observable in larger urban centers, given the interconnections with cultural stakeholders (e.g., municipal planning departments, heritage authorities, DMOs, museum operators, arts foundations, tourism SMEs, and resident associations) using heritage locations as catalysts for arts, creativity, and entrepreneurship. This is the case for the Al Shindagha and the Al Fahidi (Figure 2) historic districts in Dubai (Sharaf, 2022) and the heritage and museum areas in Abu Dhabi (Figure 3), for instance on Saadiyat island (Valek, 2022). Both images show a contrast between natural and traditional landscapes, on the one hand, and recent construction, on the other. Similarly, the cultural offering in the Heart of Sharjah provides house-museum itineraries, calligraphy workshops, book fairs, galleries, and festival markets that animate public open spaces (Karakus and Hasan, 2023). Even large cities with comparable planning strategies and ambitions exhibit different morphologic realities.



Figure 2. Dubai, Al Fahidi historical neighborhood (copyright The Cool Box Studio / Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism).



Figure 3. Louvre Abu Dhabi, Saadiyat island (copyright Hufton+Crow / Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism).

As for the effects of commodification and end-user consumption, UAE urban heritage narratives reflect Emirati identity, while the major cities are today inhabited largely by expatriate groups and visited by international tourists. The packaging of heritage as consumable experiences for all these different segments is a necessity but may flatten plural histories and consequently affect their perceived authenticity (Frymoyer, 2023; Seraphim and Haq, 2020). Old city centers in particular can be blended with amenities catering for modern consumers and residents, hence their usefulness to the cultural tourism industry. While the connection between urban heritage tangibles, communities, and development is a commonly accepted equation, it is not a linear one and outcomes may vary significantly. A comparative study on different UAE heritage districts (Awad et al., 2022) showed that their

common tourism attractiveness was based on tradition, history, and uniqueness, as would be expected, and pointed to the importance of reusing sites and buildings for tourism. A major shared challenge in managing these UAE city centers, however, consists of avoiding their museumification and the subsequent disengagement of residents (Boussaa et al., 2023). Another potential consequence may be placing certain heritage products excessively at the service of tourists, to the detriment of local cultural identities, during the process of fast-paced urbanization (Zaidan and Abulibdeh, 2021). Within local tourism distribution systems (airlines, hospitality, events), heritage attractions function as anchors for city itineraries, providing touchpoints for cross-selling products and services. This has been successfully applied in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, where diversifying stakeholder connections and repackaging heritage products has led to a more robust tourism mix (Haq, Yasin, and Nair, 2023). Against this backdrop, several urban elements are expressions of late modern or contemporary heritage and do not necessarily concentrate inside historic centers but would still allow for adaptive reuse as peripheral standalone buildings (Sosa and Ahmad, 2021), a common urban feature (Cudicio and Bassols i Gardella, 2024). In other cases, retrofitted forts (De Man and Tavares, 2023) such as Al Jahli in Al Ain (Figure 4) and newly built museum districts (Wakefield, 2020) represent independent heritage interfaces, both as architectural creations and as exhibition venues.



Figure 4. Al Ain, Al Jahli fort (copyright Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism).

Branding

Separate emirates rely on these and other ingredients for their destination branding, which is becoming increasingly differentiated and competitive, although an excessive dependence on heritage tourism may ultimately become counterproductive for UAE tourism (De Man, 2023). While a single UAE-wide percentage is unavailable, proxy indicators (museum attendance, guided heritage tour sales, and DMO program participation) reflect an increasing heritage engagement, particularly in Dubai's historic districts, Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat island, and Sharjah's cultural neighborhood (Valek, 2022; Sharaf, 2022). From the supply

side, Destination Management Organizations operating in the UAE (Upadhya and Vij, 2020), as well as entrepreneurial players (Papadopoulou, 2022) have been creating independent brand equity for cities. In other words, they provide a cumulative value of unique heritage narratives, perceived authenticity, and cultural infrastructure that increases visit intention and price tolerance (Kumail et al., 2022). DMOs in the UAE are public or quasi-public, while the state coordinates brand architecture and regulates heritage site use (Upadhya and Vij, 2020; Wakefield, 2020). Positive preconceptions of desert and luxury offerings are firmly connected with the uniqueness of Emirati heritage, hence tourism potential in deepening storytelling and scaling adaptive reuse to widen the variety of heritage experiences beyond only a few sites (Michael, Reisinger and Hayes, 2019). Indeed, estimated consumer response indicates these branded constructs have a considerable implication on the tourists' intention to visit the UAE (Kumail et al., 2022). Images of the many cities in the seven emirates are, as expected, properly dimensioned and very distinctive (Schwaighofer, 2014). More in detail, differentiation becomes visible as Dubai is perceived as a more beach-going, pop-cultured, and action-oriented destination as opposed to Abu Dhabi, understood as providing a more culturally enriching experience to a traveler (Williams, 2022). Other cities, dependent either on low-density domestic tourism (denoting weekend visitation distributed across coastal settlements and oasis towns) or on freeriding on Dubai and Abu Dhabi, are necessarily branded in some narrow-angle specificity. Al Ain is correctly pictured as an inland desert city with UNESCO-classified archaeological heritage and natural landscapes (De Man, 2020). In Ras Al Khaimah, pressures include shoreline and road development encroaching on historic clusters, which complicate buffer enforcement but also spotlight heritage as a differentiator in a mountains sea brand (Hilal et al., 2015; Bualhamam, 2009). The city of Sharjah, while considered to lay in a northern Emirate, is adjacent to Dubai and branded as a cultural capital of the UAE (Madichie and Madichie, 2013). The emirate includes three enclave cities on the east coast, namely Khor Fakkan, Dibba Al Hisn, and Kalba, which, together with the urban agglomerations of the emirate of Fujairah (forts, mosques, coastal archaeology, and east coast cultural landscapes; see Vij and Verma, 2016), are branded as offering low-density domestic alternatives to the mainstream Arabian Gulf destinations. Heritage tourism branding can be explored in multiple synergies with archaeology and other tangibles; the selling point being a perception of authenticity (De Man, 2018). About this concept, the sociocultural effect of rapid urban changes has not been well defined and is sometimes taken as a mere generational indicator, when in fact UAE heritage itself has been severely affected by sudden multicultural impacts on traditional values that are used in destination branding. The very tourism product is being transformed accordingly (Zaidan, Taillon, and Lee, 2016). Recent demographic change, new religious and cultural venues, and international contemporary architecture have expanded what can be considered as heritage. This widening now extends from pre-oil vernacular buildings to modernist landmarks, which has created blended traditional-modern tourism itineraries (Sosa and Ahmad, 2021; Williams, 2022) and form new collective memories at street micro-level (HaghighatBinl, Saghafi Moghaddam and Nijhuis, 2024).

Administration

From a material perspective, city planning in the UAE is presently the combined result of straightforward land reclamation for construction and forms of everyday urbanism. The latter includes informal shading, retail, and seating in sikkas, through which residents create micro-scaled neighborhood transformations (Alawadi et al., 2024). Both dynamics po-

tentially generate direct or induced pressure on archaeological sites and historical areas in general. As expected and indicated above, the particulars of each emirate configure unique habitats preventing standard solutions for urban developers. Clear examples of traditional neighborhoods and landmark areas undergoing pressure are indeed observable across the emirates (Boudiaf et al., 2020; Kyriazis et al., 2022) and fit a regional urban strategy that seeks to acknowledge the cultural identity of cities across the Arabian Gulf. Regionally, this occurs through the use of consensual design codes on vernacular typologies, heritage impact assessments, and public funding of cultural urban spaces to stage narratives (Kyriazis et al., 2022; Labadi et al., 2021).

This increasingly complex reality has been addressed by specific legislation such as the Abu Dhabi Cultural Heritage Law (4/2016), which articulates with Federal Law 11/2017 on Antiquities in the safeguarding of tangible heritage. Articles 22 and 23 of the latter specify that urban planning departments and, by extension, other municipal entities are required to set up buffer zones around archaeological sites, while ensuring their conservation. From an institutional standpoint, much of the associated responsibility falls on the Department of Culture and Tourism and to some extent on the recently created Heritage Authority (Abu Dhabi Law 1/2024), whose mandate includes preserving traditions, heritage, and national identity. Similarly, the government of Dubai created the Dubai Culture and Arts Authority, attributing the emirate's historical and archaeological sites to its responsibility (Law 6/2008, Article 17). The Authority is currently branded as Dubai Culture and in addition to the technical aspects of urban planning also promotes the commodification of heritage elements, including curated house-museums, craft markets, dhow-building demonstrations, seasonal heritage festivals, and storytelling routes linking Al Shindagha and Al Fahidi. This consumer-focused mission is indeed present in all seven emirates, mainly through symbioses between municipal services and Destination Management Organizations. The end users of urban culture are both Emirati residents and international tourists, leading to a coordinated supply of experiential heritage (Seraphim and Haq, 2020), even if considerably staged for ready consumption.

For these and other (namely ethical) arguments, the safeguarding of UAE urban heritage (Sosa and Ahmad, 2021) is a guiding principle that implicates multiple tangibles operating within a dynamic relationship. Simply put, the city includes retrofitted buildings, public layouts, and waterfront areas, whose conservation status interacts dynamically with cultural heritage programming. Not all structures warrant conservation; significance assessments (historical, social, architectural) need to define which heritage fabric is best documented and interpreted rather than retained in situ (Labadi et al., 2021). This is especially relevant for the changing topographies of contemporary cities, where intricate legal stipulations and social interests may hinder the pursuit of unrestricted academic research. In addition to national classifications, certain UNESCO commitments are excellent for site preservation and tourism but create additional layers of complexity to city planners. For instance, several components of the cultural sites of Al Ain (Al Nuaimi, 2024) are intraurban, as is the case of the multiple oasis areas that have become integrated by connecting residential areas. The wider city is undergoing archaeological research, namely excavation, also conditioned by the recent expansion of private housing (Sheehan et al., 2024) and World Heritage-related buffer zones.

This connects directly with the concept of sustainability in the wider UAE urban landscape when considering that dimensions such as buffer zones, walkability and transit integration, and heat-mitigation design directly support Sustainable Development Goal targets. The UN 2030 Agenda has laid an important emphasis on the development of cities, a concept translated especially through SDG 11 (Kellison, 2022; Yamasaki and Yamada, 2022) on the development of urban growth and correlated issues such as sprawl, pollution, and population density. Many other SDGs are interconnected with heritage tourism; for instance, SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth and SDG 9 on industry, innovation, and infrastructure (Buhalis et al., 2023; Labadi et al., 2021). The community-based dimension (Abreu, Walkowski, and Perinotto, 2024) is fundamental to tourism quality. Even prior to the Expo 2020 in Dubai, to which the SDGs represented a central framework, the UAE had been insisting on implementing practices that rationalize urbanization through knowledge (of urban metabolism, mobility patterns, micro-climate, and heritage significance inventories that inform smart-city decision-making; see Almulhim et al., 2022) while constructing smart and sustainable city infrastructures (Saleh, Hilal, and Haggag, 2022). From this specific angle, the links between UAE hospitality and cultural tourism are seen as a product of smart cities where commodified heritage serves as an economic driver. Examples include ticketed fort museum circuits, paid cultural festivals in historic districts, bundled museum passes on Saadiyat, and heritage themed hotel packages that channel spending to cultural operators (Valek, 2022; De Man, 2025). Some hyperreal urban components do provide marketable meanings in UAE tourism (Sai Viswanathan and Miller, 2023) but they only exist and perform in a context of sustainable cultural backgrounds. Iconic ultra artifacts (mega malls, observation decks) gain meaning through curated links to local narratives, without which they risk placelessness.

Impacts

As for the indirect and induced impacts of heritage tourism, some economic variables made available by the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Centre (fcsc.gov.ae) at the time of this publication can partially serve as proxies for illustrating city growth and cultural tourism dynamics. Long-term data series for the last decade show steadily increasing GDP, population, transport, tourism, and museum visits, as well as construction activity. According to the World Bank (databank.worldbank.org), the UAE urban population has an annual growth rate of 4.2% but this peaked around the year 2000 and is currently much lower. Variations at the city level fluctuate continuously, given the very dynamic UAE real estate industry, but the development of residential areas in peripheral or extra-urban areas is an increasing recent trend, not only in large metropolises such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai. However, while GDP growth, museum visits, construction, and cultural heritage tourism are taken together, these associations do not clearly demonstrate causality and are merely observed in some type of articulation. Overall economic benefits of urban tourism are, however, acknowledged by expatriates and Emirati citizens alike as a key non-oil alternative (Dutt, Harvey, and Shaw, 2023). The UAE leisure and entertainment industry has by now reached levels of maturity built on a convergence of hospitality and theme parks, on the one hand, and arts and culture, on the other. Investment in the latter requires fundamental attention to creativity and funding and this rarely yields direct impacts. Even with diffuse impacts, cultural investment shapes perceptions of heritage by expanding interpretive capacity, increasing media visibility, and normalizing repeat visitation, which in turn supports broader urban competitiveness (Bodolica, Spraggon and Saleh, 2020).

Additional caveats are in order because, as has been observed for long in Abu Dhabi and elsewhere, urban tourism is not always a cost-effective multiplier (Sharpley, 2002), especially in a scenario of structural state intervention and public-private rigidity (Seraphim and Haq, 2019). Notwithstanding these challenges, the UAE has by now reached the highest economic diversification ratios among the GCC countries (Shadab, 2023). Despite this competitive advantage, market indicators (Michael, Reisinger, and Hayes, 2019) confirm that UAE urban tourism attractiveness can still be leveraged through destination resource enhancement, explicitly in the cultural sector, and that sustainable growth is to be achieved by tourism products showcasing local built heritage. Another study (Reisinger, Michael, and Hayes, 2019) reaches similar conclusions; the critical factor is destination infrastructure and resources, and it therefore suggests a wider variety of heritage tourism attractions in the UAE.

Conclusion

The rationale behind this paper can be summarized by acknowledging both the systemic nature and specificity of current UAE tourism potential in relation to urban development. Most arguments identified in the literature take for granted the need for tangible elements during the transformation of the urban fabric. No mechanism for doing so exists, however, given the contextual nature of each situation. Another common premise is that of the fairness of heritage-structured tourism offerings, yet this may be challenged as well, for the same reason. What can be used as a baseline principle in any related decision is the equation between urban sustainability, heritage conservation, and tourism quality.

Implications of the scenario outlined above are manifold yet may be grouped into two categories. The first one relates to technical planning and the options for manipulating heritage tangibles inside living cities. This is a multidisciplinary task that requires input from several municipal and private stakeholders. A second group of questions deals with the economic impacts of urban heritage management, which should be aligned with engineering practice and, ideally, should stimulate tourism competitiveness in any urban development for the United Arab Emirates. Both heritage and infrastructural investment remain at the core of national strategic plans, which are heavily city-based, with the exception of a few peri-urban sites and cultural landscapes. This review paper is to be taken as a working document that aims at the development of further comparative research.

This overview of the UAE landscape validates that urban heritage can support tourism-led development. Governance enablers (legal instruments, funding mechanisms, administrative players) and market interfaces (branding, supply chains, cultural programming) can utilize heritage resources for improving livability, visitor value, and conservation, as synthesized in Figure 1. Given the context-specific nature of heritage, this is translated according to the different emirate geographies, demographic realities, and market positions. The successful outcomes of federal and emirate-level planning depend on swift conservation and retrofitting delivery, followed by downstream resident and visitor uses. Two key priorities require sustainable investment. First, the technical factors underpinning scalable adaptive reuse standards; second, the economic ones, ensuring a diversified revenue model that avoids disconnects from both the community and tourism stakeholders.

Future work is expected to refine the analytical lens and avoid over-generalizations about very heterogeneous emirates. The paper takes the adaptive reuse of historic fabric as a controllable dimension, as different public entities apply the same governance framework and

yield distinct results. The government-led dynamics of UAE tourism development accelerate heritage integration and allow for cohesive risk management. Comparative research can build on this paper to explore impacts at either the city or the international scale.

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Music-Based Smart Digital Interventions for Health: *A Scoping Review*

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Abstract

This scoping review systematically maps and synthesizes empirical research on smart, digital technology-delivered music interventions for health. Following Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) methodology and PRISMA-ScR reporting guidelines, a comprehensive search of six electronic databases yielded 30 included studies spanning four clinical domains: psychological and mental health, neurological and motor rehabilitation, aging and cognitive care, and acute care and symptom management. Studies employed four primary technology categories: mobile applications, artificial intelligence and machine learning systems, wearable biosensors, and alternative interface platforms. Findings demonstrate that smart digital music interventions are broadly feasible and acceptable, with preliminary efficacy across diverse populations. The field is adapting and expanding to include adaptive, closed-loop systems that modulate musical parameters in response to real-time physiological data, moving beyond traditional music interventions. Key gaps include standardized outcome frameworks, longitudinal data including adherence, and clinical validation of AI algorithms and machine learning systems.

Keywords: *Music-Based Intervention, Music in mHealth, Digital Therapeutics, Smart Applications, Scoping Review*

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Introduction

Background: The Therapeutic Role of Music in Health

Music therapy is a validated, therapist-delivered intervention used across diverse health domains, including emotional regulation, neurological rehabilitation, and pain management (Bruscia, 2014; Park et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2025). Music medicine (MM) refers to the clinical use of music-based interventions – typically involving pre-recorded music – administered by healthcare professionals (e.g., physicians or nurses). The primary aim of music medicine is to achieve specific physiological or psychological outcomes, such as reducing anxiety, lowering heart rate, or managing pain, often as an adjunct to conventional medical care (Dileo, 1999). Despite a large evidence base to support music therapy, traditional face-to-face delivery models are limited in their capacity to meet growing service demands. Global access is further constrained by a shortage of trained professionals and by transportation and scheduling barriers (Thompson et al., 2023; Zajac et al., 2023). In contrast, traditional music medicine typically involves pre-programmed playlists designed to manage symptoms, which lack the flexibility to adapt to individual needs or changing conditions (Bruscia, 2014; Bradt, Dileo, and Magill, 2016). In response, music-based digital applications have emerged as complementary tools that extend care and support continuity between clinical encounters (Bai, 2026).

Defining Digital Therapeutics and "Smart" Applications

Within this context, digital therapeutics (DTx) and mobile health (mHealth) technologies have emerged as widely accessible alternatives that extend care beyond traditional clinical settings. (Afra et al., 2018; Fleszar-Pavlovic et al., 2025; Wall et al., 2026). In this review, "smart" applications refer specifically to systems that incorporate adaptive, data-driven, or automated decision-making capabilities, often powered by artificial intelligence, biosensing, and real-time feedback mechanisms (Jiao, 2025; Salirrosas et al., 2026). Unlike static playlists, these systems monitor the user's real-time physiological or behavioral state and dynamically adjust musical parameters such as tempo, rhythm, or song selection, without continuous clinician input (Hutchinson et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2026). The rapid expansion of digital healthcare following COVID-19 has accelerated this shift toward remote, hybrid, and autonomous care models. Together, these developments broaden music-based care to include adaptive, data-driven models alongside therapist-delivered approaches.

Breadth of Populations and Clinical Applications

The clinical applications of smart music technologies for health span multiple domains. In the area of mental health and emotional regulation, smartphone applications and mobile neurofeedback systems target anxiety, depression, and trauma-related stress, supporting the development of emotion regulation skills in both youth and adults (Choi et al., 2024; Hides et al., 2019; Leschallier De Lisle et al., 2024). In neurological and motor rehabilitation, applications provide personalized rhythmic auditory stimulation for gait retraining in Parkinson's disease and support upper extremity motor recovery in stroke survivors (Chen and Norgaard, 2024; Wall et al., 2026; Yu et al., 2025). With respect to aging and cognitive care, digital therapeutics are used to mitigate neuropsychiatric symptoms such as agitation in dementia and to support caregivers in delivering music-based interventions in home settings (Russo et al., 2023; Thompson et al., 2023). Finally, in acute care and symptom management, smart applications are employed to manage acute pain in emergency departments, reduce preoperative anxiety, and alleviate symptoms during outpatient procedures (Chai et al., 2020; Park et al., 2024). Across these domains, a common feature is the use of

adaptive systems that respond dynamically to user states, marking a shift from static "music medicine" delivery (Lee, 2016) to responsive, closed-loop music delivery systems.

Problem Statement and Knowledge Gap

Despite the rapid proliferation of these technologies, the current evidence base remains fragmented across disciplines, including music therapy, engineering, and digital health. Studies employ diverse technological frameworks – such as virtual reality, wearable sensors, and mobile applications – implement heterogeneous algorithms, and vary substantially in how health outcomes and intervention fidelity are defined and measured (Bai, 2026; Yu et al., 2025). This fragmentation hinders knowledge consolidation and clinical translation, limiting development of a unified framework for designing, implementing, and evaluating smart music-based interventions. Without this foundation, it is difficult to compare findings, identify effective intervention components, establish dose–response relationships, or determine which technological features best suit specific symptoms and populations (Park et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2025).

Study Aim and Objectives

Therefore, the primary aim of this scoping review is to systematically map and synthesize the existing body of empirical research on digital, mobile, and smart technology-delivered music interventions. Specific objectives include: (a) categorizing the types of smart technologies recently utilized, including artificial intelligence, wearable sensors, and autonomous mHealth systems; (b) identifying the range of clinical and non-clinical populations targeted; and (c) synthesizing reported health outcomes alongside system-level feasibility and usability metrics. This synthesis aims to provide a foundation for standardized frameworks and to inform future research, clinical practice, and digital health innovation in music-based interventions.

Methods

Methodological Framework

This scoping review was conducted following the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) methodological guidance for scoping reviews. The reporting of the review process and its results strictly adheres to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) checklist (Tricco et al., 2018).

Identifying the Research Questions

The review questions are structured using the Population, Intervention, Comparison, and Outcome (PICO) format to map the available evidence. Population refers to human participants of any age experiencing clinical conditions or seeking health and wellness outcomes. Intervention refers to smart, digital technology-delivered music-based interventions, including those utilizing artificial intelligence, mobile applications, wearable sensors, and digital therapeutics. Comparison refers to standard care, waitlist control, or alternative intervention conditions against which the music-based interventions were evaluated. Outcome refers to the primary health and feasibility measures reported, encompassing psychological, physiological, functional, and usability outcomes. The primary questions guiding this review are: (a) What types of "smart" technologies – such as artificial intelligence, mobile applications, wearable sensors, and digital therapeutics – are utilized to deliver music-based interventions? and (b) What clinical and non-clinical populations are being targeted, and what are the primary health and feasibility outcomes measured?

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they evaluated digital, mobile, or "smart" technologies delivering music-based interventions, encompassing smartphone and tablet applications, AI and machine learning systems, wearable sensors, and digital therapeutics. With respect to populations, included studies involved human participants of any age experiencing clinical conditions or seeking health and wellness outcomes, including individuals with stroke, Parkinson's disease, dementia, and patients undergoing surgical or medical procedures. Studies were required to report on measurable health outcomes – such as psychological improvements, physiological changes, or motor function – or on system feasibility and usability metrics, utilizing tools such as the System Usability Scale (SUS) or the user version of the Mobile Application Rating Scale (uMARS). Eligible study designs included primary empirical research such as randomized controlled trials, pilot and feasibility trials, mixed-methods evaluations, and qualitative co-design research.

Studies were excluded if they evaluated traditional, purely in-person music interventions that lacked a digital, mobile, or software component. Studies strictly focused on computer science, software architecture, or algorithm efficiency without evaluating human health outcomes, clinical usability, or user experience were also excluded, as were studies utilizing non-human animal models. In addition, studies involving virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR) interventions that require head-mounted display devices were excluded due to potential clinical concerns related to user safety and tolerability (Lundin, Yeap, and Menkes, 2023; Palmisano, Allison, and Kim, 2020).

Information Sources and Search Strategy

A comprehensive systematic search was conducted across six electronic databases, four of which were accessed via the EBSCOhost platform: Academic Search Ultimate, APA PsycArticles, Applied Science & Technology Source, and MEDLINE Complete. In addition, Scopus and the ACM Digital Library were searched independently. The search strategy combined three key conceptual blocks using Boolean operators (AND/OR) and truncation. The first block captured smart and digital delivery technologies, including terms such as "smart app*," "digital health," "mobile health," "mHealth," "eHealth," "wearable technolog*," "smart device*," "AI-driven," and "artificial intelligence." The second block targeted clinical populations and medical contexts, encompassing terms such as "chronic disease*," "non-communicable disease*," "cardiovascular disease*," "hypertension," "diabetes," "stroke," "cancer," "dementia," "mild cognitive impairment," "Parkinson*," "Alzheimer*," "multiple sclerosis," "epilepsy," "chronic pain," "postoperative," "rehabilitation," "palliative care," and "medical setting," among others. The third block was limited to music-based interventions, including "music therap*," "music-based intervention*," "music intervention*," "therapeutic music," "music listening," "music medicine," and "sound therapy." The search was restricted to articles published in English, focusing on literature from the past ten years (2015 onward) to capture the trajectory of recent technological advancements in this area. The initial search was conducted in July 2025, followed by an updated search in March 2026 to capture any newly indexed studies. The results reported in this review are based on the updated search.

Study Selection Process

All identified records were exported to a reference management software to automatically identify and remove duplicates. The selection process occurred in two stages. First, two independent reviewers screened the titles and abstracts of all unique records against the pre-

defined eligibility criteria, categorizing each as "included," "excluded," or "maybe." Second, the full texts of potentially relevant articles were retrieved and assessed independently by the same two reviewers. Any discrepancies or disagreements during either screening phase were resolved through discussion and consensus, or by consulting a third reviewer when necessary.

Data Charting and Extraction

Data from the included studies were systematically extracted using a standardized data extraction form developed in Microsoft Excel. To ensure accuracy and consistency, one reviewer extracted the data and a second reviewer independently cross-checked the entered information. The extracted data encompassed study characteristics including author names, publication year, country of origin, and study design; participant demographics including sample size, age, gender, and clinical diagnosis or target population; intervention details including the specific type of "smart" technology utilized, music content, and frequency and duration of the intervention; and primary and secondary health outcomes alongside usability and feasibility metrics.

Data Synthesis and Reporting

Given the expected heterogeneity in study designs, technological modalities, and measured outcomes, a narrative and descriptive synthesis approach was employed. The data were mapped and grouped conceptually to address the research objectives. The synthesis categorized the types of digital technologies utilized, mapped the clinical domains addressed, and summarized the empirical evidence regarding therapeutic efficacy and system usability. Results are presented using summary tables, charts, and a narrative summary to highlight current trends and identify existing knowledge gaps.

Results

Study Selection and Characteristics

The systematic database search yielded a total of 355 records across the six databases (ACM Digital Library, n = 6; EBSCOhost, n = 121; Scopus, n = 228). Following the removal of 80 duplicate records, 275 unique records remained for title and abstract screening, of which 231 were excluded as irrelevant. The full texts of the remaining 44 records were sought for retrieval, of which 2 could not be obtained. The remaining 42 reports were assessed for eligibility, and 14 were subsequently excluded for the following reasons: four were conference proceedings, three reported no intervention testing, two involved no participant data, one was a protocol study, one was a review study, and three evaluated virtual reality devices or programs that fell outside the scope of the review. As a result, a final sample of 30 studies was retained for inclusion in this scoping review (see Figure 1 for the PRISMA flowchart). Study designs ranged from randomized controlled trials to single-arm studies, usability evaluations, and qualitative co-design investigations, reflecting significant methodological heterogeneity across the included literature.

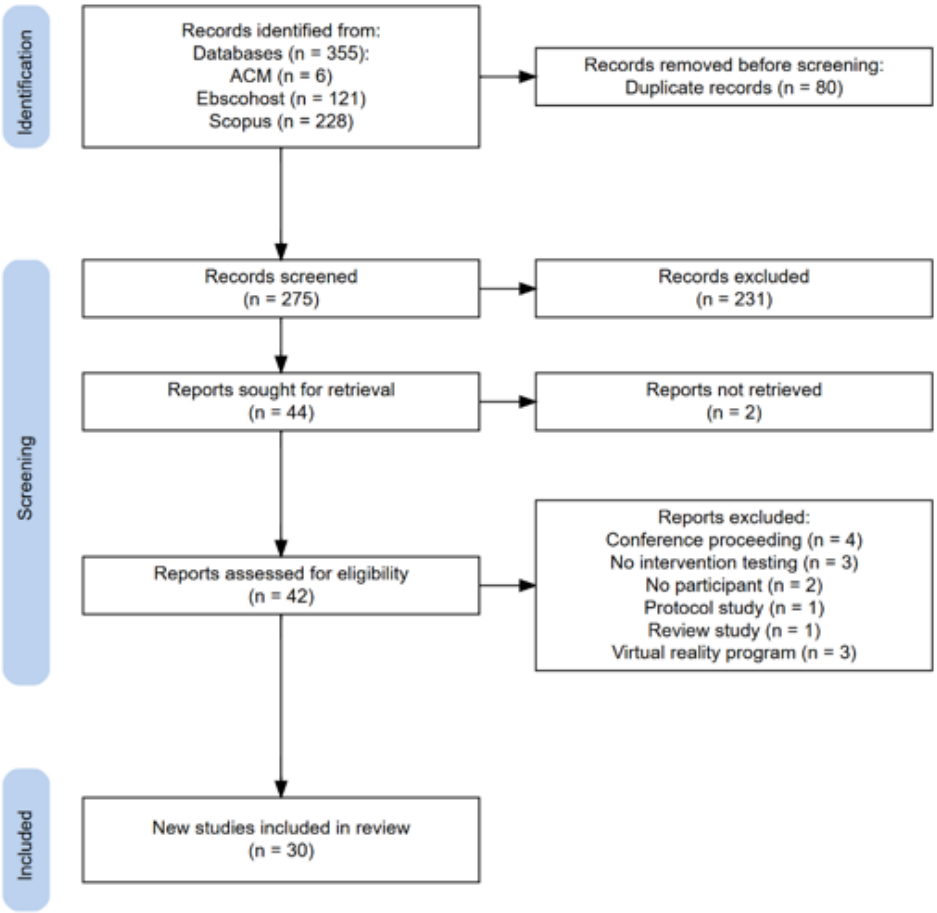


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart of Study Selection Process.

Participant Demographics and Clinical Domains

The literature targeted highly diverse populations, which can be categorized into four primary clinical domains. Studies addressing psychological and mental health involved distressed youth and adults managing trauma or PTSD (Choi et al., 2024; Hides et al., 2019). Neurological and motor rehabilitation populations encompassed stroke survivors with aphasia or hemiparesis and individuals with Parkinson's disease (Best et al., 2024; Chen and Norgaard, 2024; Zajac et al., 2023). Aging and cognitive care studies focused on older adults in care homes, dementia patients, and their family caregivers (De Nys et al., 2024; Thompson et al., 2025). Finally, acute care and symptom management interventions were utilized for surgical and oncology patients, emergency department pain management, military veterans with tinnitus, and patients with Long COVID respiratory symptoms (Chai et al., 2020; Howlett and Murphy, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). The general and participant characteristics of included studies are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. General Characteristics of Included Studies, part 1.

1st Author (Year)	Country	Design	Study Objective (< 25 words)	Participant N	Comparison Group	Age & Gender	Population
Afra et al. (2018)	USA	Survey-based study and prototype design,	To describe mobile app development to reduce seizures and assess patient preferences for digital epilepsy treatments.	Total: N=40. Withdrawals: NR.	N/A (Survey and prototype design study).	Age: mean18 years. Gender: NR.	People with epilepsy (PWE).
Bai (2026)	China	Stratified random sampling experimental study	To design and evaluate a closed-loop mobile music therapy system integrating multimodal AI emotion prediction for personalized intervention and adherence.	Total: N=120 (30 per group: closed-loop, traditional, static playlist, random music).	Traditional therapy, static-playlist group, and random music (placebo) group.	Age/Gender: Baseline comparability across age and gender ensured	Anxiety/depressive tendencies (n=40), post-operative rehab (n=40), and healthy controls (n=40).
Baur et al. (2018)	Switzer-land	Prospective randomized single-center study	To test the effects of an audio-haptic creative task and no visual display on motivation in robot-assisted arm therapy.	Total: N=16 (4 per group: A, B, C, D). Withdrawals: 0.	Within-subject design comparing conditions	Mean: 27.2, SD: 4.1. Gender: 10 M, 6 F	Healthy participants testing a robotic arm therapy system.
Best et al. (2024)	Australia	Feasibility and usability study,	To assess usability, adherence, and satisfaction of a mobile music app for post-stroke aphasia.	Total: N=19 (10 in version 1; 9 in version 2). Withdrawals: NR.	N/A (Feasibility study).	Mean: 66, SD: 8.28. Gender: 9 F (48%), 10 M (52%).	People with chronic post-stroke aphasia.
Chai et al. (2020)	USA	Prospective randomized study	To assess feasibility and use of a prescribed brief music app for pain and anxiety in the emergency department.	N=82. Randomized: N=81 (Supervision: no=38, 43 =yes).	Unsupervised (ad lib) use vs. Supervised (RA-prompted) use.	Mean: 43.84, SD: 15. Gender: 24 F (30%), 57 M (70%).	Emergency department (ED) observation unit patients with pain.
Chaitanya et al. (2025)	India	Prospective, observational study	To evaluate the effectiveness, usability, and clinical feedback of a smartphone-integrated bone-conduction platform for personalized digital tinnitus retraining therapy.	Total: N=58 (25 healthcare experts, 33 patients). Lost to follow-up: 2 experts, 4 patients.	N/A (Prospective observational study).	Age/Gender: NR.	Individuals with chronic tinnitus patients.
Chen & Norgaard (2024)	USA	3-week single-group pre-post feasibility study	To understand the feasibility and clinical effects of technology-assisted in-home piano training using a mobile app for stroke survivors.	Screened: 11. Enrolled: N=10. Excluded: 1.	N/A (Single-group pre-post study).	Mean: 56.79, SD: 13.05, Range: 40-78. Gender: 6 M, 4 F.	Stroke patients (mean 2.46 years post-stroke).
Choi et al. (2024)	South Korea	Randomized controlled trial	To evaluate the effectiveness of a mobile app utilizing neurofeedback-based meditation and binaural beat music for traumatic stress management.	Randomized: N=60 (30 exp, 30 control). Withdrawals: 2 dropped out (personal reasons). Analyzed: N=58.	Received brochure information about EEG, brain waves, and binaural beats.	Age: 18-45 years (20s: 25, 30s: 21, 40s: 12). Gender: 8 M (13.8%), 50 F (86.2%).	Individuals experiencing trauma and stress.
De Nys et al. (2024)	UK	Pilot randomized controlled trial with mixed methods,	To evaluate the efficacy of a digital movement and music intervention on health and wellbeing outcomes within care home settings.	Recruited: N=34 (17 int, 17 waitlist); Losses: 3 died, 2 withdrew, 1 left, 1 lost capacity. Analyzed: N=27.	Waitlist control; analyzed as single cohort).	Age: 65-74 (6), 75-84 (16), 85+ (12). Gender: 10 F (59%) int, 14 F (82%) control.	Older adults living in care homes. Severity: Variable (must be capable of chair-based exercise).
Feneberg & Nater (2022)	Austria	Mixed methods feasibility study (uncontrolled pilot),	To thoroughly investigate the feasibility of an ecological momentary music intervention for reducing stress in women's everyday lives.	Total: N=10. Withdrawals: NR.	N/A (Uncontrolled pilot).	Mean: 23.5, SD: 3.3, Range: 19-28. Gender: 10 F (100%).	Chronically stressed women.

Figure 2. General Characteristics of Included Studies, part 2.

1st Author (Year)	Country	Design	Study Objective (< 25 words)	Participant N	Comparison Group	Age & Gender	Population
Fleszar-Pavlovic et al. (2025)	USA	Qualitative study (focus groups and usability field-	To refine the content and usability of an eHealth mindfulness-based music therapy intervention for allogeneic stem cell	Consented: 12. Participated: N=11 (1 absent due to illness).	N/A (Focus groups and usability testing).	Mean: 43.6, SD: 17.8, Range: 19-76. Gender: 6 F (55%), 5 M (45%).	Allogeneic stem cell transplantation (allo-SCT) survivors.
Garrido et al. (2022)	Australia	Qualitative co-design study (focus groups),	To determine how to encourage help-seeking behavior and engagement in a mental health app for young people,.	Screened: 25. Excluded: 1. Total: N=24.	N/A (Co-design workshops).	Age: 13-25 years (14 aged <18, 10 aged 18+). Gender: 15 F, 10 M.	Young people with or without depression.
Guerrier et al. (2021)	France	Randomized clinical trial	To demonstrate the effects of a web app-based music intervention on perioperative hypertensive events and anxiety during	Enrolled: N=311. Randomized: N=310 (155 int, 155 control). Analyzed:	Headphones with no music.	Mean: 68.9, SD: 10.8. Gender: 176 F (57%), 133 M.	Patients undergoing elective first eye cataract surgery under local anesthesia.
Hansen (2015)	Iceland	Feasibility pilot study, experimental RCT,	To determine the feasibility and effects of mobile technology-delivered complementary music therapies on surgical patients' anxiety,	Screened: 112. Excluded: 7. Randomized: N=105 (ART 25, MI 25, NVAM	Standard surgical care (no complementary therapy).	Mean ages by group range: 43.9 - 51.2. Gender: 21 M, 84 F.	Same day surgery (SDS) patients (general and gynecological).
Hides et al. (2019)	Australia	Randomized controlled trial	To evaluate the efficacy and outcomes of a music-based emotion regulation mobile app in distressed young people.	Assessed: 209. Randomized: N=169 (85 immediate, 84 delayed).	Delayed-access control (waitlist).	Mean: 19.9, SD: 2.5. Gender: 134 F (79.3%).	Young people experiencing distress.
Howlett & Murphy (2025)	UK	Single arm, within-participants exploratory feasibility study	To investigate the feasibility and acceptability of a non-invasive, wearable white-noise sound therapy device for persistent tinnitus in military veterans.	Total: N=20. Withdrawals: 0 in 1st month; 2 lost to 2-month follow-up.	N/A (Single-arm feasibility study).	Mean: 51.3, SD: 7.7. Gender: 16 M (80%), 4 F (20%).	UK military veterans with persistent tinnitus.
Hutchinson et al. (2020)	USA	Preliminary, proof-of-concept study	To automate a progressive and individualized rhythm-based walking training program for individuals with poststroke hemiparesis.	Total: N=11. Withdrawals: 0 reported.	N/A (Single-group proof-of-concept).	Mean age approx. 57.7. Gender: 9 M, 2 F.	Individuals with chronic poststroke hemiparesis.
Jackson et al. (2025)	UK	Pilot and feasibility trial (mixed methods),	To investigate the feasibility and acceptability of online group peer support, health education, and music interventions for caregivers of unsettled infants.	Total: N=7 (Target was 40).	Treatment as usual vs. health education vs. peer support.	Age: 20-34 years. Gender: 6 Mothers, 1 Father.	Caregivers of infants (<6 months) affected by colic, reflux, GOR(D), and/or CMPA.
Ma et al. (2026)	China	Predictive modeling study (machine learning/deep learning),	To propose and evaluate a dual-stream attention model fusing physiological dynamics with music listening patterns to predict older adults' wellbeing.	Initiators: 132. Completed: N=92 (40 dropouts).	Random Forest, XGBoost, LSTM, and TCN used as algorithmic baselines.	Mean: 67.8, SD: 5.1. Gender: 58% F.	Community-dwelling older adults.
Nasmi Zarudin et al. (2025)	Malaysia	Cross-sectional study	To assess the quality and acceptance of a self-preference musical mobile app as a relaxing tool for dental students and patients.	Total: N=73 (38 dental students, 35 patients).	N/A (Cross-sectional study).	Mean age: 23. Gender: 59 F (81%), 14 M (19%).	Dental students treating anxious patients, and dental patients.

Figure 2. General Characteristics of Included Studies, part 3.

1st Author (Year)	Country	Design	Study Objective (< 25 words)	Participant N	Comparison Group	Age & Gender	Population
Russo et al. (2023)	Canada / USA	Development/training database study	To develop an AI for affective music recommendation to help manage the neuropsychiatric symptoms of dementia,.	Total: N=32 (Training database study).	N/A (Training database study).	Age/Gender: NR.	Older adults experiencing cognitive decline.
Salirrosas et al. (2026)	USA	Within-subject change-from-baseline design	To evaluate the role of deep neural networks-based AI for optimized music selection to reduce postoperative stress in surgical cancer patients,.	Total: NR (Recorded 7255.5 mins of HRV data over >1969 songs).	N/A (Within-subject pilot).	Mean: 63. Gender: 57% F.	Surgical cancer patients.
Sorkpor et al. (2023)	USA	Pilot study with fNIRS neuroimaging,	To assess the impact of preferred web app-based music listening on central nervous pain processing in older Black adults with low	Approached: 21. Enrolled: N=20. (1 opted out due to transportation).	N/A (Single-arm pre-post).	Mean: 71.60, SD: 5.04. Gender: 13 F (65%), 7 M (35%).	Community-dwelling older Black adults with Low Back Pain (LBP).
Thompson et al. (2023)	Australia	Validation study (face and content validity),	To develop and evaluate the face and content validity of a mobile app designed to train caregivers in music therapy strategies.	Invited: 28. Consented: N=20 (11 MT, 9 Caregivers). Partially	N/A (Content validation study).	Age/Gender: NR (demographic data was not collected).	Expert music therapists and expert family caregivers of people with dementia.
Thompson et al. (2025)	Australia	Mixed-methods proof-of-concept study	To evaluate a music-training app prototype's acceptability, usability, and preliminary effects on neuropsychiatric symptoms and	Consented: 18 dyads. Commenced: 17 dyads. Completed: 13 dyads.	N/A (Single-arm proof-of-concept).	*PwD:* Median 79 (62-93); 11 F, 6 M. *CG:* Median 60 (31-84); 14	Co-habiting dyads (caregiver & care-recipient).
Verna et al. (2020)	Italy	Randomized controlled trial	To evaluate an app using temporal musical mismatch for neurorehabilitation in stroke patients,.	Enrolled: 30. Withdrawals: 4 released, 2 dropped out. Analyzed: N=24 (12 Mg, 12 CTRLg).	Standard active control group (CTRLg).	Mg: 50.87 \pm 12.37 (6M). CTRLg: 64.20 \pm 10.94 (7M).	Stroke patients in sub-acute phase.
Wall et al. (2026)	UK	Qualitative focus group study,	To explore the perceptions and preferences of people with Parkinson's disease regarding a personalized, smartphone-based music cueing application for gait rehabilitation.	Total: N=8 (7 PwPD, 1 caregiver).	N/A (Focus group).	Age: 60-73 years. Gender: 3 F, 5 M.	People with Parkinson's Disease (PwPD) and caregivers.
Williams et al. (2020)	UK	Experimental machine learning evaluation study,	To design and evaluate a machine learning system generating functional music informed by biophysiological measurement to improve listener affective states.	Total: Human survey participants; Specific sample size NR.	Compared to familiar music from a popular film corpus.	Age/Gender: NR.	Human listeners analyzing affective states based on musical sequences.
Zajac et al. (2023)	USA	Single-group pilot clinical trial	To evaluate the feasibility and proof-of-concept of an autonomous music-based digital walking intervention for individuals with Parkinson's disease,.	Completed: N=23 (12 BU, 11 JHU). Withdrawals: NR.	N/A (Single-group pilot clinical trial).	Mean: 66.91, SD: 8.78. Gender: 17 M (73.9%), 6 F (26.1%).	Idiopathic Parkinson's Disease.
Zhang et al. (2025)	USA	Within-subject experimental design	To evaluate the potential efficacy and feasibility of an online music therapy respiratory telehealth protocol for adults with long COVID symptoms.	Enrolled: N=24. Withdrawals: 2 dropped out during tx; 5 stopped responding post-tx.	Full within-subject experimental design.	Mean: 45.9, SD: 13.6, Range: 22-70. Gender: 17 F (70.8%), 5 M (20.8%).	Individuals previously diagnosed with COVID-19. Severity: Residual pulmonary issues (shortness of breath).

Technology and "Smart" Intervention Modalities

The included studies employed four primary categories of smart technology. Mobile and web applications were the predominant delivery mechanism, with smartphones and tablets used to provide accessible, at-home care through platforms such as Music eScape, MoodyTunes, MATCH, and Te.M.P.O. (Garrido et al., 2022; Hides et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2025; Verna et al., 2020). Artificial intelligence and machine learning systems utilized AI for dynamic, closed-loop music prescription based on emotion prediction, physiological metrics, or reinforcement learning, including the FAT-Net model and the LUCID digital therapeutic (Bai, 2026; Ma et al., 2026; Russo et al., 2023). Sensor and wearable biofeedback hardware integrations included EEG headsets, continuous physiological monitors such as the Empatica E4 wristband, fNIRS neuroimaging, and 3D foot sensors for gait tracking (Choi et al., 2024; Ma et al., 2026; Sorkpor et al., 2023; Zajac et al., 2023). A fourth category encompassed alternative interfaces including bone-conduction devices, robotic arm exoskeletons, and virtual and augmented reality (Baur et al., 2018; Chaitanya et al., 2025; Yu et al., 2025). Technological characteristics of included studies are presented in Figure 3.

Music-Specific Characteristics and Selection

Music selection mechanisms varied widely across included studies. Approaches ranged from algorithm-generated functional music (Williams et al., 2020) and pre-selected clinical tracks (Hansen, 2015) to patient-selected or self-compiled playlists (Best et al., 2024; Feneberg and Nater, 2022). Interventions also differentiated between passive and receptive listening for relaxation and pain management (Chai et al., 2020) and active or interactive engagement, such as rhythmic auditory stimulation for walking or interactive digital piano training (Chen and Norgaard, 2024; Hutchinson et al., 2020). The musical characteristics of included studies are presented in Figure 4.

Health Outcomes and Clinical Efficacy

Psychological outcomes were the most frequently reported, with studies demonstrating significant reductions in anxiety, depression, and stress across diverse cohorts using measures such as the STAI and DERS (Bai, 2026; De Nys et al., 2024; Hides et al., 2019). Physiological and biomarker outcomes provided objective evidence of efficacy, including improvements in heart rate variability, alterations in salivary cortisol and DHEA, and modulated galvanic skin responses (Bai, 2026; De Nys et al., 2024; Ma et al., 2026; Williams et al., 2020). In the area of rehabilitation, interventions yielded improvements in motor function, walking speed and cadence, and specific symptom relief such as reduced tinnitus severity and dyspnea (Chaitanya et al., 2025; Hutchinson et al., 2020; Zajac et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2025).

System Feasibility, Usability, and Adherence

System feasibility was generally high, with standardized scores on the System Usability Scale and uMARS indicating high user satisfaction and ease of use (Best et al., 2024; Nasmi Zarudin et al., 2025). However, adherence rates varied substantially across studies. One study reported an "empty trial" due to exceptionally poor recruitment and adherence among caregivers of infants with colic (Jackson et al., 2025). Qualitative user experience feedback emphasized the importance of app aesthetics, intuitive design, data privacy and anonymity, and the psychological risks of achievement-based gamification that may introduce performance-related stress (Garrido et al., 2022; Wall et al., 2026).

1st Author (Year)	Types of Technology	Modality	Device(s) Needed	Software Needed	Feedback from Technology	AI Workflow / Datasets
Afra et al. (2018)	Prototype web-based/mobile app.	Mobile/Web Application	Smartphone, tablet, or computer	Prototype web-based or mobile app	Audio/visual interaction with emoticons; home setting for epilepsy self-care and antiseizure music.	N/A
Bai (2026)	Mobile app, wearable sensors (HRV, EDA), smartphone camera.	AI App & Wearable Sensors	Smartphone (with camera), Empatica E4 wearable wristband	Custom AI-driven mobile music therapy app	Empathic UI (visual cues, voice guidance, haptic responses); home/clinical for emotional regulation and sleep.	CNN-LSTM hybrid model fusing physiological, behavioral, and subjective data
Baur et al. (2018)	ARMin rehabilitation robot, virtual game environment.	Robotics & Virtual Game	ARMin rehab. robot, headphones, computer/monitor, keyboard	Unity game environment software	Haptic feedback with/without visual monitor and auditory music creation; clinical neurorehabilitation.	N/A
Best et al. (2024)	Custom iOS mobile app on iPad mini.	Mobile Application	Apple iPad mini, headphones	Custom iOS music listening application	Visual (album covers) and simple audio player controls; home setting for post-stroke aphasia.	N/A
Chai et al. (2020)	Smartphone-based app (Unwind) on iPhone.	Mobile Application	Smartphone (iPhone 6), noise-canceling headphones	"Unwind" iOS application (by Bose)	Auditory music tracks; Emergency Department observation unit for acute pain/anxiety.	A machine learning algorithm selects features to generate "thrill"-inducing backing music.
Chaitanya et al. (2025)	Tinnicare Android app & Tinnipatch wearable bone-conduction device.	App & Bone-Conduction	Smartphone, Tinnipatch wearable bone-conduction device	"Tinnicare" Android application	Bone-conduction vibrations (white/narrow band noise); home use for Tinnitus Retraining Therapy.	N/A
Chen & Norgaard (2024)	Commercial app (Yousician) & digital piano keyboard.	App & Digital Instrument	Tablet (Apple iPad), digital piano keyboard	"Yousician" mobile application	Visual/auditory interactive piano feedback; home setting for upper extremity stroke rehab.	N/A
Choi et al. (2024)	"Mind Therapy" mobile app & 2-channel Bluetooth EEG headset.	App & EEG Neurofeedback	Smartphone, 2-channel Bluetooth EEG headset	"Mind Therapy" mobile application	Auditory feedback (bell rings when alpha waves increase) & binaural beats; home for trauma stress.	N/A (Utilizes real-time neurofeedback).
De Nys et al. (2024)	Digital PA and music video resource.	Digital AV Resource	Digital screen / TV / Audio-visual equipment	"danceSing Care" digital music & movement resource	Audio-visual delivery via digital screen; group sessions in older adult care homes.	N/A
Feneberg & Nater (2022)	movisensXS smartphone app.	Mobile Application	Smartphone, head/earphones, USB stick (optional)	"movisensXS", "Musik Player" / personal streaming	Alarms/prompts, self-selected music streaming; daily life (ambulatory assessment) for acute stress.	N/A
Fleszar-Pavlovic et al. (2025)	SmartManage web eHealth platform.	eHealth Web Platform	Smartphone, tablet, or computer, headphones	"SmartManage" web platform (by BrightOutcome)	Audio-recorded content, guided exercises, journaling; remote home setting for allo-SCT survivors.	N/A
Garrido et al. (2022)	"MoodyTunes" smartphone app	Mobile Application	Smartphone	"MoodyTunes" app prototype, Spotify	Spotify background linking, mood tracking graphs; daily life for youth mental health.	N/A
Guerrier et al. (2021)	Music Care web app on a tablet.	Web Application	Tablet (Samsung Galaxy), headphones	"Music Care" web application	Audio via headphones (U-shaped relaxation sequence); operating/recovery room for cataract surgery.	N/A
Hansen (2015)	Apple iPods and iPads.	Mobile Media Players	Apple iPod, Apple iPad	Custom audio/video players, "Salumedia" nature video app	Audio (music/relaxation) or audiovisual (nature scenes); hospital/home pre- and post-surgery.	N/A

Figure 3. Technological Characteristics of Included Studies, part 1.

1st Author (Year)	Types of Technology	Modality	Device(s) Needed	Software Needed	Feedback from Technology	AI Workflow / Datasets
Hides et al. (2019)	"Music eScape" mobile app (iOS).	Mobile Application	Smartphone (iPhone)	"Music eScape" iOS application, TestFlight	Mood mapping visual interface (valence-arousal circumplex); daily life for youth emotion regulation.	Echo Nest extracts valence/ arousal from the user's library.
Howlett & Murphy (2025)	TinniSoothe wearable white-noise device.	Wearable Sound Device	TinniSoothe wearable device, docking station, lanyard	N/A (embedded device firmware)	Continuous, adjustable white noise; home day and night use for military veterans.	N/A
Hutchinson et al. (2020)	Smartphone app, 3D gyroscope sensors, bone-conducting	App & Wearable Sensors	Smartphone, 3D gyroscope sensors, bone-conducting headphones (AfterShokz)	Custom digital therapeutic smartphone	Real-time audio tempo modulation (BPM); overground walking in clinical/community settings post-stroke.	Decision algorithms autonomously adapt music tempo based on user's real-time
Jackson et al. (2025)	Online video conferencing &	Online Communication	Smartphone or computer	Zoom, WhatsApp	Online group sessions; remote home environment for caregivers of infants.	N/A
Ma et al. (2026)	Empatica E4 wearable wristband & online surveys.	Wearable Sensors	Empatica E4 wearable wristband, smartphone or computer	Google Forms (for survey logs), personal music streaming app	Continuous physiological monitoring; daily life for community-dwelling older adults.	FAT-Net predicts health scores using HRV and behavioral logs.
Nasmi Zarudin et al. (2025)	ACOU@PLAY mobile app.	Mobile Application	Smartphone, headphones	"ACOU@PLAY" mobile application	Auditory music & in-app anxiety/gagging assessments; clinical dental setting.	N/A
Russo et al. (2023)	LUCID/VIBE digital therapeutic app.	AI Digital Therapeutic	Smartphone or tablet	"LUCID/VIBE" digital therapeutic app	Audio playlists to induce target emotional states; home/long-term care for dementia.	BioMIR and AMRS use reinforcement learning.
Salirrosas et al. (2026)	Physiology-adaptive music software using DNNs.	AI App & Sensors	Smartphone, physiological sensors (HRV monitor)	"Rubato Life" application	Real-time audio adaptation; postoperative recovery for surgical oncology patients.	A DNN algorithm optimizes music selection from real-time stress data.
Sorkpor et al. (2023)	MUSIC CARE web app, fNIRS neuro imaging, headphone	Web App & Neuroimaging	Smartphone or tablet, over-ear noise-isolating headphone, fNIRS device	"MUSIC CARE" web application, AnalyzIR software (for fNIRS)	Algorithmic "U" sequence audio; home setting for Low Back Pain management.	Algorithmic sequence composition based on tempo/orchestral modulation.
Thompson et al. (2023)	MATCH mobile app.	Mobile Application	Smartphone or tablet	"MATCH" mobile application	Video modules, case studies, checklists; home setting training for dementia caregivers.	N/A
Thompson et al. (2025)	MATCH mobile app prototype.	Mobile Application	Smartphone or tablet	"MATCH" mobile application	Embedded training videos & in-built music streamer; home setting for dementia dyads.	N/A
Verna et al. (2020)	"Te.M.P.O." mobile app.	Mobile Application	Android device (smartphone or tablet)	"Te.M.P.O." Android application	Temporal musical mismatch; clinical neurorehabilitation for stroke patients.	N/A
Wall et al. (2026)	CuePD smartphone app.	Mobile Application	Smartphone, headphones, 3D printed smartphone cradle/belt	"CuePD" smartphone application	Music sonification and tempo adjustment; outdoor/home walking for Parkinson's disease.	Algorithms alter user's BPM to match 10% of baseline cadence.
Williams et al. (2020)	Custom generative music system, GSR biosensors.	AI System & Biosensors	Computer, GSR (galvanic skin response) biosensors	Custom generative music system (Hidden Markov Models)	Real-time audio synthesis; experimental mindfulness/mental health setting.	Supervised learning and HMMs use human-labeled and GSR data.
Zajac et al. (2023)	MR-005 mobile app, 3D foot sensors, bone-conduction headphones.	App & Wearable Sensors	Locked Android touchscreen device, 3D foot sensors, bone-conduction headphones	"MR-005" proprietary software mobile application	Real-time auditory rhythmic cues; unsupervised community walking for Parkinson's disease.	A closed-loop algorithm adapts music tempo based on gait.
Zhang et al. (2025)	Online telehealth protocol.	Telehealth Platform	Computer, tablet, or smartphone	Zoom video conferencing software	Video conferencing; remote home care for Long COVID respiratory symptoms.	N/A

Figure 3. Technological Characteristics of Included Studies, part 2.

1st Author (Year)	Involve MT	Musical Characteristic	Music Selection Process	Music Playing Device	IX duration/ Frequency	Primary Outcome	Time Points Reported	Main Finding	Program Feasibility
Afra et al. (2018)	No	Mozart's K.448 and relaxing music; passive listening	Pre-selected (Mozart) & Patient-selected	Prototype web/mobile app (HTML5)	10 min daily; proposed for 1 year or longer	Preference for mobile apps for seizure control	N/A (Survey)	N/A (Prototype design)	90% interested in app; 75% in music for seizures.
Bai (2026)	No	Empathic UI, biofeedback-driven tempo/volume; passive listening	Algorithm-generated (CNN-LSTM matching)	Mobile app, wearable sensors (E4)	30 min daily; 4 weeks	SAS, SDS, Cortisol, HRV, EEG	Baseline, Wks 1, 2, 4	Sig. reduction in anxiety (-12.6) and depression (-11.8). Increased HRV.	Adherence 85.3% (anxiety group); high SUS scores (70-90).
Baur et al. (2018)	No	Synthesized instruments; active music creation via movement	Patient-selected (triggered via movement)	ARMin robot, virtual game, headphones	Three ~5 min rounds; single session	Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI), perceived effort	Post-task	Increased motivation, autonomy, and enjoyment.	High desire to keep created music; safe to use.
Best et al. (2024)	No	General music tracks; passive listening	Patient-selected	Custom iOS mobile app on iPad mini	Target ≥1 hour daily; 2 weeks	Adherence, instances of support, satisfaction	Post-intervention (2 Wks)	N/A (Focus on usability)	74% adherence (≥7 hrs). Median satisfaction 83%; high SUS (75.26).
Chai et al. (2020)	No	Instrumental relaxing tracks; passive listening	Algorithm-generated feature, Patient-selected track	Unwind app on iPhone	10 min session; up to 3x/stay or ad lib	Pain (BPI), Anxiety (0-10 scale), Opioid use	Pre- and post-session	Sig. reduction in pain (-0.81) and anxiety (-0.72).	92% found app easy to use; no difference between supervised/unsupervised.
Chaitanya et al. (2025)	No	White/narrow band noise vibrations; passive listening	Pre-selected (matched to tinnitus frequency)	Tinnicare Android app & Tinnipatch device	Daily; 8 months	TRT score, THI, sleep quality, anxiety	Baseline, Monthly to 8 Mos	Sustained improvement in TRT scores (64.6 to 44.84).	81.8% successful usage; 92% positive/neutral expert feedback.
Chen & Norgaard (2024)	No	Interactive digital piano playing; active instrument playing	Patient-selected (from app curriculum)	Yousician app & Yamaha piano keyboard	Goal of 1 hour daily; 3 weeks	Fugl-Meyer (FM), ARAT, 9HPT	Baseline, Post-training (3 Wks)	Positive improvements in upper extremity motor function.	Avg usage 33 min/day. Positive feedback but some got "stuck" on difficulty levels.
Choi et al. (2024)	No	Binaural beats & neurofeedback meditation; passive listening	Pre-selected	"Mind Therapy" mobile app & EEG headset	50 min(Music & meditation), ≥3 days/week; 4 weeks	SCL-47-R, Psychological Well-Being, EEG indicators	Pretreatment, 1-Mo follow-up	Sig. improvements in well-being, emotional stability, and anti-stress index.	2 dropouts; remote logging confirmed adherence.
De Nys et al. (2024)	No	Group-base4d movement and music; active and passive	Pre-selected	Digital PA and music video screen	3 sessions /week; 12 weeks	Anxiety/depression , fear of falling, loneliness, cortisol, physical function	Baseline, Post-intervention (12 Wks)	Sig. improvements in anxiety, DHEA, fear of falling, loneliness. No change in physical function.	88% of sessions delivered; deemed acceptable with moderate fidelity.
Feneberg & Nater (2022)	No	Calming/relaxing tracks; passive listening	Patient-selected (self-compiled playlist)	Musik Player app or personal streaming app	5–30 min per stressful event; 18 days	Subjective stress, compliance	Baseline, Pre/Post-event, 15m Post	Music was perceived as highly calming.	Good compliance; 62% wanted to listen longer than the chosen duration.

Figure 4. Musical Characteristics of Included Studies, part 1. Note. MT: music therapist.

1st Author (Year)	Involve MT	Musical Characteristic	Music Selection Process	Music Playing Device	IX duration/ Frequency	Primary Outcome	Time Points Reported	Main Finding	Program Feasibility
Fleszar-Pavlovic et al. (2025)	Board Certified MT	Active and receptive MT, imagery, vocal/singing, mindfulness	Patient-selected	SmartManage web platform	60 min sessions; 8 total sessions	USE questionnaire, qualitative feedback	Post-focus group	N/A (Content refinement)	Seen as easy to navigate; content was refined to reduce text and increase audio/video.
Garrido et al. (2022)	No	Mood-tracking background music; passive listening	Patient-selected (Spotify integration)	"MoodyTunes" app prototype	N/A (Focus group)	Qualitative design feedback	N/A (Focus group)	N/A (Co-design)	Feedback guided app gamification and privacy functions.
Guerrier et al. (2021)	No	"U" sequence (tempo/volume modulation); passive listening	Algorithm-generated list, Patient-selected genre	Music Care web app on tablet	20 min; single pre-op session	Hypertensive events, VAS anxiety, BP, HR	Pre- and Post-session	Sig. reduction in hypertensive events (14% vs 53%) and anxiety.	Session achieved in all but 12 participants; highly feasible.
Hansen (2015)	No	Non-lyrical audio, nature videos; passive listening	Pre-selected	Apple iPod or iPad	≥15 min, 2x/day; 10 days	State Anxiety (SAI), Pain (NRS), Self-Efficacy	Baseline, Pre-op, Post-op, Day 10	Sig. within-group decreases in pain and anxiety, but no sig. between-group differences.	Confirmed feasibility for clinical/home delivery via iPod/iPad.
Hides et al. (2019)	No	Mapping library by valence/arousal; passive listening	Patient-selected, Algorithm-mapped	"Music eScape" mobile app	Ad lib; up to 6 months	DERS-SF, Kessler 10, MHC-SF, uMARS	Baseline, 1, 2, 3, 6 Mos	Sig. long-term improvements in emotion regulation, distress, and well-being.	uMARS score 3.8/5. Engagement varied (median 2 playlists generated).
Howlett & Murphy (2025)	No	Continuous white noise; passive listening	Pre-selected	TinniSoothe wearable device	24/7 or ad lib; 28 days	TFI, PCL-5, ISI, PHQ-15, SWLS, GHQ-12	Baseline, 1 Mo, 2 Mos	Sig. improvements in tinnitus symptoms and sleep disturbances.	100% completion at 1 month; 13/20 retained device at 2 months.
Hutchinson et al. (2020)	No	4/4 meter strong beat; rhythmic auditory stimulation	Pre-selected music, Algorithm-adjusted tempo	Smartphone app & bone-conduction headphones	30 min; 1 to 3 sessions	10-m walk test, cadence, entrainment precision	Pre- and Post-training	Increased usual and fast walking speeds.	No trips/falls; 100% said it helped them walk faster; 70% would use at home.
Jackson et al. (2025)	No	Infant-Directed Singing (lullabies); active singing	Patient-selected (guided)	Zoom/WhatsApp	1 hr weekly for 3 wks; 3 wks independent	EPDS, PSI, SAPS, attendance	Baseline, Wks 2-5, Post-intervention	N/A (Feasibility focus)	Exceptionally poor participant recruitment (n=7).
Ma et al. (2026)	No	Daily preferred listening; passive listening	Patient-selected	Wearable (E4) & personal streaming	Ad lib daily; 45 days	PANAS, sleep quality, HRV, RHR	Daily for 45 days	Dual-stream AI accurately predicted daily wellbeing ($R2$=0.87).	Robust and interpretable prediction framework.
Nasmi Zarudin et al. (2025)	No	Pop, classical, kids, instrumental; passive listening	Patient-selected	ACOU@PLAY mobile app	10 min; single session	uMARS (engagement, functionality, aesthetics)	Post-use	N/A (Quality rating focus)	Avg app quality 3.96/5. Well accepted by dental students and patients.

Figure 4. Musical Characteristics of Included Studies, part 2. Note. MT: music therapist.

1st Author (Year)	Involve MT	Musical Characteristic	Music Selection Process	Music Playing Device	IX duration/ Frequency	Primary Outcome	Time Points Reported	Main Finding	Program Feasibility
Russo et al. (2023)	No	Affective music recommendation; passive listening	Algorithm-generated (reinforcement learning)	LUCID/VIBE app	N/A (Training database study)	Valence, arousal, absorption ratings	N/A (Database study)	Provided training dataset for AI affective recommendation systems.	N/A
Salirrosas et al. (2026)	No	Physiology-adaptive acousticness/tempo; passive listening	Algorithm-generated (DNN self-learning)	Rubato Life app	≥45 min daily; 2 weeks	HRV-derived stress, STAI-S	Pre/Post-session & every 25s	Sig. reductions in physiological and emotional stress over time.	Accessible, low-risk, and highly feasible in post-op setting.
Sorkpor et al. (2023)	No	"U" sequence composition; passive listening	Algorithm-generated list, Patient-selected genre	MUSIC CARE app & fNIRS	20 min, 2x/day; 4 days	Cortical hemodynamic activity (HbO, HbR)	Pre- and Post-intervention scans	Sig. reduction in hemodynamic activities in somatosensory regions (reduced pain processing).	High acceptability for home use; no adverse events.
Thompson et al. (2023, 2025)	Certified MT	Singing, movement, relaxation, reminiscence; active/passive	Caregiver/Patient-selected	MATCH mobile app	≥30 min, 2x/week; 8 weeks	NPI-Q, CMAI, AES, SUS, Knowledge	Post-training; Pre/Post 8 Wks	Sig. reduction in BPSD severity and caregiver distress.	Acceptability (AES 28), Usability (SUS 73.5). Highly valid content but some tech barriers.
Verna et al. (2020)	No	Temporal musical mismatch (deviations); active listening	Pre-selected (ad hoc compositions)	Te.M.P.O. Android app	20 min, 3x/week; 4 weeks	DRS, MBI, SSQoL	Baseline, 4 Wks	Major improvement in disability and quality of life compared to control.	Feasible adjunct to cognitive rehab.
Wall et al. (2026)	No	Tempo-adjusted contemporary music; rhythmic cueing	Patient-selected music, Algorithm-adjusted tempo	CuePD smartphone app	N/A (Focus groups)	Insights on daily challenges, use of app	N/A (Focus groups)	Subconsciously encouraged faster walking.	Music was significantly more engaging than a metronome.
Williams et al. (2020)	No	Generative functional music; passive listening	Algorithm-generated	Custom system & GSR sensors	Ad lib; single experimental session	GSR, self-reported emotion	During/Post-listening	Elevated GSR for negative pieces, lowered GSR for calm generated pieces.	Successfully induced specific emotions via AI generation.
Zajac et al. (2023)	No	Rhythmic auditory stimulation; passive listening while walking	Algorithm-adjusted tempo based on entrainment	MR-005 app & 3D foot sensors	30 min, 5x/week; 4 weeks	MDS-UPDRS III, 6MWT, PDQ-39, adverse events	Baseline, 4 Wks	Sig. improvements in motor severity, walking endurance, and quality of life.	High adherence (mean 17.2 sessions); safe, highly usable.
Zhang et al. (2025)	Board Certified MT	Wind instruments, singing, music visualizations; active	Patient-selected & Therapist-guided improvisation	Zoom video conferencing		MRC Dyspnea, CRQ Mastery, VAS, BDI, GAD-7	Bi-weekly over 16 Wks	Sig. decrease in dyspnea (MRC) and Breathing VAS; improved CRQ Mastery.	83.3% attendance rate; protocol deemed highly feasible.

Figure 4. Musical Characteristics of Included Studies, part 3. Note. MT: music therapist

Discussion

Summary of Main Findings

The aim of this scoping review was to systematically map and synthesize empirical research on smart, digital technology-delivered music interventions for health. The 30 included studies span four clinical domains and employ four primary categories of smart technology. The findings broadly confirm that these interventions are feasible and acceptable, and demonstrate preliminary evidence of efficacy across diverse populations. The following sections interpret the main findings, address comparative patterns across clinical domains, and identify knowledge gaps and future research directions.

The synthesized findings confirm that smart digital music interventions are feasible and acceptable across clinical domains, despite substantial variation in technology and outcome measures. Mobile and web applications were the most prevalent delivery modality, while AI and biosensor integration represent the most rapidly evolving area. Overall, short-term usability is well supported, but longitudinal efficacy, theoretical grounding, and ethical accountability remain underdeveloped.

The Implementation of Adaptive, Closed-Loop Systems

A notable development emerging from the included literature is the implementation of the adaptive, closed-loop systems. These tools use AI and biofeedback to respond to real-time patient states, for example, matching music tempo to gait cadence or adjusting valence to physiological stress indicators, without continuous clinician oversight (Salirrosas et al., 2026; Zajac et al., 2023). This enables individualized, responsive delivery at a scale traditional music medicine cannot achieve.. Studies such as Bai (2026) and Ma et al. (2026) reported technically sophisticated architectures capable of predicting wellbeing states with high explained variance ($R^2 = 0.87$). However, these results should be interpreted with caution, as predictive accuracy within a controlled dataset does not necessarily generalize to heterogeneous real-world clinical populations. The shift to closed-loop systems is thus both a significant technical achievement of the field and a pressing clinical challenge.

Digital Devices and Access to Care

The included studies suggest that digital tools hold significant public health implications by addressing the shortage of trained music therapists and reducing geographical access barriers. Applications such as MATCH and Tinnicare demonstrated the potential to empower patients and informal caregivers to manage symptoms independently at home, thereby extending clinical reach without requiring proportional increases in staffing resources (Chaitanya et al., 2025; Thompson et al., 2025). However, most included studies were conducted in high-income, anglophone countries, and the devices required (smartphones, EEG headsets, wearable biosensors) pose a financial barrier that may restrict access in the very settings where music therapists are most scarce. Future research should examine whether digital delivery truly reduces access inequity or merely shifts it, especially in under-resourced settings with limited device affordability and digital infrastructure (Thompson et al., 2023). Furthermore, access alone does not necessarily translate into meaningful engagement, as participation is shaped by individuals' intrinsic motivation, sense of connection, and willingness to be involved (Meetiyagoda et al., 2023). This highlights the need for future research to examine motivational and engagement-related factors that influence the effective use of digital music interventions across diverse populations.

User-Centered Design and Co-Design

Qualitative findings across included studies consistently identified intuitive interface design and data privacy as central user requirements for effective digital therapeutics (Fleszar-Pavlovic et al., 2025; Garrido et al., 2022). Users also highlighted the importance of non-clinical language and expressed concerns about gamification elements that may introduce performance-related stress (Garrido et al., 2022; Wall et al., 2026). The co-design approach documented by Garrido et al. (2022) offers a useful model, as young people prioritized anonymity, mood-tracking transparency, and the ability to disengage without penalty. Future smart music applications should therefore integrate user perspectives across all design stages, especially for clinical populations whose health conditions may complicate self-monitoring and performance evaluation.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical dimensions of smart music interventions remain largely unaddressed in the included literature. Several concerns warrant attention as the field moves from proof-of-concept to clinical deployment.

Informed consent in vulnerable populations presents a primary challenge. Many of the target groups in this review – including individuals with dementia, post-stroke aphasia, PTSD, and cognitive decline – have a reduced capacity to provide fully informed consent (Russo et al., 2023; Thompson et al., 2025). When AI systems continuously adjust music parameters in response to real-time physiological monitoring, users may be unable to adequately understand what data are being collected or how algorithmic decisions are made. Future studies should develop accessible consent frameworks suited to participants' cognitive and linguistic capacities, and address proxy consent for those unable to provide sustained autonomous authorization throughout an intervention.

A related concern is algorithmic transparency. Several studies used deep learning architectures (the CNN–LSTM hybrid in Bai, 2026; the dual-stream FAT-Net model in Ma et al., 2026; and a hidden Markov model in Williams et al., 2020) whose decision logic is not readily interpretable by clinicians or patients. Notably, none of these studies involved certified clinicians in validating the algorithms; instead, they relied on computational performance metrics and user response data. Strong average performance across a sample does not guarantee clinical accountability for individual patients. The development of interpretable AI frameworks for clinical music therapeutics is therefore an important direction for future research.

Data governance represents a third area of concern. Studies such as Ma et al. (2026) and Bai (2026) collected continuous physiological data over extended intervention periods, yet none of the included studies reported detailed data governance protocols or addressed data retention policies. Future research must address these issues within applicable regulatory frameworks, given the ethical sensitivities of biometric and emotional data in clinical and research contexts.

Finally, the risk of treatment-related harm associated with gamification and algorithmic music selection warrants careful consideration. The included literature indicates that gamification elements may induce performance-related stress in mental health applications for young people, for example due to losing winning streaks (Garrido et al., 2022). In

addition, algorithmic music selection carries the risk of inadvertently eliciting unwanted emotional responses, exposing users to non-preferred music, or reinforcing undesired mood states. (Williams et al., 2020). Future feasibility and usability studies should include robust adverse event monitoring to adequately address this risk.

Implications for Music Therapy Practice

An important pattern in the included literature is the limited involvement of qualified music therapists. Only three of the thirty included studies incorporated board-certified or credentialed music therapists as active program developers. (Fleszar-Pavlovic et al., 2025; Thompson et al., 2023, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). The remaining twenty-seven studies delivered music-based interventions through algorithm, application, or trained caregiver without professional music therapy input.

This pattern raises important questions about the appropriate scope of digital delivery in music-based care. Smart technologies demonstrably replicate certain functional dimensions of music therapy – including individualized music selection, adaptive parameter adjustment, and ongoing preference responsiveness – and hold genuine promise for populations whose primary needs are symptom management, motor rehabilitation, or accessible wellness support. However, presentations involving trauma, relational disruption, identity reconstruction, or challenges to self-worth are qualitatively distinct: they arise within human relationships and are most effectively addressed through a relational therapeutic process (Bordin, 1979; Wampold and Imel, 2015). For these populations, the therapeutic relationship is not a delivery mechanism that technology might eventually replicate – it is the treatment itself. Future research should therefore ask not whether digital tools can substitute for music therapists, but which clinical needs are well-served by digital delivery and which require human therapeutic contact.

Additionally, passive receptive listening dominated the included literature, appearing as the primary modality in the majority of studies. While still a minority approach compared to passive listening, active music engagement – including improvisation, instrument playing, singing, and movement-based music activities – was represented in several studies, particularly within contexts emphasizing specific physical rehabilitation or interactive caregiver-led care (Baur et al., 2018; Chen and Norgaard, 2024; De Nys et al., 2024; Fleszar-Pavlovic et al., 2025; Jackson et al., 2025; Thompson et al., 2023; Thompson et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). This imbalance likely reflects digital platforms' bias toward easily automated modalities: passive listening requires only a playback mechanism, whereas active music-making requires far more complex interactive systems. The clinical consequences are notable: active music engagement may produce therapeutic effects distinct from passive reception, especially in trauma recovery, identity reconstruction after neurological injury, and meaning-making in palliative care (Bruscia, 2014), effects not visible in the current digital therapeutics literature.

Limitations of Digital Therapeutics

The included literature consistently reports positive short-term outcomes, yet several structural limitations of digital therapeutics warrant consideration for responsible clinical implementation.

The therapeutic relationship is notably absent from digital delivery models. Evidence across psychological and health interventions broadly, and music therapy specifically, consistently identifies the quality of the therapeutic alliance as among the strongest predictors of clinical outcome (Norcross and Lambert, 2019; Wampold and Imel, 2015). Future research should examine how digital interventions can be embedded within clinical frameworks that preserve the relational dimensions of therapeutic work, rather than being positioned as fully autonomous treatments.

Beyond the absence of the therapeutic alliance, digital delivery may also constrain opportunities for interpersonal connection among users. As music functions as a relational medium that supports shared emotional experience and social cohesion (Jurková et al., 2025), future research should consider how digital interventions can better facilitate not only individual use but also social interaction and shared engagement.

Intervention durations across the included literature were predominantly short, with the majority of studies using periods of four weeks or less. Such timeframes suffice for evaluating acute symptom relief and immediate usability, but are inadequate for longer-term outcomes such as sustained emotion regulation, identity reconstruction after neurological injury, or relational support in dementia care. The promising preliminary results should therefore be read as evidence of feasibility and proximal efficacy, not as evidence that the full therapeutic potential of music-based intervention has been captured.

Finally, several studies successfully deployed interventions in unsupervised, naturalistic settings and reported positive outcomes (Feneberg and Nater, 2022; Zajac et al., 2023). However, therapeutic context shapes therapeutic outcome: the same musical stimulus may function differently across clinical and non-clinical settings, especially for populations with trauma histories or acute psychiatric presentations. Home-delivered digital interventions should therefore be accompanied by clearly specified clinical governance structures and accessible pathways to human clinical support.

Knowledge Gaps and Future Directions

This scoping review identifies several priority areas for future research. First, standardized outcome frameworks are needed that accommodate biomedical metrics alongside the relational and meaning-making dimensions of therapeutic change. Second, longitudinal studies are necessary to assess whether engagement and therapeutic benefits are maintained beyond short-term trial periods. Third, clinical validation of AI models is essential to ensure safety, interpretability, and the prevention of unintended emotional or physiological effects (Ma et al., 2026). Fourth, explainable AI standards appropriate to clinical music therapeutics should be developed and adopted. Fifth, clinical governance frameworks for unsupervised home delivery to vulnerable populations should be established.

Limitations of the Scoping Review

Several limitations of this scoping review warrant acknowledgment. The restriction to English-language publications may have resulted in the exclusion of relevant studies published in other languages, potentially introducing geographic and cultural bias into the evidence base. Potential publication bias cannot be excluded, as studies reporting positive findings are more likely to be published; notably, only one explicitly unsuccessful trial was

included in this review (Jackson et al., 2025), which is unlikely to reflect the true distribution of outcomes in the field. Additionally, the extreme heterogeneity of study designs, interventions, and measured outcomes precluded the conduct of a formal meta-analysis, limiting the precision of the quantitative conclusions that can be drawn. Despite these limitations, the mapping across four clinical domains and four technology categories provides a useful foundation for more rigorous, theoretically integrated future research.

Conclusion

The aim of this scoping review was to systematically map and synthesize empirical research on smart, digital technology-delivered music interventions for health. Analysis of 30 studies indicated that these interventions are feasible, acceptable, and demonstrate preliminary efficacy across psychological, physiological, and functional outcomes. The field's most significant technical development is the adaptive, closed-loop system, which adjusts musical parameters to real-time physiological data and extends responsive music-based care to settings without continuous clinician presence. This expands access rather than displacing clinical practice: while promising for symptom management and rehabilitation, these systems do not encompass the relational, identity-oriented, and trauma-informed dimensions of care that require sustained human therapeutic contact.

However, these findings should be interpreted with caution due to predominantly short-term, small-sample designs, substantial outcome heterogeneity, and potential publication bias. The current evidence base remains insufficient for widespread clinical implementation. Beyond methodological limitations, AI-driven and biosensor-integrated music therapeutics have proliferated faster than the ethical and governance frameworks needed for responsible clinical use. Issues of informed consent in cognitively vulnerable populations, algorithmic transparency, biometric data governance, and potential treatment harm from unsupervised closed-loop systems remain largely unaddressed.

Furthermore, the limited involvement of qualified music therapists across twenty-seven of the thirty studies reflects a field that has developed largely without professional music therapy input. While some studies ground digital tools in established frameworks (e.g., Neurologic Music Therapy or receptive methods), the therapeutic relationship remains structurally absent from current autonomous delivery models. Smart music technologies offer meaningful potential for accessible, personalized care, best realized through technical innovation, clinical rigor, and robust ethical oversight.

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Traditional Music *Kongkil:*

The Meaning of Philosophy and the Challenges of Contemporary Life

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Abstract

Traditional *Kongkil* music from Bungkal Village, Ponorogo, East Java, Indonesia, constitutes a form of local cultural heritage imbued with philosophical and social meaning. As a bamboo-based musical tradition employing slendro and pelog scales, *Kongkil* reflects the relationship between humans and nature while articulating values of social harmony within the community. This study aims to examine the philosophical meanings embedded in *Kongkil* music and to analyze its transformation in response to contemporary social and cultural change. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method, with data collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and literature review. The data were analyzed comparatively to identify patterns of continuity and transformation in the meaning, function, and presentation of *Kongkil* music. The findings indicate that *Kongkil* conveys moral values such as mutual cooperation, togetherness, and social justice, particularly through its lyrical content and performance practices. Although its presentation has developed through the incorporation of additional instruments, expanded performance formats, and the use of technology, its philosophical essence remains preserved. *Kongkil* continues to function as a medium of reflection, moral expression, and cultural continuity. This study concludes that the preservation of *Kongkil* music requires an adaptive and balanced approach that engages contemporary developments while sustaining the core values embedded in the tradition.

Keywords: *Traditional Kongkil Music, Philosophical Values, Cultural Heritage, Local Wisdom, Social Transformation*

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Introduction

The study and research of traditional music typically falls within the domain of intangible cultural heritage, which encompasses the ideas, understanding, values, and attitudes of the community. Culture and cultural expression within a community can be threatened by changes in the way of life, and this can occur with other traditional artifacts, both tangible and intangible (Mirsa et al., 2023). In this case, research on "Traditional *Kongkil* Music" is meritorious, provided that such research encompasses not solely sound studies but also cultural studies, scrutinized through the lens of the community's social behavior and the cultural underpinnings manifested in music (Sahira et al., 2023). This approach is consistent with the established tradition of cultural studies that conceptualizes cultural products (including visual and artistic forms) as "texts" for the purpose of comprehending the culture of the communities that sustain them (Rizki & Widyastuti, 2021), It is imperative to underscore the necessity of comprehending the intrinsic values and connotations of local culture for its preservation (Sahira et al., 2023).

In Indonesia, specifically in Bungkal Village, Ponorogo Regency, East Java Province, there are unique regional arts, including: *Reog* Ponorogo, *odrot*, and *Kongkil*. *Kongkil* music has existed in Ponorogo Regency for a long time, since the formation of the *kongkil* community in 1933. *Kongkil* music reached its peak during the leadership of Eyang Katimin. In the past, *kongkil* was used to gather the community to form strategies to resist Dutch colonial rule. However, over time, *kongkil* music is now used in weddings, village clean-up events, and entertainment. As a developing country, Indonesia is a country that preserves its culture. This includes cultures that tend towards art and culture, cultures that tend towards social community, and cultures that tend towards material and action (tradition). This is also true of the traditional culture that remains deeply ingrained in the people of Ponorogo. Literature on tourism villages and the creative economy also emphasizes that community-based tourism is often positioned as a strategy for improving welfare and preserving the environment, and is expanding as a model for development. Therefore, when *kongkil* Traditional Music is presented in festivals, tourism, or the creative industry, research needs to anticipate the tension between preserving its philosophical meaning and the demands of economic performance, which has the potential to reconfigure the social function of music (Purbadi & Lake, 2019). Every 10th of Muharram, or the Islamic New Year, especially in Ponorogo, the National Reog Festival and Cultural Exhibition are held in one event, known as *Grebeg Suro*. At the Cultural Exhibition, various cultural arts are displayed, ranging from modern cultural arts to cultural arts that are less known to the public.

The philosophical dimension of music is of pivotal importance. The philosophy of music furnishes us with a framework within which we can comprehend the essence of music, its conceptual development throughout history, and its relevance in the contemporary era (Bagaskara et al., 2024). The interpretation of the "philosophical meaning" of *kongkil* Traditional Music can be formulated through an examination of the essence and relevance of music amid socio-cultural changes, as well as through the exploration of local wisdom values. This approach aligns with other studies of traditions that trace "values and meanings" as the basis for understanding culture (Sukmawan & Putra, 2023). This framework allows research to move beyond describing forms to analyzing why and how traditional practices produce conceptions of harmony, social relations, and ethical orientations that bind communities together.

The challenges that contemporary life poses to tradition are inextricably linked to the currents of globalization and postmodernity. These forces have led to shifts in lifestyles and, more specifically, in the cultural identities of the younger generation. This transformation has occurred through the contestation of popular culture across various countries (Sukmi et al., 2023). Preserving local culture is becoming an increasingly challenging endeavor in the contemporary era. This phenomenon can be attributed to the influence of modern advances, which have provided unprecedented conveniences that encourage younger generations to prioritize contemporary culture over their own cultural heritage (Gumilar et al., 2024). In this context, the interpretation of *kongkil* Traditional Music as a living tradition necessitates an examination of the manner in which changes in preferences and contemporary cultural ecology affect the transmission of musical knowledge between generations (Maulana et al., 2025; Sukmi et al., 2023), while also emphasizing the urgency of research that positions traditional music as an arena for negotiating identity and the sustainability of values.

The extraction of "philosophical meaning" in the context of tradition research often requires the use of symbolic and interpretive reading tools. A semiotic study of the *siraman* tradition by Roland Barthes illuminates the notion that rituals transcend mere physical practices, embodying profound symbolism and cultural values that serve to fortify spiritual and social relationships (Aria, 2025; Muharromah et al., 2024). In accordance with this approach, research on Sumba textiles, specifically *hinggi* and *lau*, employs Clifford Geertz's cultural theory framework to interpret cultural artifacts as a means of comprehending the community's cultural milieu (Rizki & Widyastuti, 2021). By integrating these semiotic and interpretive horizons, the study of *kongkil* Traditional Music can be positioned to interpret musical structures, performative contexts, and community narratives as a system of signs that articulates ethics, cosmology, or concepts of social harmony.

Conversely, the existing body of literature on tradition and social harmony provides a foundation for articulating the "values" that can be potentially conveyed through cultural practices. The examination of the *Pujan Kasanga* tradition among the Tengger people highlights the significance of myths and ritual instruments in neutralizing malevolence and fostering harmony, while also reflecting the concept of equilibrium (*Rwa Bhineda*) as a practice of harmony in life (Sukmawan & Putra, 2023). Research on the values and meanings of local wisdom in traditional houses also confirms that communities maintain traditions through the continuous reproduction of values (Sahira et al., 2023; Wijaya et al., 2024). With this conceptual analogy, *kongkil*'s research can be directed to examine how musical practices construct the idea of "harmony – whether through performative rules, social relations within ensembles, or the position of music in the community's life cycle (Sahira et al., 2023; Sukmawan & Putra, 2023).

In consideration of the aforementioned landscape, the present study situates *kongkil* as a locale wherein traditional knowledge systems encounter forces of globalization, shifting preferences among younger demographics, medium transformation, and the potential for commodification through festival and tourism contexts (Akbar, 2022; Gumilar et al., 2024; Purbadi & Lake, 2019; Sukmi et al., 2023). By utilizing the foundation of music philosophy to articulate the essence and relevance of music, alongside interpretative-semiotic tools to analyze cultural sign systems, this study aims to address two needs: (1) the deepening of philosophical meaning as a basis for the preservation and understanding of cultural iden-

tity, and (2) the mapping of contemporary challenges as a foundation for a sustainability strategy that is sensitive to the negotiations of young actors and the dynamics of the arts and culture arena. Consequently, the research contribution is directed towards reinforcing the academic framework for interpreting traditional music within the context of social change, while simultaneously providing evidence-based arguments on how traditions can endure, transform, or be co-opted in contemporary life.

Research Methodology

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the philosophical meaning and contemporary challenges of *kongkil* traditional music. This approach is suitable for understanding the cultural and philosophical dimensions of traditional music, as it allows for in-depth analysis of the subject matter through detailed description and interpretation (Larasati et al., 2024; Yarbrough, 2003).

This study focuses on traditional *kongkil* music at the Martopuro *kongkil* Music Association, Bungkal Village, Bungkal District, Ponorogo Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia. The method used in this study is qualitative, with the aim of exploring the philosophical meaning contained in *kongkil* music in Ponorogo Regency.

Data collection involved various methods to ensure a rich and nuanced understanding of *kongkil* traditional music. A comprehensive review of existing literature on traditional music, with a focus on historical texts, previous research studies, and relevant philosophical treatises. Observations were made during performances and documented kongkil performances.

In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants such as Sodikun (57), who is the head of the *kongkil* music community; Katmura (42), a singer *(sinden kongkil)*; Sarjono (54), a cultural expert from Ponorogo Regency; and Kabul (68), an elder of the community.

The collected data will be analyzed using a combination of comparative analysis. Comparing findings from different data sources to identify patterns and differences. This helps in understanding how the philosophical meaning of kongkil music has evolved over time and how contemporary challenges are being addressed.

Results and Discussion

Kongkil Traditional Music in Ponorogo Society

Kongkil is a fairly old musical art form. The leader of the *kongkil* group in Bungkal Village, Kabul, stated that this art form is over 80 years old. He said that in ancient times, iron was scarce, so the ancestors sought something that could be used as a musical instrument. So they found bamboo, and they made angklung. *Kongkil* was first discovered in Padas Village, Bungkal District, Ponorogo Regency, and was discovered or created by a Javanese artist named Toinangun around 1928. From the Toinangun era, *kongkil* music changed hands for the first time in the 1940s. Several players had to be replaced because they had reached old age. Around 2000, kongkil artists were inactive, even nearly extinct. At that time, there was no successor generation capable of managing the music group. With the support of the Bungkal community, *kongkil* was revived in 2012. Sodikun has been the group's leader until now.

In the village of Bungkal, a special type of bamboo was once used to make angklung musical instruments for *kongkil* music, but that bamboo is now extinct. Meanwhile, drums are made from jackfruit wood, and there are many drum craftsmen. According to Sodikun, making musical instruments cannot be done every day. Typically, certain days are set aside for making instruments. Nowadays, *kongkil* can only be found in the village of Bungkal Ponorogo in the hamlet of Kudo, and even then, there is only one group called Kyai Martopuro. This group was founded in 1938 by Mbah Marto (Marto's grandfather) and died in 1987. In addition to a set of *Reog* instruments, his legacy is a *kongkil* that is still intact and well-maintained.

When it first appeared, *kongkil* music was an instrument made from bamboo slats that had been processed to produce beautiful tones. *Kongkil* music was used in ancient times to gather people together to strategize resistance against the Dutch. "During the Dutch colonial period, it was difficult for people to gather, so this art form was created so as not to arouse suspicion (Interview with Sodikun, 2022) as the head of the *kongkil* music community. The residents' initial response to the commencement of the *kongkil* music performance was to convene, thereby facilitating the formulation of their strategy. Additionally, the *gendhing* or songs performed at that time served to galvanize the residents' fervor to engage in combat against the Dutch colonizers (Rahayuningsih & Santoso, 2020). Meanwhile, since the art of *kongkil* was passed on by Mbah Sarjono in 1960 when Indonesia had already gained its independence, *gendhing* or songs were presented as entertainment for the people. Currently, all kongkil musical instruments are stored at Mbah Marto's residence. According to Katmura, a *sinden* or singer who is also a local resident, sometimes in order to perform *Kongkil*, one must first ask permission from the late Mbah Marto so that he will be pleased and ward off bad luck (Interview with Katmura, 2022).



Figure 1. Kongkil was born in 1933, when the Dutch colonial government prohibited the people of Ponorogo from gathering (Photo source: Album of Traditional Music Instruments (Ministry of Education and Culture, Directorate General of Culture, Project of Cultural Media Development, Indonesia, 1995).

The function of *kongkil* music today is as entertainment that conveys positive moral messages to the general public, because the lyrics of *kongkil* songs contain advice about the importance of cooperation, togetherness, and good relations between neighbors. Due to changing times, *kongkil* music has become less popular, especially among teenagers. Now, efforts are being made to bring *kongkil* music up to date. Other instruments, such as the *gong*, *bonang*, and *kempul*, are now added to the performance. Sinden or singers are also present to add to the excitement.

Kongkil Music Performance

Kongkil music in Bungkal is played by 8-10 people, namely one person playing the *kongkil*, one person playing the drum, one person playing the gong, one person playing the kenong, one person playing the saron, one person playing the demung, and the rest are singers (wirosuoro or sinden). The clothing often worn in *kongkil* performances is black, typically referred to as pakaian waktu (Ponorogan clothing) or Ponorogo Cash Clothing. It is similar to Javanese gamelan or karawitan music performances, except for the musical instruments. *Kongkil* music consists of several parts, including the opening, the song, and the closing. This traditional music has a main instrument, the *kongkil* (similar to the angklung instrument), which is accompanied by other instruments with notation following the saron. The following is the structure of kongkil music performance:

Buka (Opening)

The opening of a *kongkil* music performance is marked by the playing of the *kongkil* instrument, which means that the performance is about to begin. When the opening is played, the audience will immediately prepare themselves and calm down, so that the *kongkil* music performance can begin.

Song

Song/ The song contains melodies with lyrics that contain advice on the theme presented by the host.

Panutup (Closing)

Closing contains melodies with *pepeling* lyrics or warnings not to abandon worship.

Kongkil music has a tone system consisting of five sounds, namely: *ro, lu, mo, nem,* and *ji*, which are assigned the numbers 2, 3, 5, 6, and 1, respectively, according to the order of the tones in the scale.

ro	*lu*	*mo*	*nem*	*ji*
2	*3*	*5*	*6*	*1*

Figure 2. The tone system used in kongkil music.

Of the five tones under consideration, one is designated the slendro tone, referring to the traditional pentatonic scale frequently employed in gamelan music in Indonesia. The slendro scale exhibits relatively fixed intervals between each tone, thereby engendering a harmony that is emblematic of traditional Indonesian music (Sudarsono, 2017).

The present study proposes expanding the *kongkil* tone system into a pelog scale, thereby creating a more varied form of *kongkil* music. This expansion is achieved by the addition

of two additional angklungs, which enables the pelog scale with its seven tones and wider and more complex intervals than the slendro scale. The resultant kongkil system thus enables a more diverse and rich musical expression (Setiawan, 2019). This modification resulted in a shift in *kongkil*'s musical constellation from a rudimentary pentatonic scale to a more varied one, thereby facilitating the development of more intricate compositions. The following example illustrates the transcription of musical instrument notation for *Kongkil* in *Gendhing Angkleng*:

```
j .    j 2  j .    j .    j 2  j 3  j 2 3  j 5 .
 6          5                   5
j 3    j .  j 3    j .    j 5  j 1  j 5 3  j 6 .
 2          5                   6
j 3    j .  j 3    j .    j 3  j 1  j 3 6  j 6 1
 6          6                   6
j 2    j 3  j 2    j .    j 2  j 3  j 2 3  j 1 1
 1          1                   1
j 2    j 3  j 2    j .    j 2  j 3  j 2 1  j 1 3
 1          1                   1
j 2    j 3  j 2    j 2    j 3  j 6  j 3 5  j 6 3
 1          1                   5

J 3    j 6  j 3    j 6    j 3  j 6  j 3 5  j 6 .
 5          5                   2
j 5 .        j 5 .      j 6 .        j 2 .
j 3 5     j 6 .       j 2 3       g 5 .
```

Figure 3. illustrates the notation of *gendhing angkleng* (The transcription was completed by the author in 2022).

The notation above is an example of the transcription of *kongkil* notation in the accompaniment of *gendhing angkleng*. The symbol (j) "jim" is a term for a dead beat. The symbol (.) is a beat symbol. The symbol (g) is a strike on the gong. The notation is not written in its entirety because *kongkil* artists generally use their feelings and memory, and there is no notation deliberately written to play the music. This is how the composer works, especially on original instruments from previous generations, and there is no written notation (interview with Sodikun). This is different from the Western notation system, which is organized in terms of the number of beats, for example, 4/4, 3/4, 6/8, with a regular tempo. Traditional *kongkil* music emphasizes flowing music according to the needs of the performance. The tempo of the music also changes according to the leader of the musical instruments, namely the kendang instrument.

In a kongkil music performance, there are several people whose job is to clap their hands in time with the music. In almost all instruments, this is considered a sweetener and a compliment. In addition, there are also shouts (a kind of special shout) to liven up the atmosphere. Every performance has a set order of songs to be sung. From the opening to the closing, the order is arranged in such a way that the gendhing performance can be enjoyed to the fullest.



Figure 3. *Kongkil* Music Performance in 2022 (Author, 2022).

The Philosophical Meaning of *Kongkil* Music

Traditional music often contains deep philosophical and cultural meanings, serving as a medium for expressing and preserving the values, beliefs, and identity of a community. For example, traditional music among the Yunnan Bai ethnic group in China contains narratives that instill cultural values and strengthen a deep sense of community (Dfa & Su, 2024). Similarly, *Jonggan* music from the Dayak *Kanayatn* tribe in West Kalimantan is not just dance accompaniment, but a core element that conveys symbolic meaning and strengthens collective identity (Olendo, 2025). These examples demonstrate how traditional music, including *Kongkil*, serves as a cultural medium that connects people to their heritage, social values, and communal identity.

The traditional music of Ponorogo, Indonesia, particularly '*Karawitan*' music, occupies a significant position within the cultural and social framework of the community. This musical form is firmly rooted in local traditions and serves as a conduit for articulating diverse facets of life, encompassing both religious and social values. These values play a pivotal role in

fortifying community resilience by disseminating strategies for confronting the pandemic and nurturing a sense of optimism and solidarity among community members (Hanif & Sri Maruti, 2024). This is also found in the presentation of *kongkil* music. *Kongkil* music is a traditional music genre whose instruments are made from five pieces of bamboo arranged and hung on a support pole, a unique feature found only in Bungkal Village, Ponorogo Regency, East Java. The *Kongkil* musical instrument is similar to the angklung musical instrument found in West Java. However, the difference lies in that *kongkil* music employs the Javanese pentatonic scale system, specifically *slendro* and *pelog*, whereas angklung utilizes the diatonic scale. The name kongkil is based on the sound produced by the instrument itself, which when played produces the sound *kol...kol...kil...kil...kil...kol. Kongkil* was a way to facilitate the situation at that time to gather residents to make strategies.

In *Kongkil* music, several semiotic elements have specific meanings that have developed since the music was first created. Modernization has been influenced by the instruments and songs that have been presented. The following is an explanation of several philosophical meanings of kongkil musical instruments:



Figure 4. Musical Instrument Gong (author, 2022).

The Javanese gong, an important instrument in traditional Javanese music, carries deep symbolic meaning. The concept of *rasa* is essential to understanding the aesthetic and emotional expression in Javanese music. *Rasa* encompasses a range of meanings, including taste, feeling, mood, and deep understanding, and is crucial in the context of Javanese traditional music and culture. This concept underscores the intricate relationship between musical expression and cultural identity in Javanese society (Benamou, 2010). Every time *kongkil* music is played, it always ends with the sound of a gong (*gung*) from a gong instrument. They believe that every human being will die and return to God Almighty. Therefore, humans should not be *arrogant* or *conceited*. This means that the older a person is, the more knowledge they possess, the greater their power, and the more humble they should be.



Figure 5. Kenong musical instrument (author, 2022).

The *Kenong* musical instrument, in *kongkil* music, serves not only as an instrument accompanying performances, but also as a means of expressing profound philosophical values. When the kenong is played, the sound it produces, "*nung*" has a strong symbolic meaning, namely "*dumunung*." This word means that every individual is reminded to always be aware of the path of life that must be followed in accordance with religious guidance. In this context, the sound "nung" is not just a musical sound, but a spiritual symbol that inspires listeners to reflect on the greater direction and purpose of life. This illustrates how, in Javanese culture, music and spirituality are inextricably linked, where every sound, including those produced by the kenong, conveys a profound moral message.

In the *Kongkil* musical tradition, the kenong functions as a medium for conveying abstract life values, particularly in the context of religious doctrine. The "*nung*" sound produced by the *kenong* is imbued with philosophical significance, serving as a reminder of self-awareness and the importance of living in accordance with religious teachings. This perspective aligns with the Javanese conception of music as a means of communication with a higher power. This paper sets out a definition of the term 'big data,' discusses its characteristics, and goes on to consider the implications of its use in a variety of contexts. In accordance with (de Vries, 2009; Sedyawati, 2008), which asserts that within numerous Indonesian musical traditions, most notably gamelan, a profound correlation between auditory phenomena and abstract significance exists; namely, the manner in which sonic qualities and rhythmic patterns influence the internal emotional and psychological state of the listener. Consequently, Kenong assumes not solely an aesthetic function in *kongkil* music performances, but also embodies a spiritual aspect that exerts a profound influence on individuals' perspectives concerning life and religion.



Figure 6. Musical instrument Kendhang (author, 2022).

The *Kendhang* musical instrument in traditional *kongkil* Ponorogo music plays a significant role in setting the rhythm and creating a spiritual atmosphere for the performance. When the *Kendang* is played, the rhythm produced with sounds such as *"tak, ndhang tak, ndhang ndhang tak, tak tung tak det det det"* has a meaning that goes beyond just musical rhythm. This sound contains a profound message, calling on listeners to repent immediately or "*ndhang*" in Javanese, which means to make a quick and profound change in oneself. In Ponorogo culture, which is rich in spiritual and religious traditions, every element of music, including the sound produced by the *kendhang*, is understood as a spiritual instruction that invites listeners to be more aware and improve themselves.

This phenomenon can be further understood by referring to ethnomusicological research which shows that in the tradition of gamelan and traditional Javanese music, each rhythm is often associated with a moral message or an invitation to introspection. When the *kendhang* produces these rhythmic sounds, it not only adds dynamism to the performance, but also serves as a spiritual reminder for the people of Ponorogo to engage in self-introspection and immediately repent. As elucidated by Soedarsono (2000), in numerous traditional musical rituals, particularly in Ponorogo, musical instruments such as the *kendhang* function as a conduit of communication between the physical and spiritual realms. Each percussive iteration possesses a profound significance and conveys a message that transcends the purely musical domain (Lombard, 2012; Soedarsono, 2000). Therefore, in Ponorogo *Kongkil* music, the kendhang serves a dual function: it accompanies the performance and fortifies the community's spiritual consciousness.

The Philosophical Meaning of Kongkil Music

Music often reflects and preserves the cultural identity and social values of a community. A salient illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in the practices of the Yupno tribe in Papua New Guinea, where a short melodic motif known as *konggap* is utilized to express personal identity and social relationships, thereby establishing a connection between singers and the ancestral world (Ammann et al., 2013). An analogous example of commu-

nity resilience and determination can be found in the Jaran Kepang dance of Javanese culture, where the accompanying music amplifies the performance's overall spirit (Nugraheni & Eko Wardani, 2025). Gendhing Angkleng is one of the original songs of traditional *kongkil* music. This song is a musical work rich in philosophical values embedded in each verse. In its cultural context, *kongkil* is not merely entertainment or a form of artistic expression, but also a means of conveying the worldview of the people who understand it. Every element in this music, be it the lyrics, rhythm, or harmony, speaks of a harmony that involves not only relationships between humans, but also with nature and the surrounding environment. The philosophy contained in *kongkil* can be seen as a form of reflection on life based on the principle of interconnectedness – inviting listeners to reflect on the importance of balance between individuals, society, and the universe.

More profoundly, *Kongkil* also describes a spiritual journey that is not immediately apparent, but is felt in its beats and melodies. Each element in this song reflects the social values that have developed in the local community, such as mutual cooperation, respect for nature, and the importance of maintaining harmonious social relationships (Hardianto et al., 2025; Machingura, 2022). This aligns with a philosophy of life that values appreciation for existing traditions and history. *Kongkil* serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving cultural heritage and maintaining balance in daily life, while also emphasizing that music can be a reflection and reinforcement of the values that exist in society. The following is an excerpt from the lyrics:

Pring podo pring mas
Dirakit dadi kongkil
Iling pada iling mas
Tindak laku adil

Table below shows the meaning of the song lyrics.

Song Lyrics	***Translation***
Pring podo pring mas	This verse symbolizes that the material that is easy to find at that time is bamboo/bamboo. The characteristics of one bamboo and another bamboo have differences that make bamboo/bamboo easy to make variations.
Dirakit dadi kongkil	At that time, the bamboo was then made into an arrangement of musical instruments called *konkil music.* The name *kongkil* comes from the sound of bamboo at that time, namely *kong-kil-kong-kil*, which was later used as the name of the music.
Iling pada iling mas	Remind others of that moment when they want to make a war strategy. From these verses, people understand the importance of remembering each other.
Tindak laku adil	Being human must be fair without favoritism between others. These words indirectly satirized and denounced the colonizers who did not have conscience and justice at that time.

Figure 7. Table of lyrics meanings.

Here is a more in-depth translation analysis of the lyrics of the song above, with an emphasis on the cultural and social context contained in each line:

Pring podo pring mas (line 1)
These lyrics reflect how bamboo (bamboo) became a material that was very easy to find at that time, both in terms of the number and diversity of types. Bamboo itself has unique characteristics, in which each bamboo stem, even if it comes from the same type, still has differences in terms of size, strength, and shape. This diversity provides an opportunity for people to utilize bamboo as a flexible material, which can be processed into various tools, including musical instruments. From here, bamboo becomes a symbol of diversity that can adapt and change shape as needed, reflecting the human ability to innovate with available natural resources.

Dirakit dadi kongkil (line 2)
This poem tells how the bamboos are arranged and assembled into a conkle musical instrument, which is a typical cultural product. The name "*kongkil*" itself is derived from the sound produced by bamboo when struck or vibrated, specifically "*kong-kil-kong-kil,*" the distinctive sound that gives the music its identity. In other words, the sound is a direct representation of the name and essence of this music. It illustrates how traditional culture can evolve from the use of natural elements and how the sounds of nature, in simple forms such as bamboo, can be transformed into a more structured art form that contains meaning and serves a purpose in everyday life.

Iling pada iling mas (line 3)
These lyrics serve as an invitation to remind one another. Not only in the context of everyday social relations, but it can also be interpreted as a call for preparedness in the face of larger situations, such as war strategies. In traditional cultures, maintaining mutually reminding relationships is an important principle in maintaining group harmony and solidarity. Thus, this poem becomes a symbol of the importance of collective awareness and readiness to face challenges, where each individual has the responsibility to remind each other, maintain order and balance in the community.

Tindak laku adil (line 4)
This line implies a moral teaching that emphasizes the importance of being fair in life, regardless of circumstances. Implicitly, this poem also denounces the unjust treatment of the colonizers who dominated and oppressed the people at that time. In this context, justice is not just a moral value, but also a criticism of the injustices that occur, which are felt by the oppressed society. These lyrics not only teach that justice must be upheld in daily life, but also serve as a call to fight against oppression by fighting for the basic rights and dignity of every individual, without discrimination or favoritism.

Through these lyrics, we see a subtle but clear form of social criticism. Each line carries a message that is more than just words, reflecting the social and political realities of the time, as well as how traditional societies utilized music as a medium to convey profound moral and social messages.

The Presentation of Kongkil Traditional Music in the Challenges of Contemporary Life
Traditional kongkil music, which originated in Bungkal Village, Ponorogo, faces a major challenge in maintaining its relevance amid contemporary life dominated by modern-

ization. Nevertheless, *kongkil* still plays an important role in strengthening local cultural identity and conveying social and spiritual messages to the community. Like other traditional music, *kongkil* serves not only as entertainment, but also as a medium to remind the community of the values of mutual cooperation, social justice, and spiritual awareness. This study found that despite changes in *kongkil's* instruments and repertoire due to the influence of modernization, the philosophical essence and moral meaning of each performance can still be preserved and remain relevant to the challenges of the times (Hanif and Sri Maruti, 2024).

The presentation of *kongkil* music in contemporary life cannot be separated from the influence of technology and globalization, which can affect the way people access and appreciate traditional culture. *Kongkil*, with its bamboo instruments and use of the slendro and pelog scales, symbolizes the close connection between humans and nature. The lyrics in *kongkil* songs, such as *"Tindak laku adil"* (Act fairly) and *"Iling pada iling mas"* (Be mindful, my friend), contain profound meanings that encourage people to introspect and improve themselves in the face of social and moral injustices that often occur in everyday life. *Kongkil* music serves as a reminder that justice and collective consciousness must be maintained in the face of increasingly complex social and political challenges (Machingura, 2022).

However, over time, *kongkil* has not been limited to accompanying rituals or traditional events, but has begun to be adapted into more modern forms, such as cultural concerts and art festivals. This shows that *kongkil* can adapt to the changing times without losing its philosophical meaning. Changes in the presentation of *kongkil*, such as the incorporation of technology into performances, provide an opportunity to introduce this music to younger generations who are more accustomed to digital entertainment. However, despite adaptations in form and presentation, the moral values contained in *kongkil*, such as respect for nature, togetherness, and justice, remain the main message to be conveyed to audiences and the wider community (Sedyawati, 2008).

In summary, although *kongkil* has undergone a transformation in its presentation, it remains relevant in contemporary life as a means of conveying profound moral and social messages. *Kongkil* music serves as a reminder of the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature, preserving the values of mutual cooperation, and fighting for social justice in society. In this context, *kongkil* is not merely traditional entertainment, but also a medium for strengthening social and spiritual awareness in the face of increasingly complex challenges. *Kongkil* music, with all its philosophical meaning, remains an integral part of cultural heritage that needs to be preserved and appreciated by future generations.

Conclusion

Traditional *kongkil* music, originating from Bungkal Village, Ponorogo, is a cultural heritage rich in philosophical significance. Historically, this music served as a tool to strengthen the collective spirit of the community, especially during the Dutch colonial period. The existence of *kongkil*, which is made from bamboo and utilizes the *slendro* and *pelog* scales, illustrates the close relationship between humans and nature, as well as the maintenance of social harmony within the community. Its original strategic function in the resistance has now evolved into a means of entertainment that conveys moral messages, such as mutual cooperation, togetherness, and social justice. However, despite its deep philosophical meaning, *kongkil* now faces major challenges due to globalization and changing prefer-

ences among the younger generation. These changes are evident in the adaptation of more modern musical instruments and repertoires, such as the incorporation of gongs, bonang, and kempul instruments, as well as the utilization of *sinden* in performances. This demonstrates that *kongkil* serves not only as cultural entertainment but also as an arena where local wisdom values intersect with the challenges of the times. The moral values contained in the lyrics of *kongkil* songs remain an important element that mediates the continuity of this culture in a broader context.

Transformations in the presentation of *kongkil* in line with modernization and social change are inevitable. However, its philosophical meaning is preserved because the essence of *kongkil* as a medium for reflecting on life, maintaining social harmony, and voicing moral appeals is not lost in the process of change. The use of technology and larger art festivals allow *kongkil* to reach a wider audience, while still promoting the noble values inherited from ancestors.

Kongkil, with all its transformations and adaptations, remains relevant as a reminder of the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, as well as reaffirming the moral messages contained in tradition. This research provides an understanding that even though this music has undergone changes in form, the philosophical values it contains remain the core that must be preserved. Therefore, the sustainability of *kongkil* as a form of local cultural preservation needs to be continued with a wise approach, recognizing contemporary challenges and fostering awareness of the importance of preserving culture in modern life.

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The Promotion & Preservation of the Klong Luang Lanna Drum Competition

as an Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

The Klong Luang Lanna drum holds profound cultural significance in Northern Thailand, yet the tradition currently faces systemic threats that jeopardize its long-term sustainability. This research employs an ethnomusicological approach combined with Participatory Action Research (PAR) to investigate the cultural roots and support its recognition as national intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Key findings reveal critical historical evidence through archival photography and identify a significant inflationary trend in drum scale, indicating a transition from ritualistic use to competitive display. The study further analyzes internal and external threats, including declining youth participation. To ensure cultural sustainability, this research proposes a multidimensional framework involving community-led organizations, digital storytelling, and formal ICH registration. Ultimately, this study contributes a strategic roadmap for safeguarding sonic heritage, bridging traditional community practices with contemporary urban cultural policy.

Keywords: *Ethnomusicology, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Community Participation, Cultural Sustainability, Lanna Culture, Heritage Transmission*

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Introduction

The promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is not merely a process of preservation but a vital mechanism for cultural sustainability and the continuity of national identity. This approach serves to recognize and honor participating communities, fostering pride and leading to the continuous revival of knowledge. In Thailand, this concept has been continuously implemented and promoted. Government agencies have consistently and seriously established guidelines and emphasized the importance of studying the values and knowledge in various dimensions of the nation's intangible cultural heritage.

Furthermore, Modern societal changes and economic pressures have led to the reconfiguration of cultural practices. The Klong Luang Lanna tradition, once central to community life, now faces existential threats significant challenges from global disruptions particular, the COVID-19 pandemic which have altered the socio-economic landscape of Northern Thailand. Consequently, ongoing impacts on how these communities organize and sustain their cultural activities. The forecast by the Comptroller General's Department (2020:1-2) regarding economic stability in Chiang Rai Province for the year 2020, with an annual inflation rate of 0.1 percent, is considered reliable. This prediction is shaped by heightened consumer spending caution due to various risk factors, such as the ongoing spread of the COVID-19 virus, political conflicts, potential disruptions in agricultural production from natural disasters, and air pollution (haze) challenges.

Therefore, the researchers recognize that promoting and conserving national cultural heritage can mitigate cultural threats and foster sustainable development, enhancing both cultural richness and economic value. Thai society remains largely rooted in rural community structures characterized by mutual support and strong social cohesion. These factors serve as a shield against rapidly occurring social changes. By integrating community participation as a tool for consolidating community strength in education, development, and advancement, it not only enhances collective knowledge but also develops self-management skills to effectively utilize related resources for maximum benefit in their activities. As noted by Adom (2017), successful cultural preservation is fundamentally grounded in community-led initiatives rather than top-down approaches.

The Klong Luang Lanna Drum Competition, which is popular among the people of northern Thailand or Lanna, especially the Tai Yong[1] ethnic group in Lamphun and Chiang Mai provinces, historically spread to Chiang Rai province through population migration. This socio-cultural phenomenon is particularly evident in the Tai Yong communities of Chiang Rai and Lamphun provinces, where the Lanna drum competition serves as a primary site for cultural negotiation. Traditionally, this practice functioned as a musical skill competition in which each drum represented a community. However, today this tradition is increasingly at risk of disappearing due to contemporary socio-cultural changes. Field observations indicate that previously, Tai Yong people commonly sought to purchase traditional musical instruments, including the drums and other percussion instruments, which were kept and regularly used in community temples. These instruments functioned as sonic symbols of community prestige within Buddhist rituals. The Klong Luang, in this context, transcends its musical function becomes a metaphor for collective identity and communal pride among the Tai Yong people. Following ritual processions, villagers would bring their community drums to compete, assessing which temple's drum produced the loudest and most melodious sound. Prior to each competition, teams devise ingenious techniques to

enhance the drum sound, which are regarded as closely guarded secrets, in order to produce distinctive sounds and outperform their competitors. At the end of the competition, the winning team receives prize money and brings prestige to their temple and community. The tradition of the Klong Luang Lanna Drum Competition is typically held annually from April to May each year. This period enables family members working elsewhere to return home, making it an important occasion for family reunions and collective cultural participation. These processes are dynamic, involving both systematic thinking and cultural dimensions, as Anan Ganjanapan (2019:208-209) noted:

> "They demonstrate the value of humanity, with integrated thinking that views connections in a contextual and relational manner, avoiding rigid dichotomies. There is a dynamic process of learning, creativity, innovation, and adaptation within local communities, influenced by social and environmental contexts that differ across settings. This aligns with educational concepts in ethnomusicology, where music is shaped by human experience. Therefore, studying music within cultural contexts requires ongoing exploration of cultural contexts unique to each community."

Ultimately, this research seeks to address the tension between the preservation of ancient traditions and ongoing urbanization in Northern Thailand. By examining the Klong Luang Lanna through the framework of cultural sustainability, the study aims to connect traditional community practices with contemporary urban policy frameworks. Accordingly, the study proposes to integrate traditional practices with modern policy approaches by proposing sustainable strategies for the Klong Luang Lanna competition. This approach provides a practical roadmap for local custodians to navigate contemporary challenges while ensuring that the sonic heritage of the Tai Yong remains a vital and enduring element of regional identity.

Background

The previous studies on the Klong Luang Lanna Drum have been limited in scope. Nevertheless, there are several studies that serve as foundational references to advance contemporary research, such as 'History of Wat Phra Phutthabat Tak Pha, Lamphun Province' by the Fine Art Department (1989:52-87). This book narrates the history of Wat Phra Phutthabat Tak Pha from ancient until 1989. The section pertinent to the Lanna Drum provides detailed information from a key informant, Phra Khru We-lu-wan-phithak, the abbot of Wat Phra Phutthabat Tak Pha. He possesses extensive knowledge of various types of Lanna drums and actively works to preserve this knowledge. The research document titled 'Siang Klong Song Fang Lum Nam Mae Raming: Klong-Luang' by Chusit Chuchati (1989:6-15) examines the appearance and role of the Klong-Luang as a central element of agrarian society, reflecting unity within each group. It explores the collaborative efforts centered around monastic leadership in fostering community cohesion. The thesis by Ronnachit Manmalai (1994:40-131) focuses on the roles, situations, and development of the Klong Luang Lanna Drum, including its sound system and the key elements that define its acoustic characteristics. The study area covers Lamphun and Chiang Mai provinces. Additionally, the study by the Cultural Council of Lamphun Province (2006:1-31) examines local wisdom, associated rituals and beliefs, roles in competitions, and the benefits of such competitions within the cultural context. These studies align with the concepts of Bruno Nettl (2005:139) who argues that in ethnomusicology, fieldwork is a principal theoretical concept and is seldom

framed within broader methodological discussions. Ethnomusicologists often require practical tools, including audio recording, photography, video documentation, and terminology collection. Therefore, earlier ethnomusicological writings on fieldwork emphasize hands-on practice. However, the studies by the Fine Art Department (1989), Ronnachit Manmalai (1994), and the Cultural Council of Lamphun Province (2006) all conclude similarly on the evolution of the Lanna Drum's characteristics. They divide this evolution into three periods: the ancient period (circa A.D. 1802 – 1884), the middle period (circa A.D. 1885 – 1957), and the modern period (A.D. 1958 to the present).

Conceptual Framework

Through a collaborative partnership between community members and researchers, this study facilitated the codification of traditional knowledge and its transmission mechanisms. The research team jointly conducted a SWOT analysis to evaluate environmental threats and internal vulnerabilities. Subsequently, they developed and proposed strategies to promote and safeguard cultural heritage wisdom, aiming to apply the findings in both direct and indirect ways to provide tangible benefits to the heritage custodians and the academic community.

Methodology

This research study is a qualitative investigation utilizing ethnomusicological methods, Participatory Action Research (PAR), and SWOT Analysis. The research methodology is detailed as follows: The study utilizes purposive sampling to select regions with significant cultural heritage, focusing on two areas: Mae Chan District in Chiang Rai Province, where the study seeks to uncover information on the current situation, threats, and cultural promotion efforts, and Pa Sang District in Lamphun Province, where the focus is on studying local knowledge, cultural context, and historical background of the Lanna Drum tradition. Data collection was facilitated through triangulation, employing audio recording devices, cameras, semi-structured interview guides, observation forms, and discussions guides. The data analysis process for cultural knowledge and its transmission includes: reviewing primary information from documents, conducting field visits to explain objectives and establish local working groups, collecting field data, creating a knowledge base, verifying data for accuracy, studying the factors threatening Klong Luang Lanna Drum tradition, and exploring ways to promote and preserve the cultural heritage. Data collection methods include document review, field data collection, interviews, and facilitating discussion forums. The study protocol strictly adhered to ethical standards and was submitted for human research ethics approval to the Human Research Ethics Office at Chiang Rai Rajabhat University. It received exemption approval with the certification number COE.P1-005/2566 and the research project number P1-005/2566.

History of the Klong Luang Lanna Drum Competition

The study of the history of the Klong Luang Lanna Drum indicates a paucity of documented evidence, and there are no records indicating. Most of what is known is based on inference and oral historiography. However, previous studies suggest a consensus that the Klong Luang Lanna Drum evolved from the *"Klong Aeo Drum."* Historically, villagers used the Klong Aeo Drum alongside the gongs and cymbals to create rhythmic music for dance processions and merit-making activities for Buddhist temples, known as "*Hae Khrua Tan*. This tradition remains significant in Lanna and continues to be practiced today.

Therefore, the enlargement of the *Klong Aeo Drum* led to its designation as "the Klong Luang." The term "Klong" denotes a drum, while "Luang" in the Lanna dialect means "large." Thus, this type of large drum is referred to as the "*Klong Luang*." Ethnohistorical data suggests that the cultural origins of the Klong Luang Lanna community trace back to people displaced from Mong Yawng, Myanmar, who settled in Pa Sang District, Lamphun Province between 1816 and 1852. Regarding the use of the Klong Luang Drum in competitions and cultural festivities, its exact origin remains unclear due to limited documentation. However, it is inferred that the tradition began as an informal competitive display among participants to determine whose drum produced the loudest sound. Over time, this evolved into a sustained and popular community tradition. Subsequently, competition standards such as judging criteria, rhythmic patterns, and drum size regulations were developed and standardized. This evolution from a 'playful challenge' to a 'standardized competition' reflects the formalization of community identity, where musical excellence became a measurable indicator of village prestige.

Historically, the most prominent figure with extensive knowledge and involvement in the Klong Luang Drum was Phra Khru Weluwanphithak (1929-2005). He was renowned for his expertise in crafting the Klong Luang Drum and played a crucial role in its promotion and development. According to oral accounts documented by the Fine Arts Department (1989:69) Phra Khru Weluwanphithak provided insights into the origins of the Klong Luang Lanna Drum, stating:

> "The Klong Luang Drum has been around for approximately 80 years. A craftsman named Nan-luang from Thung Tum Village, San Pa Tong District, Chiang Mai Province, was the first to create it. The drum's face measures 20 inches in diameter and is about 140 inches, which was larger than the typical Klong Aeo Drum of that time. Initially, it was offered to Phra Khru Phutthiwongsa Thada of Wat Chang Khao Noi for use in processions and competitions, where it quickly gained popularity among the local community. Consequently, others emulated this design and developed larger drums, ranging from 22 to 26 inches in diameter, with the largest measuring 28 inches in diameter and 130 inches in length." (Fine Arts Department, 1989:69).

Based on the oral accounts documented by Phra Khru Weluwanphithak, the researchers speculates that the craftsman Nan-luang likely witnessed or was familiar with the use of the Klong Luang Drum or drums of a similar nature in processions. This exposure likely inspired him to create larger drums. Therefore, such design concepts likely existed before 1909. However, the researchers identified historical documents containing archival photographs documenting the Klong Luang Lanna Drum Competition in the area, as below.

Figure 1 presents an archival image captured by the renowned Japanese photographer Kakiji Yagi, whose portfolio extensively documents the socio-cultural landscape of early twentieth-century Chiang Mai. This copy, provided by Sukhon Yagi, offers valuable visual evidence of a drum competition in progress. The photograph suggests that the Klong Luang Lanna tradition had already reached a high level of institutional maturity before 1919. Furthermore, the image reveals important organological and logistical details, illustrating the traditional method of transporting large drums on wooden carts, with the instruments securely lashed using heavy ropes contrasting sharply with the mechanized trailers used in contemporary practice.



Figure 1. Reproduced historical photograph of the Klong Luang Lanna Drum Competition at Wat Phra That Haripunchai, (1919). (Source: Yagi, 2024).

In summary, the Klong Luang Lanna Drum Competition has endured for over a century in the districts of Pa Sang (Lamphun) and San Pa Tong (Chiang Mai). Early records from 1919 suggest that these events indicate that platform for artistic virtuosity, where communities showcased their musical prowess to enhance the reputation of their respective temples. However, the tradition experienced a temporary decline around 1937. However, the tradition experienced a temporary decline around 1937 due to shifts in national governance and the socio-economic impacts of the Sino-Japanese War. A significant cultural revitalization occurred in 1957, led by Phra Khru Weluwanphithak at Wat Phra Phutthabat Tak Pha, paving the way for a large-scale resurgence in 1982. Today, the tradition has evolved into a cornerstone of Lamphun's cultural identity, remaining a vibrant and competitive form of living heritage that continues to foster community solidarity.



Figure 2. A contemporary Klong Luang Lanna drum mounted on a mobile trailer with repurposed automotive tires, reflecting modern logistical adaptation. Source: Authors (2024).

From figure 2, this image illustrates a significant evolution in the material culture of the Klong Luang Lanna. Departing from traditional bullock carts, contemporary practitioners now use mechanized trailers equipped with automotive tires to facilitate mobility in urban contexts. This technological adaptation reflects the community's strategic effort to integrate traditional competitive practices with modern infrastructure, ensuring the drum's continued viability and prestige in a rapidly changing socio-economic landscape.

Klong Luang Lanna Drum: Organological and Cultural Dimensions

The Klong Luang Lanna drum is classified as a membranophone, specifically a single-headed long drum. It is crafted from a hollowed tree trunk and fitted with a single drumhead. The drum produces sound when struck on the drumhead, while its body is carefully carved and shaped to specific design requirements. The Klong Luang Lanna is notably large, resembling a long drum but on a significantly larger scale. The drum body is constructed from a single elongated piece of wood along its entire length. In the past, the Klong Luang Lanna drum was traditionally constructed from Afzelia xylocarpa (Maka wood); however, its relatively soft texture produced muted and insufficiently loud sounds when struck. Later, craftsmen turned to Dalbergia sissoo Roxb. (Indian rosewood) for its harder structure and superior acoustic properties, although suitable sizes were difficult to obtain and the material was costly. Subsequently, Pterocarpus macrocarpus Kurz (Burma padauk) and Diospyros mollis Griff. (black ebony) became more widely used alternatives. An essential component of the Klong Luang Lanna drum is its drumhead, typically made from male buffalo hide due to its durability. A distinctive organological feature, known as "Ja Klong Luang" (tuning paste), is created by mixing boiled glutinous rice, rice husk ash, and other ingredients based on the craftsman's formula. This mixture is applied to the center of the drumhead in a circular form, functioning as a tonal regulator that enhances acoustic resonance when the drum is struck. Additionally, various smaller components of the drum are assigned specific names. Currently, the price of a Klong Luang Lanna Drum ranges from 80,000 to 100,000 THB (approximately $2,200-$2,800 USD) and may increase depending on specifications.

As shown in Figure 3, this image provides a comparative anatomical view of the Klong Luang Lanna. The left sketch delineates the external morphology, identifying key components such as the *Na Klong* (drumhead) and *Aeo Klong* (waist). The right sketch provides a rare cross-sectional view of the internal bore, highlighting the intricate carving of the Hai-Klong (resonance chamber) and the *Ru Aeo* (narrow air passage). This unique internal geometry is crucial for producing the drum's characteristic deep, resonant bass and high-decibel sound projection. The terminology reflects the local taxonomy of Tai Yong craftsmen, where each component serves both structural and acoustic function.

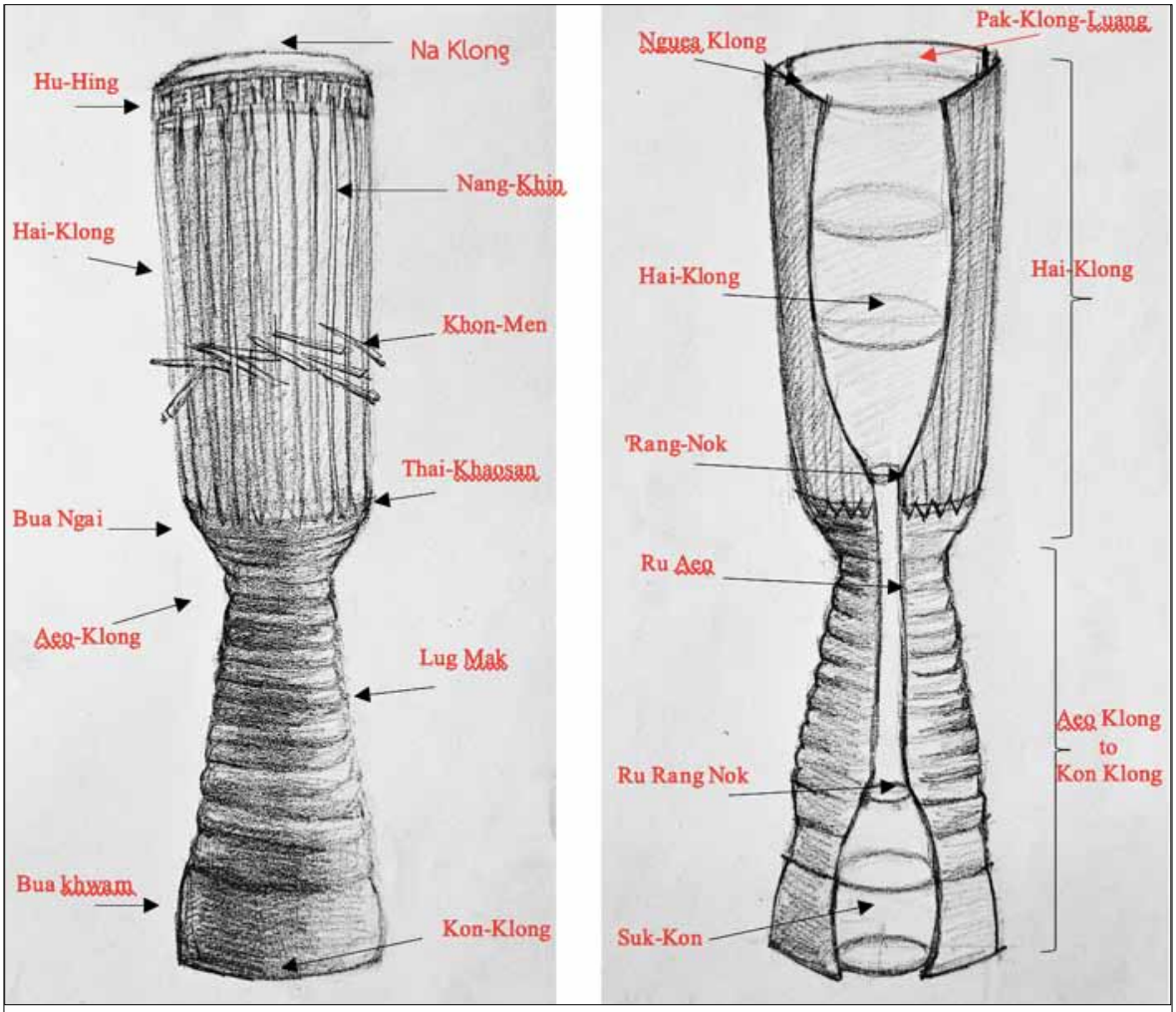


Figure 3. A detailed anatomical sketch of the Klong Luang Lanna drum, illustrating its external appearance (left) and internal acoustic chamber (right). Source: Authors (2024).

The Klong Luang Lanna Drum in Chiang Rai

Around 1881, Tai-Yong migrated from Lamphun played a pivotal role in revitalizing Chiang Saen from its deserted state. These settlers established communities to restore and repopulate Chiang Saen District. Today, these communities are located in Chan Chwa and Chan Chwa Tai Sub-District in Mae Chan District, Chiang Rai Province, extending toward the Chiang Saen border. This area lies approximately 15 kilometers from ancient Chiang Saen. Therefore, researchers suggest that the origin of the Klong Luang Lanna Drum Competition in Chiang Rai Province can be traced to around 1881. This estimation accounts for the time required to construct homes and essential infrastructure, which typically took at least ten years to return to stable conditions.

Field research conducted in Mae Chan District, Chiang Rai Province, identified a total of 11 extant Klong Luang drums. Each drum is primarily maintained by a temple, with oversight provided by a community cultural committee. Furthermore, based on a survey of existing Klong Luang Lanna drums in the area, the researcher presents details on their shape and size in comparison with the historical periods studied. The development of the Klong Luang Lanna drum can be categorized into three periods, each exhibiting distinct styles and structural characteristics, as follows:

Era	Drum Head Size (inc.)	Total Length of Drum (inc.)	Characteristics	*Drum' Name*	Temple
Ancient Era Approx. 1802–1884	18 - 19	148	Transported by carts; primarily used in auspicious ceremonies; not competition-oriented.	Fang Thanthong	Muangchum
Middle Era Approx. 1885–1957	20 - 25	135 - 145	Transportation relied on carts; drums increasingly used outside temples; emergence of sound competitions alongside ceremonial functions.	Tulung-Sangma	Pasakluang
				Buatong	Pabongluang
				Dao-Prakai	Nongrong
				Khruba-Sanglui	Tonyang
				Fa-khanong	Bandong
				Nang-khammun	Huainamrak
				khrok-Sanan-fa	Nongkhrok
				Monbanae	Kiophrao
				Phra-Yayong	Banmai
Modern Era 1958 to Present	30-50	150- 207	Use of automobiles for transportation; drums enlarged for greater sound projection; strong emphasis on competition.	Kaeo-Sathanfa	Pangmopwong

Figure 4. A comparative analysis of the organological evolution and socio-cultural characteristics of the Klong Luang Lanna across three historical eras (1802–Present). Source: Authors (2024).

The data in Figure 4 illustrates the significant transformation of the Klong Luang Lanna in terms of its physical dimensions and functional roles within the community. The data reveal a clear increase in scale, with drumhead diameter expanding from 18–19 inches in the Ancient Era to as much as 50 inches in the Modern Era. This physical enlargement corresponds to a shift in the drum's primary function from a ritual instrument used in auspicious ceremonies to a competitive instrument designed for maximum sound projection. Furthermore, the transition from traditional carts to modern automobiles reflects the community's adaptation to contemporary mobility demands. Each drum's unique name, such as Fang Thanthong or Kaeo-Sathanfa, serves as a marker of local identity and a manifestation of village prestige associated with specific temples.

Social and Cultural Roles of the Klong Luang Lanna Drum in Chiang Rai

In contemporary Chiang Rai, the tradition is expressed through an annual event known as the Klong Luang Lanna Drum Competition. Typically, each temple sends its drum to participate in the event, which is hosted annually by a designated temple. The competition is organized through mutual agreement among participating drum teams, including decisions on participation and whether betting will occur, although the hosting temple does not organize or endorse such activities. The Klong Luang Lanna serves a dual function: as a ritual centerpiece in processions and as a competitive medium that enhancing the aesthetic and traditional atmosphere of the event. The drum is integrated into a heterogeneous ensemble comprising gongs (khong), cymbals (chab), and auxiliary drums, supporting rhythmic patterns with traditional instruments such as sets of 3–7 gongs and both large and small chab. Other instruments such as klong Sing Moong and Klong Talot Pot are

also included. Performances may be either stationary or procession-based, incorporating rhythmic structures that bridge local improvisational styles with more standardized musical patterns. The continued presence of the Klong Luang Lanna in urban-religious contexts demonstrates how intangible cultural heritage (ICH) can adapt to modern social structures while preserving its core communal values.

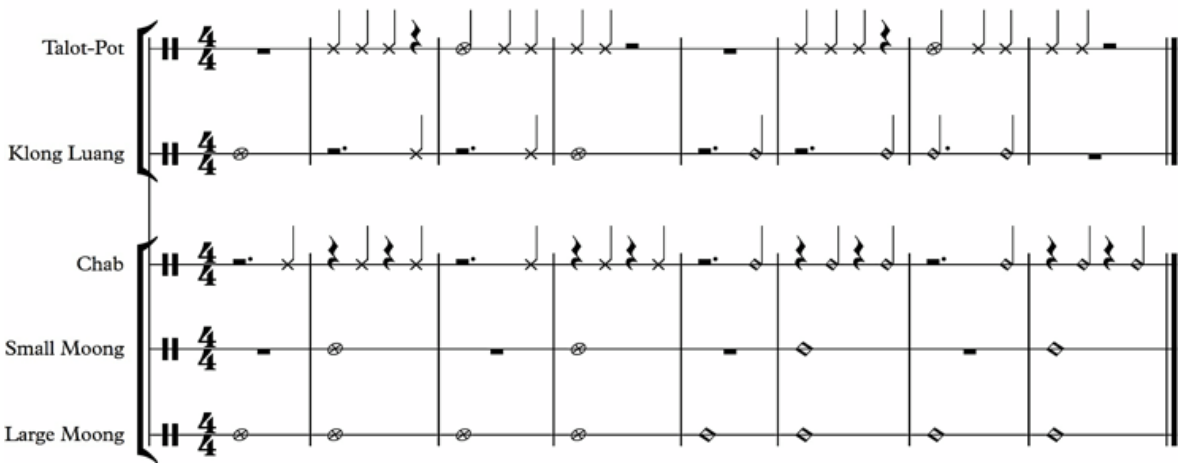


Figure 5. Rhythmic transcription of the Klong Luang Lanna drum within a traditional ensemble context, featuring the talot pot, chab, and moong. Source: Authors (2024).

The transcription in Figure 5 illustrates the polyrhythmic relationship between the Klong Luang Lanna drum and its supporting ensemble. While the moong (gongs) provides a steady temporal foundation, the Klong Luang engages in a syncopated dialogue with the talot pot. This ensemble structure reflects a hierarchical rhythmic organization in which the Klong Luang serves as the primary sonic element, supported by interlocking percussion patterns that create a dense and energetic festive atmosphere. In such competitions, participants typically perform using a single drum, following specific rhythmic patterns as outlined below:



Figure 6. Presents specific rhythmic patterns and triplet motifs used for competitive purposes in Klong Luang Lanna drum performance. Source: Authors (2024).

Figure 6 highlights the technical demands of the competition through rapid triplet motifs and high velocity strokes. The notation emphasizes rhythmic density and dynamic intensity, which are key judging criteria in the contest. These patterns are designed to maximize the drum's resonance while showcasing the performer's endurance and precision, reflecting a shift from ceremonial performance to an agonistic display of musical virtuosity.

Discussion

This study generates valuable academic and cultural knowledge in at least two key aspects. First, the discovery of historical photographic evidence confirms that the Klong Luang Lanna drum competition first appeared in Lamphun Province around 1919 (Figure 1). This photograph clearly illustrates the interconnected roles of monks and the com-

munity, who collaborated through shared effort and devotion. The preservation of distinct acoustic identities is a hallmark of Lanna culture, evident in both the complex melodic structures of Mahachat sermons (Inthaniwet & Pidokrajt, 2021) and the resonant power of the Klong Luang. As highlighted by Adom (2017), successful cultural preservation is rooted in community-led initiatives rather than top-down mandates. In the Klong Luang Lanna Drum competition, it is customary to name the drums after their temples or honorary titles, thereby asserting ownership and collective identity. These traditions, representing authentic cultural heritage, have been faithfully transmitted across generations. Second, the study examines the current presence of the Klong Luang Lanna drum in Mae Chan District, Chiang Rai Province. This analysis provides insights into the drum's age classification and its persistence in the region. The revitalization of Lanna identity in urban spaces aligns with Denes and Pradit (2022) who emphasize the role of intangible heritage in shaping contemporary cultural landscape. Building on research on the endurance of Lanna Mahachat melodies in contemporary contexts Inthaniwet and Pidokrajt (2021) this study confirms that the survival of the Klong Luang tradition likewise depends on maintain aesthetic relevance while adapting to urban social structures. This study offers findings that directly benefit and indirectly contribute to further research in fields such as historical and cultural studies and cultural tourism development. For example, Supharit Tarathipnara and Okama Jakae (2022) identified key factors in cultural tourism revival include distinctive community lifestyles, effective local management, and cooperation among relevant organizations. They propose a three-step process: (1) fostering individual acceptance, (2) strengthening intragroup relationships, and (3) expanding networks through intergroup connections. Supporting community solidarity is essential for successful implementation, with cultural councils playing a crucial role in these efforts. This aligns with Shawanluck Kunathikornkit et al. (2020), who emphasize that cultural councils, with their deep understanding of heritage, should lead the registration of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). However, a key challenge remains the lack of data integration. Similarly, Dhanyaporn Phothikawin (2022) highlights that fostering acceptance and recognizing the value of traditions are crucial for their continuity in contemporary contexts. Ultimately, this research bridges traditional community practices and contemporary urban policy, providing a roadmap to ensure that the sonic heritage of the Tai Yong remains a living component of regional identity.

Moreover, findings from the field seminar on factors threatening the Klong Luang Lanna Drum Competition can be categorized into two main types: internal community factors and external factors. These findings are summarized in the table below.

Factors from within the community	Factors from outside the community
1. Lack of effective management in organizing the competition ritual. 2. Insufficient participation among youth and young men in seriously learning and preserving cultural heritage. 3. Perception among some drum groups that variations in drum size create competitive disadvantages. 4. Lack of preservation and repect for their own cultural knowledge and beliefs.	1. Event organization formats perceived as exclusive to certain groups. 2. Planning and budget constraints in organizing the Lanna Drum competition.

Figure 7. Identification of internal and external threats affecting the sustainability of the Klong Luang Lanna Drum competition. Source: Authors (2024).

From Figure 7, the findings indicate that internal community factors pose a greater threat to the tradition's longevity than external pressures. Consequently, strategic interventions should prioritize intra-community capacity building and knowledge transmission before addressing external systemic challenges. This is consistent with Phongphanich et al. (2023), who argue that community-led management is the cornerstone of effective cultural heritage safeguarding. By formalizing the Klong Luang Lanna competition as a recognized national cultural heritage asset, stakeholders can mobilize support systems to advance traditional knowledge and ensure its effective preservation in contemporary urban contexts.

Therefore, in considering the value of the Klong Luang Lanna drum competition tradition for registration as national cultural heritage, the researchers examined the 2017 (B.E. 2560) regulations of the Cultural Heritage Promotion and Preservation Committee regarding the preliminary selection criteria for cultural heritage items. This involved analyzing and comparing the official criteria with the characteristics of the Klong Luang Lanna drum competition tradition. This analysis provides a rationale for evaluating its eligibility for registration as national cultural heritage, as detailed below:

Criteria for Preliminary Selection	Supporting Reasons for Consideration
1. Characteristics as specified in the announcement of the Cultural Heritage Promotion and Preservation Committee regarding the criteria for cultural heritage recognition, B.E. 2560 (2017).	The Klong Luang Lanna drum competition meets the specified criteria. It embodies practices that have been continuously performed until they become customary norms, corresponding to characteristic (b), traditions related to festivals.
2. It is an intangible cultural heritage located within the geographical and cultural boundaries of Thailand.	The Klong Luang Lanna drum competition is widely practiced in Lamphun, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and among Tai Yong communities in the upper northern region.
3. Distinctive and representative of local or national heritage.	It represents the unique ethno-musical identity of the Tai Yong, integrating indigenous craftsmanship with ancestral knowledge.
4. Continuity and risk of disappearance.	It remains an active communal practice but faces vulnerability due to a decline in traditional leadership and formal knowledge transmission.
5) Historical, academic, artistic, and creative values.	Research demonstrates significant intellectual and creative development across historical periods, which is essential for future sustainability.
6. Documented or referenceable original knowledge.	It is documented through photographs and research studies conducted by local academics.
7. Consent for registration by the community.	Communal consensus has been achieved through regional seminars, with a formal resolution supporting registration in the national ICH inventory.

Figure 8. Evaluative framework comparing the Klong Luang Lanna drum competition with national criteria for Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) registration. Source: Authors (2024).

Evaluation against the preliminary selection criteria indicates that the Klong Luang Lanna drum competition meets all requirements for Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) recognition. The findings highlight both its historical and artistic significance, as well as its potential for future development. By securing a place on the national heritage list, the tradition can be effectively safeguarded, establishing a resilient framework for its transmission and ensuring its enduring role within Lanna cultural identity.

Conclusion

Strategic efforts to safeguard and promote the cultural heritage of the Klong Luang Lanna drum competition should prioritize sustainable development and aesthetic revitalization. First, local communities should formalize community-based organizations that promote ethical practices, disseminate knowledge, raise awareness, and ensure the effective transmission of traditional wisdom to younger generations. Second, sustained institutional support for the "Young Cultural Researchers" initiative is essential to cultivate a new generation of heritage custodians. Third, cultural programming should be diversified to build a resilient cultural ecosystem that encourages public engagement. Additionally, implementing integrated digital storytelling and strategic social media campaigns will be vital for expanding the reach of this heritage. Ultimately, formal recognition as national intangible cultural heritage (ICH) will provide a framework for the sustainable development, promotion, and advancement of the Klong Luang Lanna cultural legacy.

Recommendations

The findings provide a robust empirical basis for preliminary consideration in Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) registration, particularly in relation to social practices, ceremonies, rituals, and festivals. Additionally, the study can inform further research on historical data analysis and cultural migration using interdisciplinary scientific methods, such as wood-type analysis, acoustic frequency analysis, and artifact dating. Moreover, efforts should be made to foster communal ownership, agency, and awareness of the benefits of local cultural heritage.

Endnotes

1 Tai Yong refers to a group of Tai Lue people who originally resided in Mong Yawng, in the eastern part of Shan State, Myanmar. Over a century ago, some members of this group migrated and settled in northern Thailand, particularly in Lamphun, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Nan provinces.

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Cartoons and Graffiti: Consolidated Forms of Peaceful Protest

in the Contemporary Arab World

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Abstract

The emergence of the Arab Spring and networked society has led to the consolidation of graffiti and cartooning as two forms of artistic expression in the contemporary Arab world. These forms were utilized as peaceful means of protest to demand the restoration of social and political rights that had been deprived. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze and explore how these two expressions evolved and diversified in the Arab world, ultimately becoming a form of peaceful protest. The methodology employed will be qualitative, given the theoretical nature of the topic. Specifically, a visual ethnographic approach will be used to examine the images presented in this work as a sample. The expected outcome of this research is to emphasize how these two relatively unknown forms of artistic expression have become an alternative means of communication, capable of engaging society and stimulating their involvement in political and creative processes.

Keywords: *Cartoons, Graffitis, Arab, Art, Revolution, Social Change, Protest, Propaganda, Demonstrations*

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Introduction

This research is an attempt to demonstrate the strength of protest art in the Arab world. Graffiti and cartoons are two artistic expressions that have proven to be a means of communication and a way to encourage the population to participate in the political and creative process. For all these reasons, they are often associated with uprisings, with the aim of claiming a series of rights. Thus, the following hypotheses have been established, which will be analyzed throughout this work: (1) cartoons and graffiti are a way of claiming rights and policies; (2) their emergence is associated with revolutionary demonstrations; and (3) they can be considered a peaceful protest weapon.

To verify these hypotheses, the following general objectives have been established: (1) to study resistance arts; (2) to analyze these artistic expressions; and (3) to verify their impact on society. Regarding the specific objectives, the following specific objectives have been developed: (1) to compare the development of cartoons and graffiti in order to see the function they represent in society; (2) to verify the claim they make through drawing to understand the objective of these artists; and (3) to examine the consequences that these arts can have for their authors.

Nevertheless, cartoons and graffiti have generally been associated with revolutionary and street art. However, it is important to note that their use is much more extensive, as they generate a collective opinion. In particular, graffiti is often perceived as a collective and socially rooted art form that reflects broader social concerns, even when it is produced by individual creators. Therefore, it cannot be understood in isolation, but rather as part of a broader social and cultural whole.

In this context, urban artistic practices such as graffiti and cartoons can be understood within broader debates on public space, collective expression, and social participation. Previous research in urban cultural studies has emphasized how artistic interventions in public spaces contribute to civic engagement and the construction of shared meanings within communities. In particular, public art and creative placemaking have been identified as mechanisms that enable citizens to actively participate in shaping urban narratives and expressing socio-political concerns (Solanki, Kane Speer, and Huang 2014; Dona 2017).

Similarly, graffiti has been examined as both a subcultural practice and a form of aesthetic expression linked to processes of urbanization and identity formation. These perspectives highlight how artistic practices in urban environments function not only as visual artifacts but also as tools for resistance, communication, and social transformation. In this sense, the emergence of graffiti and cartoons in the Arab world can be framed within a wider global phenomenon in which art operates as a medium of collective memory, protest, and cultural negotiation (Poon 2023; Borrup 2019).

Methods

A qualitative methodology has been used because this research consists of a social and cultural study of the phenomenon of graffiti and cartoons, as a form of protest expression and communication. Therefore, the aim is to understand the complex situation that has developed through lived experience (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). In this sense, both cartoons and graffiti are two forms of resistance art that explore diverse worlds. They also represent a sustained opinion of society, so their use serves to understand a particular moment, highlighting the experiences of those who are immersed in this situation.

Taking all of this into account, a descriptive and interpretive study has been carried out. An exhaustive sample was selected for this purpose. Three graffiti works were used to illustrate their development at specific moments. It should be noted that graffiti is generally conceived as a social and collective form of art, closely linked to broader social contexts rather than to a single identifiable author, whereas cartoons are usually associated with specific named artists whose work reflects an individual perspective. Three representative examples have been chosen. Two of them are by Ali Ferzat, one of the most representative cartoonists in the Arab world, due to his professional and artistic trajectory. The third example corresponds to the Algerian Ali Dilem, who has been quite critical of the situation in his country and has sensationalized the cyberspace in a remarkable way.

In this way, a visual ethnographic method has been used to study, analyze, and contextualize the selected sample for this work. Through this method, the aim is to reconstruct what happens in the drawing. For this reason, a reflection on this fact is intended, establishing a relationship between Arab culture and the context in which this art arises, taking into account at the same time the use of social media and Web 2.0 by society (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2009).

On the other hand, the grounded theory has been chosen, as it is an inductive method that allows for the explanation of this artistic phenomenon in its natural context. Thus, two fundamental strategies have been employed: the constant comparative method and theoretical sampling. These strategies have enabled the coding and analysis of all the necessary data to develop different concepts. Therefore, a series of theoretical abstractions of what is happening has been established. For this purpose, an open coding has been carried out that has allowed for the identification of the analysis theme and observation of its dimensions, in order to develop basic concepts. Then, an axial coding has been conducted that has allowed for the establishment of categories and subcategories, taking into account the development of graffiti and cartoons in the Arab world and its consolidation. Finally, a selective coding has been established, in which the theory on which this research is based is refined, namely that graffiti and cartoons have been a communicative and social phenomenon that has been consolidated, generating a participatory process in society (Trinidad Requena, Carrero Planes, and Soriano Miras, 2006).

Analysis

The development of the Arab revolutions has led to a great proliferation of artworks in response to the wave of protests and uprisings. This explosion of free artistic expression encompasses various genres of visual and multimedia arts, including photography, painting, video, and sculpture, as well as the development of mixed techniques, such as illustration and graffiti. They use an iconic language to draw attention to the corruption of governments, their excesses, their monopoly on wealth, or their rigid censorship regime. In addition to this, other works focus on the uprising itself, addressing topics related to the incitement and spread of the revolution through the internet.

Therefore, this new art explores political diversity in all its possible directions, as well as claims the right to freedom of expression. To do this, it relates to the revolution in a more nuanced way, taking into account the untranslatable voices or unrepresentable visions of democracy in the most universal sense. In this context, this art can contribute to the

debates surrounding the broader issue of post-colonialism, of how to represent the unrepresentable, that is, how to represent a society that has been, basically, essentialist and lacks homogenizing visions.

Art evokes a revolutionary transition from singularity to multiplicity and diversity in order to achieve a balance between newly discovered freedom and extreme fragility. In this sense, it not only evokes political and social upheaval but also a transition towards an artistic revolution. Additionally, the evocation of contemporary art appears simultaneously to articulate the liberation from the old censorship of art and culture in Arab-Islamic countries, as a consequence of the political and social restrictions associated with the old regime. Therefore, it not only shows ambivalence and tension but also the instability and fragility of the democratic transition process. Thus, the goal of these artists is to become alternative voices of the revolution, through visual and multisensory forms. In other words, this visual and multisensory language of instability combines semiotics, politics, and poetics, with the participation of the viewer, incorporated into the formation of discourse (Shilton, 2013:129–145). The artists, on their part, have become a representation of a new formulation of the vanguard, so that artistic praxis gives rise to a change in aesthetics, reflecting different episodes, while also becoming a refuge for expressing solidarity. Therefore, these artists, through their works, have become agents of ethical responsibility and socio-political change (Demerdash, 2012).

Development of Graffitis in the Arab World

In this context, graffiti became the most visible artistic response of the revolution in the streets as an act of defiance against the government. Some of the early graffiti served to reflect and highlight people's calls for freedom, as well as to demand the most basic needs such as food or bread. As a result, its use has motivated this art to be considered one of the most important voices of the revolution (Brianbridge, 2013).

Graffiti negotiated its integration between the contestations to the systems of state disintegration and bureaucratic power. The meaning of the revolution was constituted from the experiences lived within the spaces of the revolution. Therefore, artists tried to capture the memories of the past on public walls, turning them into monuments to these struggles and lives lost in revolutions. However, for the public, the spaces occupied by these walls acquired collective and personal meanings. The graffiti that appeared on murals and panels embodied specific memories of ordinary people, to the extent that people ended up gathering around the walls in order to participate in discussions to invoke a certain collective memory. These forms of art transformed public spaces and streets through graffiti activism. In this sense, graffiti can be understood as a form of urban artistic intervention that reconfigures the meaning of public space and fosters collective engagement. As noted in urban cultural research, artistic practices situated in public environments often function as catalysts for civic participation and social interaction, contributing to the construction of shared urban narratives (Solanki, Kane Speer, and Huang 2014; Dona 2017). The posters and visual graffiti seen in different protests contributed to creating a community and solidarity, becoming an ideal means of public dissent (Demerdash 2012). Therefore, the art of graffiti became a form of expression of the society's dissatisfaction towards different dictatorial regimes (García Prieto, 2013).

The early graffitis encouraged others, summarizing the demands and frustrations of the people; pointing out the failures of the system; remembering the pending challenges and the faces of those who oppressed and those who gave their lives for a future of hope and not repression. In this way, they reflected political changes, but also showed a certain omen of what could happen, giving a premonitory feeling in these countries (García Prieto, 2013).

In Egypt, for example, after the fall of Mubarak, there was a period of disillusionment during the SCAF's takeover, which journalists did not speak of, but graffiti criticizing the Military Council could be seen. When there were no demonstrations, there were paintings, so a symbiotic relationship could be inferred between what was seen on the wall and reality. In fact, it could be seen that in the mornings, walls covered in graffiti would appear, which were erased by law enforcement agents hours later, only to resurface the next morning with more force, irony, and color. This was so much the case that Egyptians themselves said that the walls were alive, as they recounted different events. In this way, graphic artists involved in graffiti in Egypt have published Wall Talk, a book that collects photographs of hundreds of paintings made in Egyptian streets from January 25, 2011, until the present day, thus graphically documenting the revolution (Carrión, 2013).

El-Husseini (2013) argues that the youth played a crucial role in the revolution, as they were the ones who organized and led the protests against the authoritarian regime of Hosni Mubarak. The use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter enabled the youth to mobilize quickly and effectively. Social media allowed them to share information, coordinate protests, and disseminate their message to a wider audience. Moreover, the youth's engagement in the revolution was fueled by a sense of frustration and disillusionment with the political and economic situation in Egypt. High levels of unemployment, corruption, and political repression had created a climate of social and economic inequality that the youth felt needed to be addressed. For this reason, the youth's engagement in the revolution was also influenced by cultural and generational factors. The youth, who had grown up in a more open and connected world, were more likely to question authority and challenge traditional norms than their parents' generation.

As a consequence, the walls of cities in Arab countries began to speak, screaming the harshest episodes of the transition that had unfolded in these countries. It was a way to challenge the official narrative, while also remembering all those who had died or been tortured in the protests and denouncing the brutality of some countries. In this sense, graffiti provided security information or messages for protesters, even explaining constitutional declarations on walls. Some paintings suffered furious attacks from governments, while others were updated as events unfolded, and an urban art form that was controlled both by neighborhoods and by the younger sectors of society spread (Carrión, 2013).



Figure 1. New Mural Identity (Carrión, 2013).

In this mural (Figure 1), double meanings are used to bring visibility to the revolution. This is achieved through the representation of a girl dressed in Ancient Egyptian attire. The girl is also depicted with a flower in her hair as a symbol of spring and rebirth. Additionally, the flags and symbols of the revolution are displayed, thus inciting revolution in a diachronic manner, referencing Egypt's glorious past and emphasizing the need to regain it, as the present has distorted everything.

In contrast, Syrian reaction was completely different. The protests erupted against the authoritarian regime of President Bashar al-Assad in 2011. However, the protests quickly turned into a full-scale civil war, with various factions fighting for control of the country. The conflict has resulted in the displacement of millions of people and has had a devastating impact on Syria's infrastructure and economy (Hinnebusch, 2018).

Nevertheless, during the Syrian civil war, graffiti became a form of expression for those involved in the conflict. Graffiti was used to convey messages of resistance, to memorialize those who had died, and to critique the government and its policies. Graffiti artists risked their lives to create these works of art, often working in secret and under cover of darkness. In view of this, the Syrian government cracked down on graffiti and other forms of public expression, viewing them as a threat to its authority. However, graffiti became an important means of resistance for many Syrians, particularly young people. Through their art, they were able to express their frustration with the government and their hopes for a better future (Abaza, 2014).

As a matter of fact, the Syrian Arab Spring began with a graffiti. They sought to incite revolution in a peaceful way, as the revolution eventually led to a brutal civil war. However, this graffiti had quite negative consequences, as the authorities kidnapped the children who had created it without their parents knowing anything about it, causing them to take to the streets in protest to demand the freedom that had been taken away from them (Oudat, 2011). As a result, the uprisings eventually spread throughout the country, causing society to take to the streets to demand reforms and the freedom that had been taken away from them by the wrath of the president (Alhames, 2013).

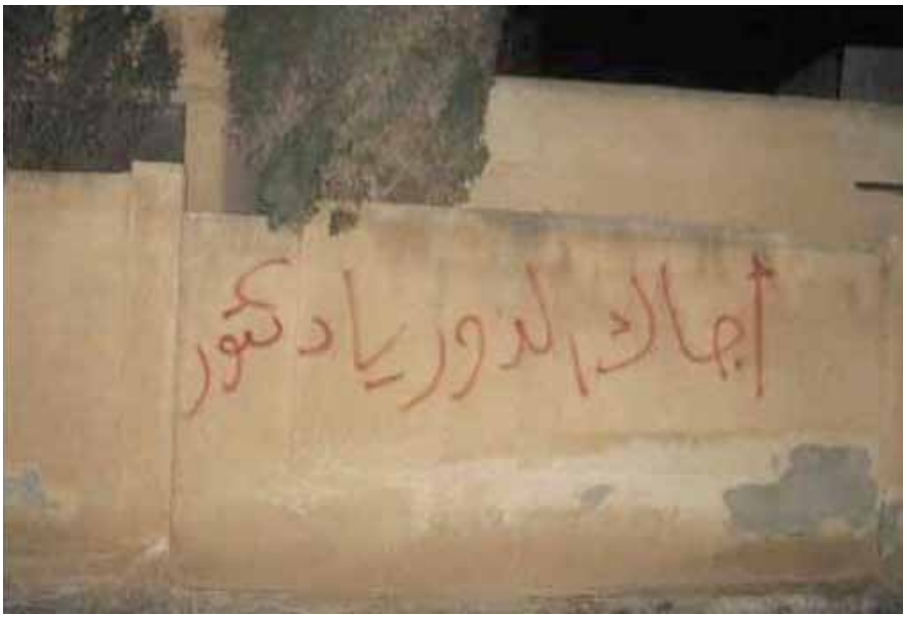


Figure 2. It is your turn, doctor (Alhames, 2013).

This graffiti (Figure 2) was the one that started the Syrian Arab Spring. Furthermore, it was created by young people in a school in the city of Deraa, motivated by the uprisings that had been taking place in the rest of the Arab world. As a matter of fact, the graffiti is composed of Arabic words, including a clear and direct message against the Syrian president: "It's your turn, doctor." These words refer to the profession of the Syrian president, who had studied ophthalmology in Europe. The aim of this graffiti was to make everyone around them react, but the consequences were terrible. As a result, the young people who made this graffiti were tortured, so protests soon became visible throughout the country. Thus, this graffiti became a symbol of the revolution, as it appeared on social media and other websites perpetuating its survival.

Nonetheless, graffiti consolidated itself as a means of artistic expression, becoming a contestatory current in Syria. In fact, it solidified as another part of the conflict, where rulers and peace activists found their freedom of expression. Despite this, artists who made slogans on walls against the regime were subject to certain persecution. Thus, the government covered up the graffiti and arrested the authors, even going so far as to control who bought the spray paints and what they intended to do with them (Alhames, 2013).



Figure 3. Freedom (Freedom Graffiti Week Syria, 2015).

This graffiti (Figure 3) is an example of what was previously mentioned. It shows hands holding the word "freedom" in Arabic as well as the dove of peace. The word "freedom" is painted in red to symbolize the bloodshed. This is so intense that it crumbles in the hands and drips abundantly. In addition to this, this graffiti aims to reflect how costly the Arab Spring was in Syria, as what began as a peaceful movement ended up turning into a vicious war.

The Development of Cartoons

The development is associated with the emergence of the press during the Nahda (the Awakening). These first models aimed to entertain and make society laugh, while showing a progressive acquisition of public liberties (El-Jisr, 1988:1). The early models presented clear European influence (Wichhart, 2009:8.1-8.21). A negotiation scenario was generated, in which they took Western forms, transformed them, and mixed them (Abu-Lughod, 1989:7). These early models often circulated in a relatively anonymous manner, since the ideas they expressed were understood as shared social concerns with a common purpose. As a result, individual authorship was not always foregrounded until well into the 20th century. (Müge Göçek, 1988:15-16).

During the 20th century, its importance grew to the point of covering events of the First World War. Thus, around 1919, a nationalist movement was launched in which cartoons made by foreigners in Egypt appeared, but which retained their European essence (Krifa, 1988:29-30). They were characterized by intense cultural schizophrenia, that is, by a conflict of identity, in which two very different worlds were represented. The goal of these cartoons was to achieve realism, that is, to interpret the modern world not through personal experience, but rather through the reading of European magazines (Müge Göçek, 1988:91-92).

The 1950s marked a new era for cartoons and a new role for the cartoonist. During this decade, magazines multiplied and diversified to such an extent that a new movement of cartoonists known as modernists emerged, who were responsible for redefining the artistic conventions of cartoons as well as the topics of interest. Themes such as social injustice or class struggle began to be addressed, due to the fact that the main objective of these cartoons was the political regime, the economic order, ruling parties, and elites. A politicization developed, where cartoonists assumed the duty to enlighten and educate society through their drawings, as they became involved in a historical struggle against the established system of political and economic domination (Müge Göçek, 1988:104-110).

However, this did not fully solidify until the Gulf War in the 1990s. At that time, due to the lack of transparency in the media, cartoons were used to satirize the media and report the true news about the conflict (Slyomovics, 2001:97). In any case, the Gulf War caused cartoons to increase significantly, developing in two areas: traditional media and new technologies. Thus, cartoons began to be used as a propaganda tool that could awaken public opinion (Müge Göçek, 1988:139-144).

This fact finally became clear with the arrival of the Arab Spring in 2011, during which art contributed to creative activism, generating an immediate response, as it was able to simplify complex ideas into visual products that facilitated their memorization and understanding. For this reason, it acted as a tool capable of subverting the repression practiced by authoritarian regimes (Jamshidi, 2014:77-101). This fact was also favored by the development of cyberspace, as cartoons abandoned magazines and newspapers. The internet and new technologies represented an alternative virtual public sphere that allowed for the creation of an ideal space for cultural creation, while also inciting society to mobilize and confront regime injustices (Liu, 2013:252-271). It was a way to avoid censorship and reach a wider audience, and the emergence of social networks like Facebook or Twitter allowed for greater diffusion (Hicks, 2009:11.1-11.20).

Taking this view into account, during the Arab Spring, the use of the internet played a critical role in organizing and mobilizing protesters. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter allowed for the rapid dissemination of information and facilitated coordination between activists. Online activism allowed for the circumvention of state censorship and the ability to reach a broader audience (Howard and Hussain, 2013). Additionally, the use of citizen journalism through online platforms, such as blogs and YouTube, allowed for the reporting of events as they unfolded, often providing an alternative perspective to state-controlled media outlets (Atton, 2015). However, it is worth noting that the internet was not the sole factor in the success of the Arab Spring uprisings, and its role has been debated among scholars (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012).

However, cartoons managed to gain ground after the Arab Spring. The development of the internet and different platforms allowed cartoons to become a revolution in themselves that were transmitted through an alternative means. Furthermore, cartoons used cyberspace to develop a bidirectional relationship with the public while generating a current of opinion. Therefore, it became a tool for peaceful struggle that allowed society to participate in the political process directly, using social networks as a bridge.

The figure 4 cartoon was made to criticize the Gulf War. It is an impersonal drawing in which an official is seen distributing medals, highlighting the consequences for society and the motives of the leaders. It can be observed that the officer is dressed in his best at-

tire, while the citizen receiving the medals has completely torn clothing. Additionally, the officer's arrogance is apparent in order to highlight the organ of power in front of society. Therefore, this cartoon is a critique of the Gulf War and its consequences for society. Additionally, this cartoon had negative consequences as the caricaturist Ali Ferzat was threatened with death.

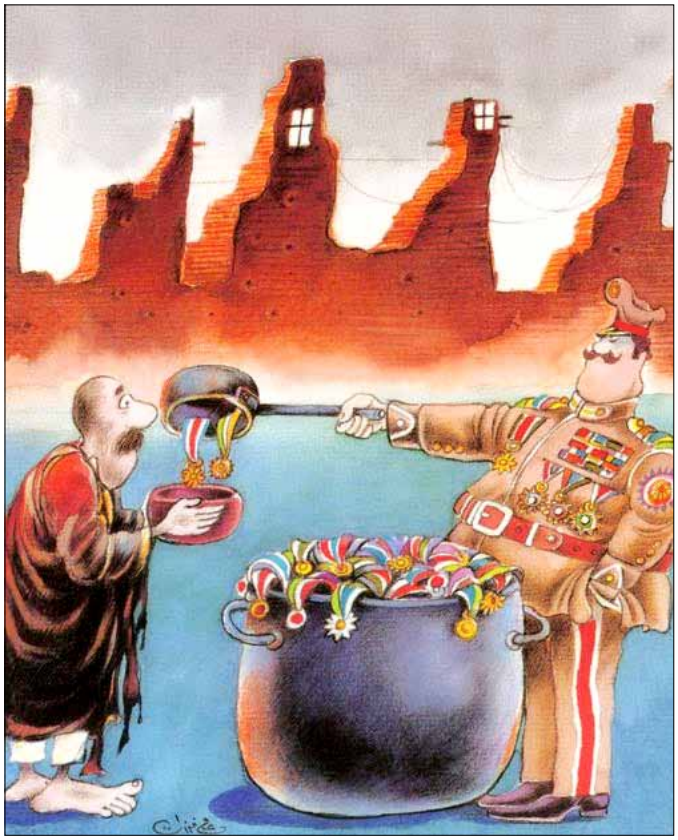


Figure 4. Official handing out medals (Creative Syria, n. d.).



Figure 5. President al-Asad and President Gaddafi leaving their countries together (Trotta, 2011).

This cartoon (Figure 5) shows Bashar al-Assad and Gaddafi trying to escape from their respective countries together. Gaddafi is portrayed as crazy and driving a car that is spitting out screws, while al-Assad is seen waiting with a hastily packed suitcase and a government member trying to help him escape with the Libyan president. This cartoon had negative consequences, as the cartoonist suffered a brutal beating by the government as a result of it. As a matter of fact, this cartoon was a revolutionary act. It was created in 2011 in Syria during the uprisings of the Arab Spring. Despite the consequences suffered by the cartoonist, this cartoon represented a breaking of the barriers of fear, as for the first time, the Syrian president was depicted in a direct way. Furthermore, this cartoon marked a turning point as it demonstrated the power and strength that these cartoons could achieve.



Figure 6. The fifth mandate (Dilem, 2019).

This cartoon (Figure 6) appears in the context of the 2019 revolution in Algeria, calling for a cessation of the government. Its author, Ali Dilem, depicted an image in which the Algerian president announces that he will not run for re-election, but will instead serve a fourth ten-year term. In this way, the author highlights the president's refusal to leave power and underscores his lack of coherence in the situation. The objective is to spur society, generating an opinion that seeks to influence the public regarding the president's hypocrisy, an underlying issue.

The next cartoon (Figure 7) depicts a criticism of freedom of expression. The Tunisian president and a citizen with a banner are shown in the cartoon. The citizen is demanding freedom of expression, while the Tunisian president points out that they are out of stock. The cartoonist is thus criticizing the situation that still affects the Arab world. In other words, the cartoonist Ali Dilem is criticizing the fact that, despite the Arab Spring and the reforms, there is still no freedom of expression, as governments themselves do not allow it. Furthermore, attention is drawn to the fact that Tunisia has been used as an example, as it

was one of the few countries in the Arab Spring to have a peaceful transition. However, as evidenced in this cartoon, the expected result for citizens was not achieved. Therefore, this drawing seeks to draw attention to Arab and Tunisian society in order to show the reality and incite society to continue fighting. For this reason, it can be considered a revolution in itself.



Figure 7. Tunisia: repeated shortages (Dilem, 2022).

Results

After analyzing the phenomenon of cartoons and graffitis, it can be said that they are artistic expressions associated with revolution. Thus, during times of social and political conflict, their production increases considerably. Moreover, graffiti tends to emerge most visibly during moments of social conflict and upheaval. It is generally associated with collective, anonymous, and socially embedded forms of expression, often developed by younger generations in public spaces. By contrast, cartoons are a more individualized form of art that seeks to shape opinion in the viewer. They usually have a clearer intellectual and authorial component, as they are linked to identifiable artists who use satire and visual language to comment on political and social issues. This is because graffitis are a revolutionary art that develops according to certain circumstances. In contrast, the use of cartoons refers to a mature art that focuses on a current of opinion. Therefore, the art of cartoons has been associated with newspapers and its evolution has been progressive, as it has played with irony and double meanings to inform Arab societies about certain events.

This leads us to examine the issue of authorship in these artistic expressions. Graffiti is generally understood as an anonymous and collective form of art rooted in the contemporary social milieu. Although individual artists are often involved in its creation, graffiti is usually perceived as representing broader social voices, concerns, and forms of collective expression rather than the perspective of a single identifiable author. By contrast, cartoons constitute a more individualized form of art, as they are generally produced by a named person who uses wit, satire, and visual language to influence public opinion regarding a particular event or issue. This distinction is also related to the evolution of both forms of expression. Graffiti is often associated with youthful, immediate, and spontaneous interventions that make walls "speak," whereas cartoons have experienced a more structured process of development. In the Arab world, cartoons have undergone a significant maturation process, with several intellectuals and artists contributing to their consolidation as an alternative form of communication.

In any case, graffitis and cartoons can be considered communal artistic expressions, as they are part of the Arab social collective. The goal of graffiti and caricature in the Arab world is to elicit a reaction from society and become a form of resistance art. Therefore, they are passive manifestations, as they are a peaceful form of protest. In other words, both spray paint and pencil are weapons thrown against authoritarian regimes.

In addition, both are a form of literature in images. They manifest themselves as an alternative non-verbal language that has generated a form of communication. In this context, it is a visual communication medium that draws attention to a specific fact and invites participation. Therefore, it must be understood as another means of communication that shows visual culture. As a matter of fact, if graffitis or cartoons are analyzed together, the succession of events can be appreciated. Therefore, it should be noted that this literature in images serves to narrate the most immediate reality, so they can also be interpreted as an important source of information that helps to understand the different events within the Arab world.

On the other hand, they have also adapted to new times. Although new technologies have arrived late in the Arab world, their most current transmission is through the internet. Cyberspace offers the opportunity to develop a virtual reality where the revolution develops simultaneously. This fact allows the revolution to remain alive, and this art to be preserved: no matter how much they try to erase graffiti, it is practically impossible to make it disappear thanks to the internet. Moreover, The development of social media has also allowed for an expansion of bidirectionality, as it has enabled society to comment on and analyze events through the network. For this reason, new technologies have brought a new era for these artistic expressions.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it is necessary to say that both artistic expressions form a cultural block. However, they must be understood in their specific contexts. While cartoons are usually linked to identifiable artists whose work reflects an individual perspective, graffiti is more closely connected to collective social experiences and anonymous forms of expression. In both cases, artists are products of their time and cannot be separated from the context in which they create. It is a subjective art that makes society react to a specific event.

It should be noted that this art is also a historical source. Its development narrates what happens at a certain moment, so if it is joined and seen with a holistic perspective, a connecting thread can be found. In other words, these artistic expressions seek to tell a story, so they cannot be considered in isolation.

It is not a fixed art but evolves over time. It is true that a certain symbolism can be appreciated when narrating specific events. However, symbols can change, and their impact depends on the moment in which they are developed. Ultimately, it is important not to lose sight of it and to analyze it since it is a way of better understanding the contemporary Arab world.

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Beyond the Headlines: Investigating Media Framing

of Malaysian Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia During Covid-19

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Abstract

This study presents a comprehensive analysis of human trafficking involving Malaysians in Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar. Employing a systematic review approach based on the PRISMA methodology, the study examines 63 news records from The Star, covering the period from March to September 2022. The findings reveal a notable increase in media coverage during this time, signaling heightened awareness of Malaysian human trafficking issues. The COVID-19 pandemic emerges as a critical factor exacerbating vulnerabilities and contributing to a surge in trafficking incidents. Malaysians were identified as victims of forced labor in diverse industries, including online scams and illegal gambling. The study highlights the significant role played by human trafficking networks and unscrupulous employers in trapping individuals in exploitative situations. The study underscores the urgency of strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing law enforcement, and fostering international collaboration to address challenges of human trafficking in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: *Human trafficking, Malaysians, PRISMA, Southeast Asia, Media Framing, The Star New Straits Times (NST)*

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Introduction

Human trafficking stands as a deeply entrenched and urgent concern in Southeast Asia, with countries like Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand emerging as focal points of this distressing issue. Extensive research, including reports from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (Perry and McEwing, 2013), underscores Southeast Asia's role as a significant source, transit, and destination for human trafficking, affecting both sex and labor trafficking, with women and children disproportionately bearing the brunt of this exploitation (UNODC, n.d.). In particular, this severe violation of human rights encompasses various forms such as forced labor, sexual exploitation, and organ trafficking (Stanescu and Tasente, 2023). Beyond the regional context, human trafficking is a global issue affecting individuals regardless of demographics, perpetuated by coercion, manipulation, and power imbalances. Solntsev and Popovic (2023) argue that human trafficking represents a modern form of slavery affecting all states, thereby highlighting the seriousness of the problem for the international community in particular, Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand.

At the national level, Cambodia grapples with an exceptionally severe human trafficking crisis. Research from the United States Department of State illuminates Cambodia's status as a primary destination country within Southeast Asia, serving as a hub for both the supply and transit of trafficking victims. Moreover, this vulnerability is exacerbated by high levels of poverty and limited access to education and viable employment opportunities (U.S. Department of State, 2020).

Similarly, in Myanmar, a recent news report reveals the plight of over 300 Malaysian nationals trapped as victims of human trafficking syndicates in the country (Arifin, 2023). Specifically, due to the unstable political situation in Myanmar, these individuals are trapped and awaiting transfer to the syndicates' relocated operational hub situated on the outskirts of Tonpheung, proximate to Laos within the Golden Triangle region. Azirul Syafiq Sazali, an activist from the Malaysia International Humanitarian Organization (MHO), corroborated this shift in operations based on his involvement in various rescue missions targeting human trafficking victims across Myanmar and Laos (Arifin, 2023).

Shifting our focus to Thailand, recent data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) highlights a concerning trend. From 2022 to June 2023, a total of more than 230 people from 19 different nationalities were reported regarding instances of coerced involvement in criminal activities. Notably, among these individuals, 86 percent were recognized as victims of trafficking. However, it is probable that the true number of victims exceeds the reported figures, as access to and availability of comprehensive data on such fraudulent establishments remain limited (Chaikaew, 2023).

Taken together, the ramifications of human trafficking are profound and enduring, constituting a grave violation of human rights in these Indo-China countries. Victims endure not only physical but also psychological and emotional trauma. Furthermore, beyond the individual level, society bears a significant economic and social burden as a result of this criminal enterprise. Thus, there is an urgent imperative for coordinated efforts aimed at eradicating human trafficking and providing comprehensive support for survivors.
In recent years, the scourge of human trafficking has escalated both regionally and globally, constituting a contemporary form of slavery (Russell, 2018). The emergence of this crisis has been notably exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, as evidenced by the research of

Todres and Diaz (2021). As a result, the issue transcends the purview of Southeast Asian governments, implicating transnational criminal networks that systematically exploit human dignity and rights through reprehensible treatment.

The advancement in communication technology and transportation has significantly altered the landscape of Southeast Asia, blurring the once rigid lines of national borders. This shift has facilitated a greater movement of goods and people across the region, with Malaysians increasingly seeking employment opportunities in neighboring countries. In part, the catalyst for this migration can be traced, in part, to the economic downturn triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic (Karim et al., 2020). However, amidst this increased mobility, there lies a concerning issue: human trafficking. Despite the interconnectedness fostered by modern technology, there exists a critical gap in the dissemination of information regarding this illicit trade. Recent content analyses of online news and social media have revealed shortcomings in reporting, with many narratives failing to address the root causes and preventive measures of human trafficking (Tsai et al., 2021a, 2021b). Such gaps impede the efforts of authorities and researchers to develop comprehensive solutions to combat this pervasive problem.
Given these challenges, at the heart of the matter is the need for heightened public awareness, which serves as a pivotal factor in preventing human trafficking within the region (Dinh et al., 2021). Nevertheless, there remains a notable research gap, particularly concerning the trafficking of Malaysians during the Covid-19 outbreak, necessitating a rigorous examination of news coverage related to human trafficking and forced labor specifically in Malaysia. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of news content, the article delves into the primary reasons why scam victims are coerced into forced labor, while also outlining the harrowing experiences they endure.

This study aims to investigate how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the trafficking of Malaysians in the Mekong region and the implications it carries for intervention strategies and victim support. Importantly, the objective extends beyond informing Southeast Asians; it also aims to alert potential victims worldwide to the dangers of such scams, thereby mitigating the risk of exploitation and abuse. Through the application of media analysis, this research endeavors to provide a thorough overview of human trafficking and forced labor involving Malaysians in Southeast Asian countries.

Literature Review

Human trafficking from Malaysia to Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar

In Southeast Asia, the issue of human trafficking looms large, with Malaysia at its epicenter, serving as both a source and destination country for this illicit trade. Within Malaysian borders, migrant workers and vulnerable individuals, particularly women and children from neighboring nations, endure exploitation, exacerbated by instances of organ trafficking (Wan et al., 2017). In 2021, Malaysia faced a concerning trend: a significant number of its citizens travelled to the Great Mekong Region in search of employment with fictitious companies. These individuals were lured by promises of high wages promoted by agents on social media or by acquaintances involved in local phone scam operations. As a result, some fell victim to scams orchestrated by trusted individuals who promised employment benefits and accommodation, only to find themselves ensnared in fraudulent schemes.

Recognizing the clandestine nature of human trafficking operations, obtaining accurate statistics poses a significant challenge (Von Feigenblatt, 2021), thereby highlighting the urgent need for more comprehensive research efforts. In response to these challenges, various measures have been enacted to safeguard state stability and security, including immigration restrictions. However, conventional migration patterns have inadvertently facilitated the establishment of illicit migration networks by transnational criminal organizations (Farrell et al., 2019). Consequently, these groups exploit the economic, social, cultural, and psychological vulnerabilities of marginalized populations (Armitage and Nellums, 2020), leading to emerging security concerns such as human trafficking and forced labor, which transcend national borders and constitute transnational crimes.

Against this backdrop, research examining human trafficking from Malaysia to Cambodia has unearthed pivotal insights. Takamatsu's seminal work (2004) employs a case study approach, synthesizing government reports, media accounts, and expert interviews. This comprehensive analysis establishes Malaysia as a major source and destination for human trafficking and smuggling cases, with Cambodia chiefly serving as a destination (Larsen, 2010). Crucial factors like poverty, limited educational and employment opportunities, and lax law enforcement mechanisms emerge as central contributors to this complex issue.

Similarly, Gozdiak's study (2011) parallels this narrative, offering a meticulous examination of the trafficking route from Malaysia to Cambodia. Echoing Takamatsu's findings, this research reaffirms Malaysia's dual role and underscores Cambodia's significance as a destination. Poverty, limited opportunities, and weak law enforcement emerge as pivotal factors contributing to the perpetuation of this issue (Adesina, 2014). Building on the foundations laid by Cheah (2006), researchers delve deeper into the push and pull dynamics shaping human trafficking from Malaysia to Cambodia. By employing a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, including expert interviews and data analysis, they identify poverty, lack of education and job prospects, and socio-cultural factors as primary push factors. Simultaneously, demand for cheap labor and inadequate law enforcement emerge as key pull factors (Yagci Sokat and Altay, 2022).

Extending the geographical scope, Marks and Olsen's comprehensive study (2015) further extends the exploration to encompass human trafficking from Malaysia to Myanmar and Thailand. Drawing from diverse sources, including government reports, media coverage, and expert insights, this research underscores Malaysia's pivotal role and emphasizes Thailand's emergence as a major destination. Consistent with earlier studies, poverty, educational and employment deficits, and weak law enforcement surface as significant contributors (Qiu et al., 2019). More broadly, a wider perspective on human trafficking from Malaysia to Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar highlights the complex and intertwined nature of this pervasive issue. Lim et al.'s comprehensive study (2018) underscores Malaysia's dual role, shedding light on the vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers. In particular, these vulnerabilities -- rooted in deceptive recruitment, unpaid wages, and deplorable working conditions, make them susceptible to human trafficking networks, further exacerbating the issue.

Beyond migration-focused studies, Greenbaum and Okech's research (2018) emphasizes the role of supply chains in perpetuating human trafficking, particularly in Southeast Asia. Their work uncovers how multinational corporations inadvertently contribute to forced

labor and trafficking, underscoring the urgent need for greater corporate responsibility and accountability. In addition, Smith et al.'s analysis (2017) delves into the impact of government policies on human trafficking trends in the region. Their findings reveal that shifts in immigration policies can either exacerbate or mitigate trafficking risks, highlighting the delicate balance that must be struck. Furthermore, Lee and Choi's exploration (2016) of civil society organizations (CSOs) underscores their significant contributions to the fight against human trafficking in Southeast Asia. Their study highlights the invaluable support provided to victims by CSOs and emphasizes the necessity for collaborative efforts between governments, CSOs, and international agencies to formulate effective anti-trafficking strategies. Likewise, Williams' investigation (2019) into the intricate connections between human trafficking and transnational organized crime illuminates how criminal networks operate seamlessly across borders, exploiting vulnerabilities in source, transit, and destination countries. Understanding the modus operandi of these networks is pivotal in developing comprehensive strategies to combat human trafficking.

In the digital age, technology assumes a prominent role in the trafficking landscape. Smith and Naim's research (2019) delves into the ways traffickers utilize online platforms and social media to lure victims and coordinate illicit activities. Therefore, recognizing the influence of technology is critical in efforts to counter human trafficking effectively. In sum, these studies collectively provide a comprehensive and interconnected understanding of human trafficking from Malaysia to Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar. They highlight the urgency for a multifaceted approach, addressing the vulnerabilities of migrant workers, the role of supply chains, the impact of government policies, the contributions of civil society organizations, the dynamics of transnational organized crime, and the influence of technology in combating this complex challenge. In light of these findings, this research aims to provide a thorough overview on human trafficking and forced labors of Malaysians in these Southeast Asian countries by using media analysis. Specifically, the study explores how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the trafficking of Malaysians in the Mekong region, and what are the implications for intervention strategies and victim support?

Methods

This section establishes the systematic technique utilized in this study to examine the content of news items pertaining to human trafficking in Southeast Asia amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve this objective, the research technique employed in this study is founded upon the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) approach, which provides a structured approach to reporting systematic reviews, guaranteeing a thorough and well-documented selection process (Beller et al., 2013; Batista et al., 2021; Domi et al., 2021, and Vilar-Compte et al., 2021; Takkouche and Norman, 2011). The objective of this systematic review is to thoroughly examine contemporary advancements in the field of human trafficking, with a specific emphasis on individuals from Malaysia residing in Southeast Asia. Additionally, this review seeks to evaluate the repercussions of the COVID-19 epidemic on the phenomenon of human trafficking in this region.

The process of selecting news content units for this content analysis strictly complies to well stated criteria for inclusion and exclusion (Page, 2021). Accordingly, the parameters for inclusion and exclusion in this review are delineated as follows:

Inclusion Criteria

First, this study focuses on examining the experiences of the Malaysian community in relation to human trafficking in Southeast Asia during the Covid-19 outbreak. To provide a comprehensive perspective, the analysis encompasses a range of study types, including peer-reviewed scholarly publications, empirical investigations, case studies, qualitative and quantitative research, systematic literature reviews, and reports from reputable sources such as government agencies, international organizations, and established research institutes. Second, the chosen publications encompass the time span from 2019 to the current date, or a period directly pertinent to the Covid-19 epidemic. This time frame is chosen because an analysis of how the research provide insights into the effects of the pandemic on human trafficking. Third, the study concentrates on the issue of human trafficking in Southeast Asian nations, namely Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar.

Furthermore, English-language publications were largely chosen for distribution because of the extensive English proficiency among the Malaysian populace (Ahmad and Lateh, 2016). The purpose of this decision is to enhance the accessibility of the study for its intended audience.

The study's focus is on the distinct effects of the Covid-19 epidemic on the dynamics of human trafficking. In this regards, the task entails examining alterations in the transportation of commodities, people, and resources, together with the vulnerabilities and precautionary measures that have arisen in reaction to the worldwide health emergency. Figure 1 presents the specific criteria that were used to determine which papers were included in the review.

Inclusion Criteria	*Description*
Demographic	Malaysian population involved or encountered with human trafficking in Southeast Asia during the Covid-19 pandemic
Type of study	Peer-reviewed scholarly publications, empirical investigations, case studies, qualitative and quantitative research endeavors, systematic literature reviews, and reports from reputable entities (government agencies, international organizations, and well-established research institutes)
Temporal scope	2019 to the present or a time frame directly relevant to the Covid-19 pandemic
Geographic scope	Southeast Asian countries, specifically Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, and other relevant nations in the region
Language	English
Topic	Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on human trafficking dynamics (changes in movement of goods, individuals, and resources, as well as susceptibilities and countermeasures)

Figure 1. Inclusion criteria of the study.

Exclusion Criteria

This section shows the preset elements or traits that are utilized to disqualify persons or subjects from engaging in a study or analysis. The focus of this study mostly centers on non-Malaysian populations, unless there exists a direct correlation to the impact of Covid-19 on the occurrence of human trafficking involving individuals from Malaysia throughout the Southeast Asian region.

The requirements for publication types explicitly exclude sources that do not undergo peer review, such as opinion pieces, editorials, news items, and non-academic blogs, unless they provide unique insights or data that possess academic or scientific significance. Non-scholarly sources encompass any sources that lack the necessary academic or scientific legitimacy in relation to the information they provide.

Irrelevant Studies: Articles that do not possess direct relevance to the understanding of human trafficking or the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as those that are not related to the given geographical context. The selection criteria for the research included in this analysis are restricted to publications that have been published subsequent to 2019, unless they incorporate essential historical context or foundational information that is relevant to the topic under consideration. The inclusion of this criterion serves to eliminate duplicate sources that exhibit duplicated research findings or employ identical datasets.

Research on Languages Other Than English: Despite the widespread usage of English as a commonly spoken language in Malaysia, it is reasonable to use non-English sources into academic inquiries, as long as they give substantial and unique data. However, it is crucial that these sources are well justified prior to their inclusion.

The current investigation centers on the examination of news stories sourced from The Star, a renowned English daily in Malaysia. Despite its limits and inherent biases, The Star is nevertheless a viable option as a news source for information on human trafficking for various reasons. The Star, as a highly regarded Malaysian media, offers significant perspectives on the local nuances of human trafficking, particularly Malaysia's position as a destination nation. Although there may be inherent patriotic biases, The Star's coverage provides a comprehensive and sophisticated grasp of human trafficking concerns in Malaysia and Southeast Asia. Moreover, The Star's being in Malaysia could provide a distinctive viewpoint on narratives about human trafficking, namely those that involve Malaysians as victims in foreign countries. By focusing on the local context, we can gain insight into the difficulties experienced by victims and the measures taken by authorities to tackle trafficking problems.

Although The Star's reporting may be influenced by government pressure, it also presents an opportunity to examine the intricate aspects of human trafficking, such as suspected instances of corruption or collusion inside the government. The Star's adeptness in navi-

gating these hurdles and delivering impartial coverage enhances the credibility of its reporting. In addition, The Star's coverage of human trafficking, despite the risks faced by journalists, displays its dedication to increasing public knowledge and ensuring that those responsible are held responsible. Despite the inherent dangers, The Star persists in covering human trafficking cases, emphasizing the courage of its journalists in addressing delicate and perilous subjects. Despite The Star's relatively modest resources in comparison to international news organizations, its local presence enables it to provide comprehensive coverage of human trafficking concerns that are unique to Malaysia and Southeast Asia. Although conducting extensive investigations can be difficult, The Star's research continues to provide significant insights into the intricate dynamics of human trafficking in the region.

Comparison of two main news source from Malaysia

Although both The Star and New Straits Times address the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia, they choose distinct approaches. As shown in Table 2, The Star frequently covers a wide range of human trafficking issues and typically includes the viewpoints of survivors in its reporting. The language employed in The Star's articles is typically more comprehensible, suggesting a deliberate attempt to involve a broader readership. In contrast, The New Straits Times (NST) prioritizes in-depth investigative journalism pertaining to individual instances of trafficking and governmental initiatives. Although this strategy may provide valuable information about official responses, it occasionally utilizes more specialized terminology. The Star's collaborations with anti-trafficking non-governmental organizations (NGOs) could offer an edge in terms of having a wider range of stories and more comprehensive coverage (Siti Hajar et al., 2010; Suppiah et al., 2019).

Criteria	*The Star*	*New Straits Times (NST)*
Focus of Coverage	Broad range of human trafficking types (labor, sex, etc.)	Leans towards investigative reports on specific cases or government actions.
Investigative Depth	Varies, can include in-depth pieces	Often focuses on initial reporting of incidents, with less follow-up.
Survivor Voices	Makes a conscious effort to include survivor stories.	Less emphasis on survivor narratives, focuses on official pronouncements.
Language	More accessible, caters to a general audience.	Can be more technical or bureaucratic in tone.
Solutions-Oriented	Sometimes includes discussions on policy changes or NGO efforts.	Lacks focus on solutions or preventative measures.
Partnerships	Known to collaborate with some anti-trafficking NGOs.	Unclear if they have established partnerships with anti-trafficking NGOs.

Figure 2. A comparison based on The Star and NST coverage of human trafficking and news delivery in Malaysia (Siti Hajar et al, 2010; Suppiah et al, 2019).

Exclusion Criteria	*Description*
Demographic	Non-Malaysian populations, unless there exists a direct correlation to the impact of Covid-19 on the occurrence of human trafficking involving individuals from Malaysia throughout the Southeast Asian region
Publication type	Non-peer-reviewed sources, such as opinion pieces, editorials, news items, and non-academic blogs, unless they provide unique insights or data that possess academic or scientific significance.
Scholarly legitimacy	Non-scholarly sources, such as any sources that lack the necessary academic or scientific legitimacy in relation to the information they provide.
Relevance	Irrelevant studies, such as articles that do not possess direct relevance to the understanding of human trafficking or the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as those that are not related to the given geographical context.
Temporal scope	Publications that have been published prior to 2019, unless they incorporate essential historical context or foundational information that is relevant to the topic under consideration.
Duplication	Duplicate sources that exhibit duplicated research findings or employ identical datasets.

Figure 3. Exclusion criteria of the study.

The specific subject of interest is the issue of human trafficking in Southeast Asia, with a particular emphasis on Myanmar, Cambodia, and Thailand (Hoon, 2022; Tsai et al., 2021). The study employed a combination of search phrases, such as "human trafficking" and "Southeast Asia," together with specific country names to gather pertinent news data. It is crucial to mention that the records were selectively refined to omit commentary and articles that did not primarily focus on human trafficking. The United Kingdom Modern Slavery Act of 2015 offers a thorough explanation of modern slavery, which includes human trafficking, coerced labour, and various other types of worker abuse. The legal framework mentioned in this study, as discussed by Farrell and Fahy (2009), is an important resource for comprehending the extent and consequences of human trafficking.
The data gathering process includes using the Google search engine to retrieve news stories published by The Star over the period from March to September 2022. The study explicitly examined the headlines, sub-headlines, and the first three paragraphs of online news stories to assess their suitability for inclusion in the content analysis (Farrell and Fahy, 2009).

It is crucial to recognize that the news articles obtained by Google News are accessible to the public and can be accessed by all users without any cost. Therefore, it is presumed that consent has been given for the utilization of these items in the current investigation. In addition, the data gathering procedure followed the ethical guidelines of qualitative research, guaranteeing that the principles of research ethics were maintained throughout the study

(Farrell and Fahy, 2009). Overall, the study performed a thorough examination of news articles from The Star, utilizing a methodical approach to gathering and analyzing data in compliance with recognized ethical standards. The study aims to offer significant insights into how human trafficking concerns are portrayed and covered in Southeast Asia, specifically within the Malaysian media setting (Farrell and Fahy, 2009).

Following with the procedural of data gathering was carried out in accordance with the PRISMA methodology.

As show in Figure 4, a total of 132 news recordings pertaining to human trafficking issues in Southeast Asia were identified during the initial phase of the study. The data was additionally refined to eliminate commentary, and individuals involved in human trafficking were not the primary focus of the research. The research was carried out utilizing the online search engine Google, namely within the news area. The parameters of the setting were configured to exclusively display the news articles produced by The Star newspaper throughout the period spanning from March to September 2022. The inclusion of online news articles in the content analysis was determined based on the examination of their headlines, sub-headlines, and the initial three paragraphs. The information available on Google News is openly accessible to the general public without any cost, thus implying that consent is presumed in the current research. The data collection process employed in this study adhered to the ethical principles commonly observed in qualitative research.

The findings are organized based on categorization by date, title, description, and source. The dataset was carefully curated to eliminate duplicate records, resulting in a final dataset of 63 distinct news records. The dataset consisting of 63 records was subjected to a comprehensive screening procedure in order to evaluate their pertinence and congruity with the research objectives. The articles underwent evaluation based on predetermined criteria for inclusion and disqualification. During the screening stage, 69 records were excluded due to their lack of relevance or direct focus on human trafficking issues in Southeast Asia. The total number of full-text articles that were evaluated for eligibility in this study was 63. After the screening process, a total of 63 records were identified as relevant and were further evaluated to determine their eligibility for inclusion in the content analysis, based on predefined criteria.

The total count of full-text articles that were excluded from the study is zero, and this exclusion was based on specific reasons. All 63 full-text papers were deemed pertinent to the research objectives, resulting in none being excluded.

The qualitative synthesis contained a total of 63 studies, encompassing all of them. This comprehensive approach aimed to extract valuable insights from the news content units. The quantitative synthesis, often known as a meta-analysis, did not include any studies (N=0). Our investigation focused primarily on a qualitative synthesis of news material, and did not include any quantitative synthesis or meta-analysis.

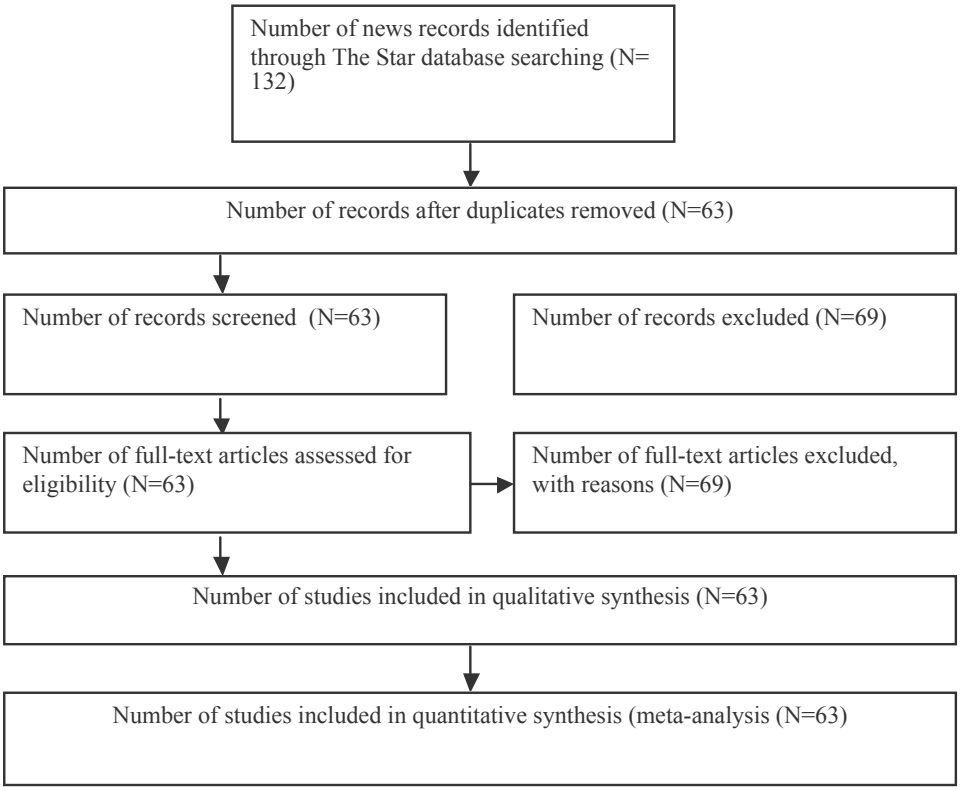


Figure 4. PRISMA flow diagram of Malaysian in Southeast Asia during Covid-19 (Liberati et al, 2009).

Findings

This study unravels the complexities surrounding human trafficking in the region, utilizing news content analysis to provide insights into the current situation. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the surge in human trafficking of Malaysians in Southeast Asia is attributed to heightened vulnerability among individuals and weakened border controls in the region. The pandemic has exacerbated socio-economic challenges, leaving many susceptible to exploitation. Additionally, disruptions in law enforcement and border security have created opportunities for traffickers. This alarming trend underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to address vulnerabilities, enhance border management, and mitigate the impact of the pandemic on human trafficking in Southeast Asia (Ha Jin and Dhaneswara, 2023).

The pandemic has amplified instability, leading to a significant increase in human trafficking incidents (Aslam, 2022). The utilization of the internet as a tool for exploitation has further complicated the situation, with online information becoming a method for trafficking (Buckley et al., 2022). Moreover, the elevated unemployment rate during the pandemic has added to the rise in trafficking cases, increasing individuals' susceptibility to exploitation (Meri et al., 2022).

Beyond these structural factors human trafficking networks and brokers play a major role in facilitating these scams and forced labor situations. They profit from the recruitment and exploitation of vulnerable individuals. These networks often operate across borders, making it challenging for authorities to track and apprehend those responsible. Vulnerabil-

ities to trafficking among Malaysians include economic hardship, unemployment, lack of education, and the presence of marginalized communities (Srinivas and Sivaraman, 2021). Moreover, limited awareness and information among potential victims about the risks associated with overseas employment can make them easy targets for scams (Button et al., 2014). These scams may be orchestrated by organized criminal networks with connections in both Malaysia and Myanmar, making it challenging for law enforcement agencies to track and dismantle these operations. Both the Cambodian and Malaysian governments, in collaboration with international organizations and NGOs, have taken steps to address these issues. Efforts include awareness campaigns, improved regulation of recruitment agencies, and measures to identify and assist victims. Law enforcement agencies in both countries have worked together to dismantle human trafficking networks and bring perpetrators to justice. It is worth noting here that from March to September 2022, the number of news items reported in The Star increased from three to seventeen. This demonstrates that the media is becoming more aware of the significance of Malaysian human trafficking in the study areas as presented in Figure 5.

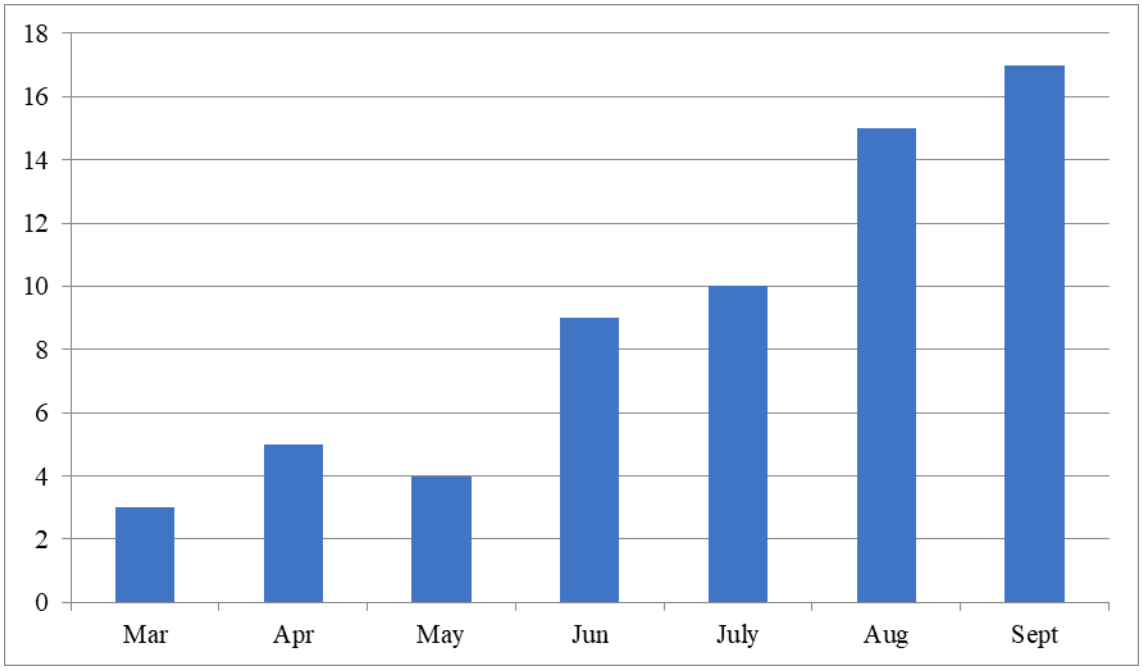


Figure 5. Total news content units from March to September 2022 in The Star.

The main locations where victims are trafficked into gambling and phone scam operations in Southeast Asia are illustrated in Figure 6, highlighting Lashio, Mae Sot, and Sihanoukville. Lashio is a small town located in northern Myanmar near the China-Myanmar border; it also borders east India (Ng, 2021). Mae Sot-Myawaddy is indeed a small town located on the border between Thailand and Myanmar, and it has gained notoriety as an area associated with human trafficking and forced labor. KK Park, also known as Kyaw Khaing Park, is one of the areas in this region that has been cited in connection with such illicit activities. Mae Sot in Thailand and Myawaddy in Myanmar are located on a porous and relatively uncontrolled border (Arnold and Hewison, 2005). This geographic proximity and the ease of crossing the border make it conducive for illegal activities, including human trafficking. In Cambodia, Sihanoukville is a touristy coastal town in the southern part

of the country (Jackie Ong and Smith, 2014). Since 2018, it has been a part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to develop the tourism and casino industries as the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone in this region (Wang et al., 2021).

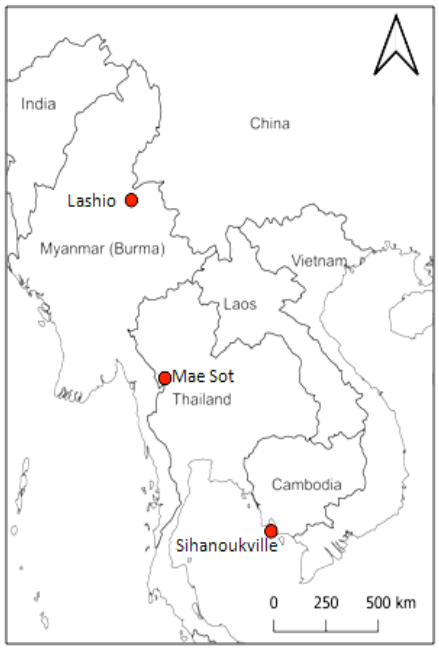


Figure 6. The primary locations of victims trafficked in the gambling and phone scam industries in Southeast Asia.

Myanmar

Myanmar has been under scrutiny for human rights abuses, and various international organizations and governments have called for investigations and accountability (Arifin, 2022). The situation is complex, and efforts to address these issues involve a combination of domestic and international actions, including diplomatic pressure, sanctions, and support for local organizations working to protect human rights (Günes et al., 2022).
KK Park in Myanmar is well known for human trafficking and forced laboring. It was formed by the now arrested Chinese She Zhijiang, who has acquired a Cambodian passport and changed his name to “Tang Kriang Kai.” Before being caught in Thailand, he was wanted by both China and the international community. He was involved in the illegal gambling and lottery sector, where he deceived and made large sums of money (Strangio, 2020).

In the southern Myanmar, according to information from a rescued Malaysian who only wanted to be known as Seah, he reported that the syndicate was enslaving over 1,000 Malaysians simply in the building where he was being held in Myawaddy. "There were roughly 300 individuals on each floor, predominantly Malaysians. They were also beaten; therefore, I know they are victims" he added at a press conference on June 8 at Wisma MCA.” (Adam, 2022). The exploitation of victims is consistent in the International Labor Organization (ILO) (Lerche, 2007), including of restriction of movement, isolation, physical and sexual violence, retention of identity documents, excessive overtime and abusive working and living conditions.

Thailand

The economic disparities between Thailand and Myanmar drive many people to seek employment opportunities in Thailand, often without legal documentation (Chan, 2022). This

vulnerability to exploitation is exploited by human traffickers. Historically, the region has faced challenges related to the enforcement of labor laws and regulations. Weak regulation and oversight can create an environment where exploitative labor practices can thrive. Organized criminal networks involved in human trafficking often operate in border areas, taking advantage of weak border control and limited law enforcement cooperation between the two countries.

Traffickers and unscrupulous employers may confiscate the identification documents of workers, effectively trapping them and limiting their ability to escape exploitative conditions. For example, a student named Goi was about to graduate as a teacher but the 23-year-old went to Bangkok in January 2022 to meet a "girlfriend" he had only contacted online, trafficked into Myawaddy in south-eastern Myanmar and forced to work for the syndicate (The Star, 2022b). The family discovered Goh had died in May under a fake name in a Thai hospital in Mae Sot, the doctor believed Goh was abused before he was left for treatment on April 11, 2022. He was admitted to the hospital's ICU unit under a fake name and passport number. Due to his son's fake identity, he said the hospital could not reach the embassy and family to discuss his health condition and treatment.
He passed away on May 11, 2022 at Mae Sot Hospital near the Thailand-Myanmar border. His remain was buried at a cemetery in Si Racha in Chonburi province, across the river from the Myanmar complex. He was hospitalized in intensive care for a month and his cause of death was reported to be infection in his heart and lungs. He made his first – and last – call to his parents in March saying he had been beaten up for allegedly faking illness and needed RM80,000 so he could be hospitalized (The Star, 2022).

Following a tip-off by another Malaysian victim who had returned to the country, it was learnt that Goi was taken to KK Garden in the Myawaddy township near the Thai border to work for companies engaged in online scams. Goh was cremated on Thursday at the Hin Kong Temple in Si Racha, about 120km southeast of Bangkok, and his ashes brought back to Ipoh (The Star, 2022a). The parents were informed by a non-governmental organization that arranged his son's burial services in May to settle the outstanding hospital bills of about RM40,000 before the family could obtain a death certificate to exhume the body for DNA testing and cremation (Zainal, 2022).

Cambodia
Sihanoukville has undergone rapid economic development and urbanization, driven by tourism, real estate, and the construction of a major deep-sea port. The demand for labor in these sectors has attracted a large number of foreign workers, particularly from countries like China (Po and Heng, 2019). Sihanoukville, a coastal town in Cambodia, has faced significant challenges related to issues like forced labor, particularly in the context of its rapid development and the influx of foreign workers in industries such as construction, hospitality, and entertainment (Wang et al., 2021). This coastal town is known for its rapid transformation into a major destination for casino gambling and entertainment. In recent years, Sihanoukville has become a hub for the casino industry, attracting both domestic and international visitors (Bo and Loughlin, 2022).

Previous research on human trafficking in Cambodia has primarily focused on women and children who work in sex industry to earn living (DoCarmo et al., 2021; Schmidthorst, 2022). However, according to the present news analysis, the human trafficking for forced labor

in phone scamming industry cases involving a mix population of Malaysian men, women, fresh graduates, and students under the age of 18. These individuals are desperate for better job prospects and are unwilling to be tricked or voluntarily join the forces in Southeast Asian countries, most of them were attracted by lucrative pay. As a result, additional in-depth study efforts are necessary to understand the statistics of the population engaged in these crimes during and after Covid-19.

These victims are made to work in illegal gambling and scam call centers, they also set with high key performance indicator and overly worked for long hours that stressed them out and if it was not achieved, they will get punished by getting beaten and electric shock (The Star, 2022b; AFP, 2022). They are forced to work for a scam call center (The Star, 2022a). At a shuttered Great Wall Park compound in the seaside city of Sihanoukville, Cambodian officials uncovered evidence of human trafficking, kidnapping, and torture during searches on suspected cybercrime compounds. These victims are made to work in illegal gambling and scam call centers (The Star, 2022b). These victims are relocated inside the Indo-China region; these scam centers are said to be run by a large fraud group of Chinese people.

Refusal to Return Back to Home Country

Even though the goal of all trafficked victims is to return to Malaysia, some returnees – due to financial hardships and familial pressure (Louw, 2020) – have refused to go back and have instead chosen to engage in the phone scamming industry. Factors contributing to the reluctance of human trafficking victims to return to their home country encompass the severe trauma and exploitation they endured, the fear instilled by traffickers, the social stigma attached to being a trafficking survivor, apprehension about re-victimization, a lack of trust in the criminal justice system, and insufficient support, treatment, and protection. These elements can impact victims' willingness or ability to engage in the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators. Furthermore, inadequacies or inefficiencies in legislation, governmental and criminal justice system corruption, and shortcomings in return programs can exacerbate these vulnerabilities, diminishing the likelihood of victims participating in legal proceedings (Andrevski et al., 2013; Jain, 2022).

Traffickers often confiscate victims' passports and identification documents, leaving them without legal documentation and effectively stranded in the host country. This limits their ability to leave and return home. Many victims of forced labor incur significant debts as a result of recruitment fees, transportation costs, and other expenses related to their employment. This debt bondage created a sense of obligation to stay and continue working, even in exploitative conditions, in the hope of repaying the debts (Louw, 2020).
Many victims are unaware of their rights and the available resources for assistance, which can keep them trapped in exploitative situations. Some victims may distrust law enforcement or government authorities in their home country due to previous negative experiences or corruption concerns. This distrust can dissuade them from seeking help. Victims of forced labor often experience severe trauma, depression, and other psychological effects as a result of their exploitation. These factors can impair their decision-making and their ability to take action.

Some Malaysians refused to be rescued or to leave Cambodia. Some of them fled their homes, while others fled from loan sharks. They don't always want to tell their parents the truth (Zahiid, 2022). “When the parents are at a crossroads for what to do, they fabricate

stories about their children being abducted and forced to work, but when we arrived to rescue them, they refused to return," said Eldeen. However, Malaysian Ambassador to Cambodia Datuk Eldeen Husaini further stated that others had refused to return to Malaysia because they were runaways or victims sheltering from loan sharks (Zahiid, 2022).

Post-trafficking stigma refers to the negative attitudes, perceptions, and discrimination that survivors of human trafficking often face after escaping or being rescued from their traffickers. This stigma can manifest in various ways and can be a significant barrier to survivors' reintegration into society and their overall recovery. Survivors may be unfairly blamed for their victimization. They might be seen as willing participants in illegal activities or as having made poor choices (Laurie and Richardson, 2021).

Reasons for Falling into Job Scams

During the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, economic hardships and limited job opportunities in Malaysia may drive individuals to seek employment abroad, including in Thailand and Myanmar. Desperation for employment can make them more vulnerable to deceptive recruitment practices (Larsen, 2010). Many potential victims may lack adequate information about the risks associated with overseas employment. They might not be aware of the common tactics used by human traffickers and scammers. Scammers and traffickers use false promises to manipulate victims, making it difficult for them to make informed decisions about their employment (Sykiotou, 2017).

Victims are often lured by fraudulent job offers that promise high wages and a better life (Gul et al., 2022). Scammers may contact Malaysians, often via phone calls or online advertisements, offering lucrative job offers in Myanmar. They may claim that the positions are well-paid and require no previous experience. These offers may come from recruitment agencies that are not properly regulated or licensed.

Malaysian nationals who travel to Cambodia for employment are sometimes lured into exploitative situations by unscrupulous recruiters or employers. Some Malaysians may be promised well-paying jobs but end up trapped in forced labor situations where they are subjected to long working hours, low wages, and inhumane conditions. Victims in foreign countries like Myanmar may have limited access to legal protections and may not be aware of their rights or how to seek help. Scammers and traffickers often use threats, intimidation, and psychological manipulation to control victims and keep them in exploitative situations (Denney and Xayamoungkhoun, 2023).

Some victims may have their passports confiscated upon arrival in Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar, making it difficult for them to escape exploitative situations (Denney and Xayamoungkhoun, 2023). Victims may be required to pay substantial fees for recruitment, visas, and travel costs. These fees can create a cycle of debt bondage, making it difficult for individuals to escape exploitative situations. Victims find themselves in exploitative working conditions, such as long working hours, low wages, lack of proper accommodation, and inadequate safety measures.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study offers a comprehensive exploration of the intricate dimensions surrounding human trafficking involving Malaysians in Southeast Asia, with a specific focus

on Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar. The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened vulnerabilities, amplifying the exploitation of Malaysians, particularly in contexts like online scams and illegal gambling. The research underscores key contributing factors such as human trafficking networks, passport confiscation, debt bondage, and the enduring post-trafficking stigma, all of which impede victims' ability to break free from exploitative situations. The noteworthy increase in media coverage during the specified period underscores the growing acknowledgment of Malaysian human trafficking issues, signaling the urgency for intensified attention and collective actions.

The study reveals the multifaceted nature of trafficking, ranging from traditional forms of exploitation to emerging threats in the digital realm, such as phone scamming. The geographical proximity and porous borders in the region contribute to the ease of illegal activities, necessitating collaborative efforts between nations, NGOs, and international organizations to combat these issues effectively. Importantly, the analysis unravels the reluctance of some trafficking victims to return to their home countries, highlighting the enduring trauma, fear, and socio-economic pressures that impede reintegration. Legislative inadequacies, corruption concerns, and shortcomings in return programs exacerbate these challenges, calling for urgent reforms in legal frameworks and support systems.

Addressing this complex challenge demands a holistic strategy, involving strengthened legal frameworks, augmented law enforcement capabilities, and robust international cooperation. Essential components include awareness campaigns, enhanced regulation of recruitment agencies, and comprehensive support systems for victims. The study emphasizes the critical need for governments, non-governmental organizations, and international entities to collaboratively develop and implement strategies that address the root causes of human trafficking, ensure the protection of victims, and bring perpetrators to justice. In confronting this critical issue, sustained and concerted efforts are imperative to establish a Southeast Asia where the rights and well-being of individuals are safeguarded, and the blight of human trafficking is effectively eradicated.

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The Subjectivity and Conformity Issues in Contemporary

Practices of Algorithmic Creativity

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Abstract

This article examines the issue of subjectivity and conformism in algorithmic cultural practices (robotic performances and neurocomputer installations “A3 K3 Dragan Ilic," “Alone Together," “NOOR” and “AIBO”). The focus is on the technological features of algorithmic creativity, which is based on machine learning, stylistic imitation and computational data processing. In this context, ethical and legal issues related to copyright and the recognition of artistic works created by artificial intelligence are analyzed. In particular, mechanized artistic practices create the illusion of autonomous creativity, whilst retaining the decisive role of human subjectivity in the organization and interpretation of cultural processes. Algorithmic creativity remains dependent on human programming, technological mediation and artistic conception. However, the creative process involving BCI may take on characteristics of subjectivity. This is evidenced by court rulings on the determination of subjectivity and copyright in works created through algorithmic computations.

Keywords: *Algorithmic Creativity, Robotic Performances, AI, Conformity, Brain-Computer Interface, Authorship*

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Introduction

The Fourth Scientific and Technological Revolution, characterized by the rapid development of algorithmic computational methods, has swept across the globe and had a significant impact on artistic culture and the definition of its subjectivity. With the invention and refinement of computer technology, human activity is increasingly being replaced by mechanized processes. These innovations have not bypassed the spatial arts either. It is not a question of the disappearance of the creator's noumenon in artistic production, but of the viewer's participation in the immediate process and the automation of production activities.

Therefore, in the course of this research, it is important to analyze contemporary experience in the development of robotic mechanisms and their use by artists in organizing creative activities. These practices have contributed to the formation of a new specificity of the cultural process, which shapes scientific thinking and advanced methods of creating interactive art. These transformations raise ethical and social questions regarding the role of technology in artistic culture, the freedom of the artist, and the interpretation of works within the relevant organization of creative activity.

Theoretical Foundations

In our time, in an era of industrialization across all spheres of activity – accompanied by standardization, unification and the suppression of creative impulses – the creative individual is transformed from a biological being into a purely social one. After all, collective forms of organizing the creative process tend to turn into a routine production process (Goncalo and Barry, 2006:97). With the introduction of AI into contemporary cultural studies, conceptual research into “algorithmic creativity” and the autonomous generation of artistic content has become highly relevant (Pearce, Meredith and Wiggins, 2002; Colton and Wiggins, 2012; Lucchiari, Folgieri, Cas and Soave, 2016; Andujar, Crawford, Nijholt, France and Gilbert, 2015) These attempts to understand “algorithmic creativity” are accompanied by critical academic research, which highlights the impossibility of replicating biological systems in terms of their structure and functioning (McCarthy, 1987:1030-1035). In algorithmic creativity, aesthetic content can be generated autonomously through the operation of computational models (Ames and Domino, 1992: 186; Pearce, Meredith and Wiggins, 2002:119-147). In this context, the main focus is on the minimisation of the role of human activity in the organization of artistic creation; consequently, the risks of losing control over the process of creating an aesthetic product are examined (Sangvanich and Phetmalaikul, 2024:270).

These issues are relevant in the concept of “technological singularity” (Good, 1965; Drexler, 1986; Vinge, 1993:11-22), according to which a robotic device is capable of functioning without human programming (control). This leads to the illusion of equating human intelligence with “artificial” intelligence. One of the main topics of discussion regarding the conceptualization of artistic culture arising from the use of algorithmic computations is the question of authorship and creative uniqueness. C. Lucchiari, R. Folgieri, L. Dei Cas and F. Soave (2016) investigate the interaction between mechanized and human actions in the organization of the creative process. The main limitation of these approaches is the use of an invasive “brain-computer” interface to control the device. In cultural studies, critical statements and concerns prevail regarding the negative impact of “artificial intelligence” on the formation of artistic culture (Chen, Shidujaman, Jin and Ahmed, 2020:13-31; Yusa, Yu Yu and Sovhyra, 2023:153-154).

Most scholars argue that the cultural practices of introducing "artificial intelligence" do not indicate genuine "authorship" on the part of mechanized technologies, since they ultimately turn out to be the product of human programming and training data (Hofstadter, 1999: 83–91), because AI can only imitate existing styles and is incapable of originality and creativity (Janjanam, et al, 2022:1425-1433). The issue of understanding the introduction of "artificial intelligence" into creativity is based on the assertion that computational systems mimic human behavior.

Scientists agree that there is still no AI technology that is self-aware, independent, and able to cope with emotional and social effects (Hadzi and Roio, 2020:1-18). Instead, J. Litman points out that "copyright laws become obsolete when technology renders the assumptions on which they are based obsolete" (Litman, 2006:22). S. Ligon argues that if we recognise the originality of AI-generated products, it means that we should raise the question of the subjectivity of artificial authors (Ligon, 2019:51). Depending on the level of automation in creative activities, the following types of user control can be identified: selective control, passive control, direct control and collaborative control (Wadeson, Nijholt, Nam, 2015: 70-75). Based on their technological developments, the authors propose a definition of "brain-computer" artistic interfaces according to four criteria: "human-computer" interaction, neurophysiology, art and computer technologies (Andujar, Crawford, Nijholt, France, Gilbert, 2015:60-69).

Research Methodology

In order to explore the issue of creative subjectivity in the organization of robotics practices, the article considers both technocentric conceptual views on the process of organizing creativity (which are predominantly expressed in the conceptual sphere of "technological determinism") and anthropocentric approaches to understanding artistic culture (as established in posthumanism and transhumanism, as well as in the theory of technological singularity). The artist's technological individualism is manifested in an original approach to the organization of the creative process. According to the concept of creativity proposed by R. Folgieri, M. Granato, C. Lucari, and D. Grechi (2014), "the artist's idea approaches a state of consciousness," but the human mind only begins to realize the process of the creative realization of this idea only when the task of technological implementation arises. As a result, divergent thinking (author's thinking involving a large number of non-standard, original solutions) is often replaced by canonical thinking (an established set of generally accepted techniques and technologies of creative activity). The increasing complexity of the technological component of the creative process – in particular, automation – alters the nature of artistic creation, its style and the results of production. To address the research objectives, a comparative-typological method was employed to compare human and mechanized activity, as well as to determine the level of conformity in robotic practices in light of the identified technological determinism. We propose a method for analyzing the complex psychological ultrastructure of the creative process, which enables the investigation of signs of subjectivity and authorship in the organization of cultural creation processes.

This technological representation algorithm of the artist's idea is an important issue that depends not only on determining the technical and technological component role, but also on the subjective feature of the artistic cultural process. After all, despite all the uniqueness and originality, the creative process is built according to a certain logic: from the

moment when its image is born in the artist's imagination, to the moment of embodiment, (embodiment) in a certain material, and then – the search for its completion in the minds of consumers, which is a complex art psychological ultrastructure (Bezklubenko, 2015:229). This process of technological implementation of the artist's vision is a crucial issue that depends not only on defining the roles of technical elements, but also on the subjective nature of the creative process. After all, despite all its uniqueness and originality, the creative process follows a certain logic: from the moment the image is born in the artist's imagination to the moment of its realization (materialisation) in a specific medium, and then – the search for its completion in the minds of the audience, which constitutes a complex artistic and psychological superstructure (Bezklubenko, 2015:229).

In the case of the automation of the creative process, the creator's idea is realized using technical tools, algorithmic data analysis, and complex mathematical calculations. Consequently, it becomes difficult to analyze the psychological superstructure of the creative process and to compare the creator's original idea with the realized variant. This issue becomes crucial in the course of the research and requires the resolution of a number of significant problems related to the determination of authorship, subjectivity and the conformity level.

This finding also leads to a further intensification of technophobia, the consolidation of the "technological singularity" theory, and subsequently the "Uncanny Valley" theory (Mori, 2012:98-100). The latter aims to explore human reactions to the realism of an artificially created object as it comes closer to a real-life counterpart. M. Mori argues that as a robotic mechanism becomes more human-like, observers' emotional reactions become more positive, but this lasts only until the robot's appearance becomes increasingly indistinguishable from that of a human. A sense of anxiety is likely a form of human instinct that protects against immediate sources of danger (Mori, 2012: 100). This concept is important in the research of the role of technology and engineering in the organization of artistic creativity, as its propositions illustrate the contemporary understanding and perception of technical innovations in the organization of artistic creativity by the audience.

The Conformity and Technological Determinism Problem in Automated Practices of Organizing Artistic Creativity

Contemporary technological attempts to mechanize the creative process and integrate computer technology into cultural practice are undertaken with the aim of optimizing labour and saving time and resources. These processes lead to the organization of factory-style production of cultural works. This does not refer to the factory production of consumables for the creative process (in visual arts –paints, brushes, stencils; in sound reproduction – musical instruments, etc.), but to a fully mechanized creative process. Robotics is generally used to perform complex operations in production. The coiner of the term "artificial intelligence," J. McCarthy, once emphasized that: "the capabilities of modern technology exceed human capabilities" (McCarthy, 1987:1030).

Given the importance of a creative approach in the organization of artistic creation, the collective nature of such activity may have certain negative consequences. In particular, artificial creativity, compared to individual creativity, exhibits a higher degree of conformism. Working independently, an artist can easily adapt methods and techniques to suit

an idea, leading to the development of a distinctive style and manner of execution. In an automated creative process, all participants must "subordinate" themselves to the common goal. Consider examples of a hybrid combination of mechanized and human activity directly within the production process, including the scanning of brain activity and human thought, as well as the subsequent execution of mechanized manipulations in accordance with the results obtained. In particular, in the installations "A3 K3 Dragan Ilic" (Kreutzer and Sirrenberg, 2019:219), "Floor" and "Living Fool" (Colton and Wiggins, 2012:21-26) robotic mechanisms create so-called "pictorial" canvases.

At the Ars Electronica festival (Linz, Austria, 7–11 September 2017), a demonstration was given of the A3-K3 mechanism (a Kuka robotic mechanism), which made it possible to "draw" a picture mechanically. This means that the robot creates the image that the user has in mind and intends to draw, without making any physical movements. This is achieved by monitoring the user's mental state in order to modify the operation of the robotic device (Fig.1). This process is made possible by a "brain-computer interface" (BCI), which is a method of direct interaction between human activity and a computer. The brain-computer interface measures brain activity and converts the recorded data into corresponding control signals for BCI applications (Graimann, Allison, Pfurtscheller, 2010:1–27).

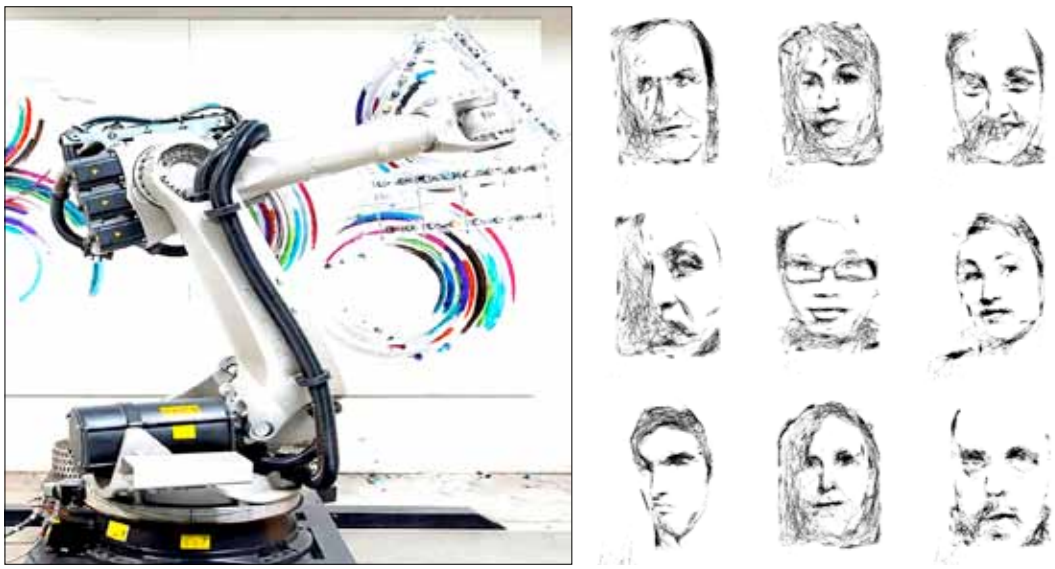


Figure 1. Functioning of the robotic mechanism A3 K3, installation by Dragan Ilic (2017).

Figure 1 shows that robotic movements mimic human activity in such a way that they appear to completely replace manual manipulation with mechanized actions. The user does not perform any physical actions; the creative process is carried out exclusively by the mechanized arm. Thus, human interaction with the robot is aimed at finding new mechanized ways of realizing the author's vision. The proposed robot architecture is capable of recognizing users' mental states based on biofeedback derived from their focus of attention. During the festival, the robotic system was demonstrated twice a day. In total, there were ten performances, each lasting thirty minutes, and on average the Kuka robotic manipulator received more than twelve commands per test. These commands could be programmed using two main methods: via a manual programming system and an automatic programming system using simple specialised commands (Biggs and MacDonald,

2003: 1–3). A hybrid approach to the production process (combining human activity with the operation of robotic equipment) enabled creative activity based on brain-computer interaction. According to the results of a survey of visitors to this impressive installation, only twenty per cent of respondents had prior knowledge of the Kuka robot and the possibility of robotizing the creative process, whilst seventeen per cent were aware of the brain-computer interface.

However, personal attitudes towards the installation were positive, as over fifty-nine per cent of respondents considered it possible to use a robotic mechanism to facilitate artistic creation and recognized the built-in brain-computer interface as a useful technology. More than sixty-five of respondents considered the performance to be innovative, and over forty-nine per cent found the interaction between the robotic mechanism and the artist to be organic (Tramonte, Sorbello, Guger and Chella, 2019). It can therefore be concluded that the automation of the creative process has reached such a level that the human hand is no longer required in the process of painting: canvases are now successfully painted using robotic mechanisms. It is important to note here that a robot is a technological system which, thanks to the integration of sensors and actuators, exhibits conditionally autonomous behavior in the physical world. Given that the process of performance (whether music or painting) is carried out by imitating traditional human techniques, a mechanically reproduced work of art cannot be regarded as an original work from the primary source. For example, on stage at the Norwegian Academy of Music as part of the EPARM Conference “Alone Together” (9 April 2026), a mechanized piano “accompanied” the solo violinist (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Functioning of the a mechanized piano, EPARM Conference “Alone Together” (9 April 2026).

Despite the originality of the mechanization process, music remains material for the listeners’ perception. At the same time, the instrument, like the performer, merely reproduces the recorded score. Thus, by imitating traditional human technique, the illusion is created that the musical sequence arises through the instrument’s action. In reality, however, the opposite is true: musical compositions, as the result of traditional music-making

techniques, dictate the algorithm for their reproduction to mechanized technology. These findings raise questions about the importance of improvisation and the author's approach to the choice of techniques and technologies for organizing artistic creation. The author's style, inherent to the individual artistic process, is transformed into a clearly planned method for calculating mechanized manipulations. It is therefore important, in the course of this research, to identify mass-produced works that are unique, one-of-a-kind, and which can rightly be called works of art. This raises the question of authorship, for if creativity can now be reduced to a purely mechanized process (as noted above), then the significance of human activity risks being downplayed. Given the identified patterns of the industrial transformation of the creative process, it is extremely important to investigate the issues of authorship and the uniqueness of the results of this activity. The possibility – or, conversely, the impossibility – of fully mechanizing creative activity and determining the role of human activity in the relevant process are the next questions for further research.

Copyright and the Illusion of Authorship in Algorithmic Creativity

The integration of artificial intelligence into the field of stage entertainment creates significant ethical issues. One of the key issues is the balance between the role of AI-generated content and human artistic expression. While artificial intelligence can facilitate and extend creative processes, it is important to preserve the authenticity and emotional depth that identifies human experience and interpretation. The "Izolyatsia" Foundation and the "IZONE Creative Association," with the support of the US Embassy, organized the "Incubator" project (2014–2020) with the aim of familiarizing specialists and artists from around the world, particularly from Ukraine, with the results of technological developments in the field of "artificial intelligence" in the cultural sphere (Sovhyra, 2021:9). The "NOOR" and "AIBO" projects (directed by Ellen Perlman) are based on tracking brain activity and incorporating artificial intelligence into the artistic space. "NOOR" was presented in a 360-degree immersive theatre. Audience members interacted with the performer, observing her brain waves, various videos and sounds in real time. Data is captured from the human brain, undergoes pre-processing, resulting in the creation of an electroencephalogram: facial features and emotions are transformed into a specific algorithm. The resulting digital indicators are subsequently transformed into a specific artistic and visual medium (light, color, animation, sound, music, and, with the help of more complex and voluminous clouds, heat, vibration, etc.).

The artist can walk around the audience and interact with other people. Video generated from the performer's brainwaves is projected onto screens, whilst the music and soprano vocals also change in response to the actress's emotional state (Pearlman, 2017:79-85). This project demonstrates the potential for interconnection between artistic content and innovative digital technologies, art and science. Unlike "NOOR," the data obtained is processed and transformed into color images, dynamic videos and audio. Depending on the actress's emotional state, the costume reflects green colors (positive emotions – joy, laughter, interest), red (negative – disappointment, nervousness), and yellow (neutral – calm). At the same time, these detected emotions "trigger" a database containing pre-recorded video clips and vocals. This experimental project serves as a prime example of "computational creativity," organized through the operation of computational systems to represent creative ideas. "Computational systems that produce this (artistic) material can also introduce aesthetic innovations, justifying and utilizing the results of scanning" (Colton and Wiggins, 2012:23).

Based on this, artistic algorithmic creativity is largely grounded in the exploration of human works, which amounts to a simple imitation of a particular human creative style.

Experimental practices of automated creativity raise the issue of copyright. All legal norms and doctrines relating to creativity, originality, personality, economic and moral rights, limitations and exceptions are created and regularly redefined to meet the challenges of the times. Copyright is infringed in relation to works created by machine learning, a special type of artificial intelligence that "can mimic human learning and action by autonomously processing data (involving) algorithms, or sets of rules, that progressively improve themselves by feasting on data." The question arises whether these works of art can be copyrighted and who will own these rights (Ramirez Caminatti, 2023:13).

Recent case law suggests that a computer cannot be an author. Under current U.S. intellectual property law, machines are not recognized as natural persons capable of copyright. The Compendium of the United States Copyright Office Practices regulates some of the rules and concepts derived from the above case law examples. Compendium section "The Human Authorship Requirement" illustrates anthropocentric approaches to the definition of copyright, noting that the law recognizes "work of 'authorship' a work must be created by a human being. Works that do not satisfy this requirement are not copyrightable" (U.S. Copyright Office, 2021: § 313.2). In April 2021, the European Commission proposed the first EU regulatory framework on AI. It states that AI systems that can be used in different applications are analyzed and classified according to the risk they pose to users. Different levels of risk will mean more or less regulation. According to Gabriel Hallevy's theory, subjectivity in AI-enabled practices should be determined by three legal models. The first is the model of liability "committing a crime through another person," which imposes liability on a person. The second is the natural – probable – consequence model, which holds users and developers of AI liable if they knew that a criminal offence was a probable consequence of their use or programming. The third is the direct liability model, which directly imposes liability on the AI system if it satisfies the physical and mental elements of the crime (Hallevy, 2010). Bringing to justice the developer of the neural networks used to commit the crimes is problematic, as "certain technologies used in the development of AI can be created many years before such AI is developed" (Gurkaynak, et al., 2016:754) and could not foresee the likelihood of the respective outcomes.

In addition, the EU Resolution emphasizes the importance of raising the level of software that controls robotic mechanisms, which "turns them into something more than mere tools and makes the usual rules of liability … insufficient" (European Commission, 2021). Accordingly, it is proposed to grant the most complex robots the legal status of electronic persons. So, the copyright issue is actually resolved between those who developed the machine or technology that created the product.

Similar issues have been discussed in the UK Court of Appeal, the Court of South Africa and the Australian Court of Appeal in the lawsuit filed by researcher S. Thaler to recognize AI as the inventor of a patent. The inventor filed patent applications with the "Intellectual Property Office" in 2018 to recognise the Dabus algorithm as the inventor.) This computer-generated image was created entirely by an algorithm called Creativity Machine (Ramirez Caminatti, 2023:15). The UK Court of Appeal rejected the claim, noting that the subject of

creativity must be a person (Bonifacic, 2021). Judge E. Laing wrote in her decision: "A patent is a legal right and it can only be granted to a human being." Lord Justice Arnold noted: "it is clear that, on a systematic reading of the 1977 Act, only a person can be an 'inventor'" (Bonifacic, 2021).

Instead, positive decisions in favour of the plaintiff researcher were made by the judicial panels of the Court of South Africa and the Australian Court (July 2022). The latter ruled that Dabus has the rights of an author and inventor. The US District Judge Leonie M. Brinkema partially upheld the decision, writing: "As technology advances, the time may come when artificial intelligence reaches a level of sophistication that will allow it to meet the generally accepted concepts of invention" (Ibid). J. Jefferson noted: "Until a machine can write a sonnet or compose a concerto by the thoughts and emotions it feels, and not by the random fall of symbols, we cannot accept that machine activity is equivalent to brain activity." (Jefferson, 1949:1105-1110).

This case demonstrated an excellent understanding of the AI deterministic role in the creative activity organization. On the one hand, AI technology is regarded as a formative and generative factor in the organization of the artistic and cultural process. On the other hand, the results of AI functioning are downplayed in every possible way in order to emphasise the role of humans in the contemporary process of algorithmic creativity. "Artificial intelligence programmes will never, no matter how far computer science develops, be able to provide the kind of conceptual understanding that is characteristic of human consciousness" (Penrose, 2016:18).

Despite the vast potential for automating the creative process, it is important to note that "artificial intelligence" is programmed by humans according to a specific algorithm, and therefore cannot function without their involvement. In the context of organizing algorithmic creativity, the interactive art environment becomes more human-centred, and the process of interaction becomes more intellectual. This refers to the creative application of artificial intelligence technologies in human activity. For example, the renowned British artist, musician and "cyborg activist" N. Harbisson had a technological antenna implanted in his body. The artist was born with achromatopsia, or complete color blindness. N. Harbisson considers his natural way of perceiving the world an advantage, although he would dream of being able to comprehend dimensions of vision that go beyond the visible spectrum (Sovhyra, 2021: 11). Thus, in the context of algorithmic creativity, the role of the viewer in interactive art has undergone a radical transformation: he (viewer) is no longer an external observer in the traditional sense, but become a participant and a creator.

Conclusion

The research examined algorithmic creativity as a form of mechanized production process, organized through machine learning and the identification of stylistic imitations of traditional practices. The assessment of the algorithmic creativity aesthetic can be subjective, as what is considered beautiful or aesthetically pleasing may vary from person to person. However, algorithmic creativity should not be interpreted as a completely autonomous process. It also identified four types of creative process organization practices depending on the degree of interaction between artists and robotic systems:

1. Practices in which robotic mechanisms become "agents of creativity," i.e. capable of generating creative content during the organization of the artistic process. Examples in this context include the immersive performances "AIBO" and "NOOR" (2019), in which

data on a person's psycho-emotional state, obtained through algorithmic analysis, is transformed into a form of artistic expression.
2. Practices involving equal interaction between robotic mechanisms and artists. Through machine learning, robotic mechanisms can "adapt" to new circumstances, and thus, in this form of "collaboration" between human and robot, the illusion of "improvisation" arises through the variable reproduction of actions to perform a programmed task (installations "A3 K3 Dragan Ilic," "Floor" and "Living Fool").
3. Practices in which devices serve as a means of metaphorically representing the relationship between machines and humans (the installation "Alone Together").
4. Practices involving the use of robotic devices as "neuroprostheses," extensions of human limbs and "intelligence" (as in the case of N. Harbisson's technological antenna).

The use of mechanized and robotic systems in the organization of the artistic and cultural process raises questions regarding the role of the artist. The automation of cultural creation leads to a reduction in the artist's participation and a weakening of their authorship. Conversely, the findings of this research allow for a strengthening of the position of subjectivity in the practices of algorithmic automated creativity. Firstly, the interactive artistic environment becomes more human-centred, and the process of interaction becomes more intellectual. Thus, the role of the viewer in algorithmic creativity undergoes a radical transformation: the viewer is no longer an external observer in the traditional sense, but rather becomes a participant and creator. Secondly, the facts examined regarding legally approved decisions on the possibility of recognizing AI as an inventor did not provide sufficient grounds for the proper recognition of its authorship. The examined facts regarding legally approved decisions on the possibility of recognizing AI as an inventor did not provide strong grounds for the proper recognition of its authorship. Therefore, it should be noted that patent rights can only be granted to a human subject of creative activity. The creative process involving BCI (a combination of a human author and AI) may acquire signs of subjectivity. Since courts have rejected the possibility of granting copyright to artificial intelligence and other non-human entities, the combination of a human author and AI may acquire signs of subjectivity.

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Community Development and Economic Value Creation

through Thailand's Tier 2 Film Industry: The Forest-Surrounding-the-City Strategy

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Abstract

Tier 2 films, specifically those designed for the local audience, play a vital role in Thailand. The research has two objectives: 1) to analyze the process of Tier 2 Thai films in alignment with the concept of the 'forest surrounding the city' strategy, and 2) to propose a model for community development and economic value creation within the Thai film industry based on the 'forest surrounding the city' strategy. The research reveals that the majority of Tier 2 Thai films apply the strategy through storytelling and character creation, focusing on local narratives that portray a simple and uncomplicated life. These films emphasize elements such as fun, humor, and the struggle against the power of money and the insincerity of urban society. Furthermore, Tier 2 Thai films contribute significantly to community development and economic value creation through key cinematic elements, including scenes, language, costumes, and the incorporation of music, art, and culture.

Keywords *Economic Value-Added, Community Development, Thai Film Tier 2, Strategy of Forest Surrounding the City*

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Introduction

Due to the Economic Development Plan outlined in the 20-year Thailand National Strategy Plan (2018-2037), specific plans related to rural development have been specified. The focus is on creating growth from within and giving importance to basic economic development or community economy. This involves emphasizing various economic activities in which local community members actively participate, contributing to collective benefits and ownership. Such developments are rooted in community potential, wisdom, or community capital. In addition to the concept of basic economic development or community economy, the 20-year Thailand National Strategic Plan identifies economic development and Thailand's competitiveness as key policies (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, Prime Minister's Office, 2017).

From the main policies outlined in the country's development plan, these two policies have given rise to social phenomena in various forms. This reflects the potential for responding to the concepts of community and economic development outlined in the 20-year strategy. One social phenomenon occurring in the Thai community and economy is 'Thai Film Tier 2' or Film for the local audience. These films are produced with a focus on presenting 'local content' or content related to rural people or individuals in the provinces of Thailand, constituting the largest consumer group in the country. Furthermore, the phenomenon of Thai films Tier 2 showcases the success of the Thai film industry in creating or adding economic value. According to information from Narut Chiarasanong, Deputy Chief Marketing Officer of Major Cineplex Group Public Company Limited, in 2018, 30 Tier 2 films were produced, totaling 43 films released to audiences nationwide. Thai Film Tier 2 can generate economic income for the country exceeding 2 billion baht annually, with each Thai Film Tier 2 earning about 50-100 million baht.

"The Tier 2 films serve as the answer for people in the provinces, representing movies with clear segments and a focus on the local audience. I have observed a trend in the online world where not everyone appreciates this kind of film. However, there are still many people who enjoy Tier 2 films. For instance, the movie 'Hor Taew Taek' can earn an average of 100 million from every part of Thailand. This film specifically targets teenagers in various provinces, making it clear about its target market. In 2018, there were a total of 43 Thai films, with 30 of them falling into the Tier 2 category, generating substantial income. Furthermore, each film is invested in producing better quality, resulting in an average income of 50 million" (Ratinan Chaiwiboonwet, 2018).

The growth of Thai Tier 2 films from 2018 to the present aligns with the information from the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, as stated in the 20-Year National Strategic Economic Development Plan (2018-2037). Films and videos constitute one of the creative industries in Thailand, falling into four main groups that align with government policies supporting the 'media' to create economic value and contribute to the progress and development of the nation (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, Prime Minister's Office, 2017)

Thai Tier 2 Films not only impact the economy by adding value and money to the film industry but also influence Thai society and culture. It is evident that these films have an effect on consumers who constitute audience groups in the provinces, the largest audience segment in the country. Films, being multidimensional products and one of the most important and powerful media, influence the minds of the viewers. The fact that Thai Tier

2 films present stories related to people and rural society in different provinces of Thailand serves as an essential channel to promote the diverse image and culture of people in various parts of Thailand, showcasing the beauty and value of their way of life. The essence of the countryside is transmitted through the film to a broad audience, both nationally and internationally.

In addition to its role as media for public relations and creating economic value, considering the benefits gained from studying the processes and mechanisms of Thai Tier 2 film production, it may be possible to discover the potential of Thai Tier 2 films that can serve as a catalyst for 'community development' and for the people involved in each film. Take, for instance, the movie 'Thai Baan, The Series,' classified as a successful case of a Thai Tier 2 Film, building a reputation as a film for young Isaan teenagers. It includes content related to love, lifestyle, tourist attractions, and northeastern culture, aiming to present the perspective of people in Thai society, especially in the northeastern region. The focus is on target groups, including teenagers, students in the Northeastern region, and the general public, both Thais and foreigners. The success of the movie Thai Baan, The Series goes beyond income and popularity; it has also helped build a positive reputation for Sisaket Province. This includes personnel and staff involved in the movie, such as filmmakers, directors, and actors, all of whom are part of the new generation of Isan people who have had the opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills, ultimately achieving success through the aforementioned Thai Tier 2 Films.

Research Questions

Through research on information related to the success of the Thai Baan, The Series case, it was found that the film's success did not result from the original concept of film production and distribution. Instead, a marketing concept known as the "Forest surrounding the city" emerged as a crucial factor. This marketing strategy involves a system of marketing from provincial areas into the capital or economic zones (Piyamas Klakhaeng, 2017) and has been employed for over 30 years in military strategy.

Furthermore, in the film industry, integration of the Forest surrounding the city strategy into the production and distribution process of Thai films represents a novel concept that has not yet been explored in film academic circles. This raises questions for the researcher, including: 1) Are there currently any Thai films in Tier 2 following the Forest surrounding the city strategy concept? 2) How do Thai films in these Tier 2 groups undergo the production process and distribution according to the Forest surrounding the city strategy concept? 3) Will Thai films in Tier 2, using the Forest surrounding the city strategy concept, contribute to community development and add economic value? If there are Thai movies in the Tier 2 group adhering to the Forest surrounding the city strategy concept, what guidelines or processes are involved? The research is important as it contributes to the development of the Thai film industry, fostering continuous production and creating sustainable value. From the research questions above, the researcher will establish the following research objectives:

1. Analyze the process of Thai Tier 2 Films according to the concept of the Forest surrounding the city strategy.
2. Propose a model for community development and economic value addition within the Thai Film Industry based on the concept of the Forest surrounding the city strategy.

Methodology

The method used in this research is a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. Data were gathered through document analysis, including research interviews with key informants. To further deepen this research, additionally collect data in the form of theories and expert opinions, pictures from the literature, and documentation regarding Thai Tier 2 Film to be analyzed. The analysis focuses on Thai films in the Tier 2 group or Thai films produced for marketing purposes targeting provincial audiences. This category of films plays a pivotal role in community development and creates economic value.

Data Collection

The population in this research comprises Thai Tier 2 films or Thai films produced for marketing purposes that specifically target provincial audiences. The sample group for this research consists of 10 cases which are:

Name of the movies	Year
1. Thai Baan, The Series	2017
2. Hug Paeng	2018
3. On-Zon-De	2019
4. Indie Look Esan	2019
5. Hugby Ban Bak	2019
6. Mon Ruk Dok Pak Bung	2020
7. Hug Tho Thoeng	2020
8. Love You Kohk-E- Kueng	2020
9. Ela-Auey	2020
10. Som Poi	2021

Figure 1. The Sample group of Thai Tier 2 Film. Source: Author, 2021.

Data Analysis

The researcher has allocated 1 year for this study, divided into three phases: which are 1) Preparatory phase and literature review 2) Exploration phase and data collection and 3) Data analysis phase to summarize and discuss the results.

Theoretical Framework

Forest-Surrounding the City Strategy Theory

The Forest-Surrounding the City Strategy originally emerged from military and market expansion approaches and was later adapted into business and marketing contexts. The strategy emphasizes entering peripheral or less competitive markets before expanding into larger and more competitive centers. Rather than directly competing with dominant players in urban markets, organizations create a strong consumer base and brand loyalty in local or provincial areas before extending influence toward metropolitan centers.

Within the film industry context, this strategy can be interpreted as producing films that first resonate with local audiences through familiar narratives, regional identities, dialects, and cultural representation. Strong support from provincial audiences subsequently generates broader popularity and expands consumption into urban markets. Thus, the strategy functions not only as a marketing mechanism but also as a cultural production process that links local identity with economic expansion.

Film Industry and Community Development Theory

The film industry extends beyond entertainment functions and increasingly serves as a mechanism for community development. Previous studies suggest that films can promote local identity, strengthen social cohesion, encourage cultural preservation, and generate tourism activities. Communities represented in films often gain increased visibility, leading to new economic opportunities through tourism, local businesses, and cultural products. Community development through film therefore involves both direct and indirect impacts. Direct impacts include employment opportunities and local income generation during production activities, while indirect impacts include strengthening local identity, community pride, and cultural sustainability.

Film Industry and the Creative Economy Theory

The Creative Economy framework considers creativity, culture, and intellectual assets as important drivers of economic development. Within this framework, the film industry operates as a cultural industry capable of generating value through storytelling, artistic production, and symbolic meaning.

Films create economic value not only through box-office revenue but also through multiplier effects including tourism promotion, merchandise consumption, local product visibility, and cultural branding. Consequently, the film industry contributes to broader economic growth while simultaneously enhancing social and cultural capital.

Similar to the growth of Thailand's digital creative industries such as the webtoon market, the film industry increasingly relies on cultural content and local identity as sources of economic value creation (Kim et al. 2025).

Thai Tier 2 Films Concept

Thai Tier 2 Films refer to films specifically designed for provincial and regional audiences. Unlike mainstream commercial films primarily targeting metropolitan markets, Tier 2 films emphasize local narratives, regional languages, cultural practices, and everyday experiences of people outside major urban centers.

The emergence of Thai Tier 2 films reflects changing market dynamics within the Thai film industry, where provincial audiences constitute a substantial consumer segment. Their success demonstrates that local cultural identity can become an important source of both audience engagement and economic value creation.

Results

The results showed that the sample group of 10 Tier 2 Thai Movies selected by the researcher for this analysis – namely, Thai Baan, The Series, Hug Phaeng, On-Zon-De, The Indy, Hugby Ban Bak, Mon Ruk Dok Pak Bung, Hug Tho Thoeng, Love You Kohk-E- Kueng, Ela-Auey, and Som Poi – have adopted the Forest Surrounding the City Strategy in various processes related to the production and marketing of Thai Tier 2 films by analyzing four processes, namely: 1) the process of thinking about the story and the characters, 2) the process of conveying and presenting the picture, 3) the process of raising funds for film production, and 4) the production and marketing process. As stated in Thai Winner (Thai Winner. 2020), 'Making a name in an area that is easy to beat low cost and easier to reach consumers.' This is evident in the various processes, starting with Process 1 – the story thought process. In this phase, most Tier 2 films implement the forest surrounding the city

strategy through storytelling and character creation by focusing on local stories. The films depict simple, uncomplicated life stories with an emphasis on fun and the struggle against money power and the insincerity of urban society.

In the second process, the transmission and presentation of the image experience the implementation of the forest surrounding the city strategy, as well as the story thought process. The depiction and portrayal in Tier 2 films often showcase the countryside or a local area full of beautiful nature where people are sincere to each other. Moreover, every movie concludes with a picture of the joy of being in the home community. This is an effective strategy to reach local audiences by visualizing places that audiences are familiar with, creating a feeling of being part of the depicted image. The research also found that the characters in all 10 sample films were portrayed by actors who were domiciled in the provinces and could transmit and communicate in the local language to everyone. This creates a sense of unity with the audience, who are people in the same region, fostering a feeling of support, known as 'People of the same village,' which is one of the strategies of the forest surrounding the city strategy.

In the third process, the fund-raising process for film production, the research found that the sample groups of Thai Tier 2 films had different fund-raising processes, both in terms of the amount of investment and the background of the sponsor. An interesting case is the movie Thai Baan, The Series, which involves a fund-raising process and seeks support from local politicians. They aim to provide funds to support directors from the same province who desire a film that can intervene in the publicity of the place and create a positive image for Sisaket Province, starting with a total amount of 2 million baht. Additionally, the research identified cases of Tier 2 to 4 films in the sample group where filmmakers received direct funding from national cinema business capitalists. For example, the movie On-Zon-De, Mon Ruk Dok Pak Bung, and Som Poi received funding from M Pictures, a movie production company under Major Public Company Limited. Moreover, a group of capital and producers from a music label and drama camps from the country's major television stations collaborated in this process. Even if the goal is success in terms of income, indirect results benefit those involved, including the film industry and the country's economy. According to the concept of the Forest-Surrounding the City Strategy, this approach involves using a small budget but quickly achieving success, making it an ideal choice for new businesses seeking survival today.

In the fourth process, which is the production and marketing process of Thai films in the Tier 2 group, the research found that the Forest Surrounding City strategy was employed in all 10 films. This is evident in filmmaking for the audience in provincial regions and films communicated in dialects to make consumption easy for audiences. Additionally, all films were initially released in the provinces before expanding to cities and the capital. This was done to create strong local popularity, leading to the creation of trends and expansion to audience groups in other regions or provinces. Ultimately, this popularity extended to the urban market like Bangkok and garnered attention from the audience, leading to media attention and the involvement of influencers who were interested in and conveyed the film's message. Popular movie soundtracks, cover songs by famous artists, and mimicry of words used in movies, for instance, originated from local (forest) marketing, resulting in building a robust consumer base in the city. Finally, this filmmaking process, utilizing urban siege

tactics, represents the creation and development of the Thai film industry, making it more widely known and successful. It has the potential for future development in the global film market.

The research results also found that the films were analyzed regarding issues related to community development and economic value creation through key elements of the film, namely, 1) Scene, 2) Language, 3) Costumes, and 4) Music, Art, and Culture. The researcher intends to present the analysis results separately for each component as portrayed in the films.

The Analysis of Community Development and Economic Value Creation Through Scene Elements

The research found that areas or locations used in the filming of all 10 Tier 2 films are popular for depicting scenes or locations in various regions of Thailand, such as the Northeast, the North, and the South. All of these shoots have chosen beautiful and enhanced locations, intending to present images of the areas that convey abundance, nature, purity, shade, and tranquility, with the aim of creating new perceptions for the audience. This will offer a different perspective from reality, and the portrayal of the area can also influence a change in the attitude of the audience, particularly individuals outside the local area, fostering positive thoughts and feelings about the locality and rural life. For example, pictures of the northeastern region in the past portrayed it in terms of drought, heat, and cracked ground. However, Tier 2 films now present images of the Isan area from a perspective that outsiders may not have previously seen or touched, showcasing scenes like a picture of a green field, representing pure nature, beauty, and abundance. This evokes a desire to connect, as illustrated in the following example:



Figure 2. The Movie 'Hug Phaeng' & the Portrayal of the Abundance of Isan Region. Source: www.variety2day.com.

The presentation of places differs from the audience's past memories, initiating a trend following the movie that leads to community and economic development. This is due to the surge in tourism sparked by the movie, resulting in increased travel by tourists, job creation, income generation for the community, and heightened visibility for the location. The selected sample films presented by the researcher showcase these outcomes. The representation of landscapes and local spaces in films can function similarly to heritage preservation mechanisms that strengthen cultural significance and tourism development (Zhang et al. 2025).



Figure 3. A Beautiful Scene from the Movie 'Som Poi' shows a beautiful landscape of North Thailand. Source: www.entertainment.trueid.net.

Results indicate that after watching the movies, many instances highlight the allure of the filming locations, prompting interest in the community. Consequently, community members unite to develop, preserve, and maintain these locations as appealing tourist destinations. Numerous attractions gain recognition for being featured in films, perpetuating their popularity. In the present day, there is a growing yearning for nature and tranquility, making locations presented in films increasingly popular. Therefore, the film's depiction of beautiful places not only attracts outsiders but also contributes to community and economic development.

The Analysis of Community Development and Economic Value Creation Through the Language Component

The results showed that all 10 Thai Tier 2 film samples used the local language of each region in the film's transmission. This included the Isan language, the northern language, and the southern language. Additionally, the local language was present in all movie soundtracks. The use of local language to convey the story in the film expresses the uniqueness of different regions, aiming for people in those areas to access, feel, and engage with the mood of the story. The intention is also to convey through the movie, with a primary focus on people in the area understanding the narrative. Furthermore, the presentation of the film will also be in the central language, allowing audiences in other regions to comprehend the intended story. The use of local language in such presentations helps create a new culture for the film industry, eliminating the need for a common language for communication. Instead, it utilizes local languages to enhance the viewing experience. This use of local languages, besides conveying the identity of each locality, fosters a relationship between people from different regions. It creates knowledge, understanding, and cultural exchange through the unique charm of the language from each area. Moreover, the charm of the language leads to learning specific words, used as 'cool phrases,' contributing to the popularity of communication among audiences nationwide. A good example of a Tier 2 film effectively using the local language is a song in the film that employs the local language to convey its content. This approach is not only popular among people in that region but also

among residents of other regions who can memorize and sing along, as evidenced by the popularity of many movie soundtracks, proving that this method resonates well with the audience.

The Analysis of Community Development and Economic Value Creation Through Costumes

The results show that, in addition to presenting a local image through space, location, and language, clothing is another important element of presentation. Costumes in films can broadcast regional identity as well, such as showcasing the beautiful and endemic costumes of the north, northeast, or south. This includes the portrayal of costumes used in traditions, merit events, and important occasions, as well as the transmission of art and culture through clothing. It serves as a presentation of beauty to those in other regions, allowing them to learn about the dress and perceive the value of clothing made with local fabrics. The beauty conveyed through these clothes or attire has gained popularity, turning into a trend and leading to campaigns for the conservation and wearing of various regional styles. This ongoing trend has continued to contribute to community and economic development in the production and distribution of local fabrics and traditional costumes. The presentation of local costumes also aligns with studies emphasizing the role of traditional textile knowledge in preserving cultural identity and generating local economic opportunities (Chanthakhoun et al. 2025).



Figure 4. Left, A presentation of Northern Women's Dress in the movie “Som Poii." Source: www.entertainment.trueid.net. Right, Presentation of Isan Culture through Dress in the Movie “Love You Kohk-E-Kueng.” Source: www.sanook.com.

The Analysis of Community Development and Economic Value Creation Through the Elements of Traditions, Arts, Culture and Beliefs

The result found that 10 Tier 2 films were presented and interwoven with traditions, arts, culture, and beliefs throughout the film. This presentation manifests through the transmission of local beauty and identity, encompassing subjects, songs, and performing arts

unique to various localities, such as Mo Lam, Luk Thung songs, Nora dance, and more. Each culture's beauty is showcased, creating images that are recognized, remembered, and leave a lasting impression, contributing to the preservation of traditions, arts, culture, and beliefs for the next generation. This effort serves as a means to persist and prevent these cultural elements from disappearing, particularly in the face of foreign cultural trends. Moreover, by disseminating these cultural expressions to people outside the respective areas, it raises awareness of the traditional culture in each locality. As this culture is transmitted to people in other regions, it draws attention to the richness of the local culture and traditions. When the time comes for cultural events and traditions in each area, it leads to increased tourism in these traditions, resulting in community development and a boost to the local economy.



Figure 5. Presentation of the Northeastern Thai Arts in the Movie “Love You Kohk-E-Kueng.”
Source: www.sanook.com.



Figure 6. Presentation of the Northern Dance arts in the Movie “Som Poi."
Source: www.entertainment.trueid.net.

The unique performing arts can facilitate social and cultural learning through the presentation of musical instruments, lyrics, and dancing gestures. These elements convey ways of life, the development or adaptation of performing arts in accordance with the era, making it more accessible to local people. For instance, adapting 'Mor Lam' to Isan Pop or 'Mor Lam Ploen' can make it more relatable to listeners in the northern part of the country. In the north, there are delicate and beautiful dances, accompanied by music that distinctly represents the region. These performances showcase the diverse folk life that holds value for those who witness them.

Moreover, cultural aspects, beliefs, lifestyles, and eating habits, including occupations, are woven into the story to convey these elements to the audience. This aims to provide the audience with a comprehensive understanding, whether it pertains to matters of godliness, food, or other aspects that have been passed down through generations.

The Impact of the Forest-Surrounding the City Strategy on Rural and Urban Society and Economic Development

The findings indicate that the Forest-Surrounding the City Strategy creates significant impacts on both rural and urban societies. In rural communities, the strategy contributes to strengthening local identity and increasing community participation through the representation of local stories, traditions, language, and cultural practices. The portrayal of local lifestyles through films encourages community pride and creates opportunities for tourism development and local business growth.

In urban society, the strategy introduces alternative cultural perspectives that challenge conventional representations of provincial areas. Rather than portraying rural communities as underdeveloped or economically disadvantaged spaces, Tier 2 films reconstruct these areas as places rich in culture, social values, and creative potential. This process reduces cultural distance between urban and rural audiences and facilitates cultural exchange.

Economically, the strategy contributes to Thailand's economy and film industry through multiple mechanisms. First, successful Tier 2 films generate direct revenue through box-office income and distribution channels. Second, film-related activities stimulate tourism and local product consumption. Third, the strategy creates employment opportunities among local actors, filmmakers, musicians, and supporting industries. Finally, successful local productions strengthen the overall competitiveness of Thailand's creative economy and increase the sustainability of the national film industry.

Therefore, the Forest-Surrounding the City Strategy can be viewed not only as a film production strategy but also as a mechanism for cultural and economic development that integrates local resources into broader national development objectives.

Conclusion & Discussion

The Process of Thai Film Tier 2 Based on the Forest Surrounding City Strategy

The results show that the sample group of 10 Tier 2 Thai have adopted the Forest surrounding the City Strategy in various processes related to the production and marketing of Thai Tier 2 films. The analysis was divided into four processes: 1) the process of thinking

about the story and the characters, 2) the process of conveying and presenting the picture, 3) the process of raising funds for film production, and 4) the production and marketing process of Tier 2 Thai films. All films demonstrate the application of the 'forest surrounding the city' strategy from the very beginning of the filmmaking process, and used the strategy as a precursor to plot and narrative design. The goal is to make the film's story, upon release, popular with audiences residing in the provinces. Therefore, the focus is on local stories simple, uncomplicated narratives with a focus on fun and the struggle against the influence of money and the insincerity of urban society. As seen in the research, this is a strategic use of urban siege tactics to build a deep relationship and create loyalty in marketing between filmmakers and audiences. In other words, it establishes a connection with the consumer in the economic engine.

In the process of transmitting and presenting images, it can be seen that Thai Tier 2 filmmakers aimed to portray the countryside or a local area full of beautiful nature where people are sincere to each other. Every movie ends with a picture of the joy of being in the home community. As explained in the research summary, the film producers implemented a forest strategy through images to evoke empathy from the local audience and contribute to the assembly process for creating images in movies. The research also found that the characters in all 10 sample movies were portrayed by actors domiciled in the provinces, able to transmit and communicate in the local language, creating a sense of unity with the audience who are people of the same region. This visualization strategy is crucial in marketing, serving as an important factor and motivation for consumers to support 'People of the same household,' leading to sustained patronage. If the creator reproduces the movie, the phenomenon of visual representation in Tier 2 films aligns with the Small-Town marketing strategy that the filmmakers created – a 'Brand Image' for the audience. Just like a product maker who sincerely values consumers in the provinces, the audience reacts positively and responds promptly to the products and services the operator sells. Thus, the entrepreneur's business becomes a better option in the consumer's point of view, and consumers are always ready to show their loyalty when presented again.

Regarding the funding process for production and the process of creating and marketing Tier 2 films, all of the trailers had lower budgets compared to other types of films, aligning with the concept of the forest surrounding city strategy, 'The Urban Forest on a Low Budget.' Filmmakers choose to market and sell their films in the suburbs or upcountry according to the forest strategy to save a substantial budget. The lower cost, encompassing marketing, transportation, labor, rental costs, etc., gives an undeniable advantage over competitors. Even in urban areas known to be densely populated with consumers, it's crucial to note that population distribution rates do not equate to actual numbers of people inhabited. A direct comparison reveals there are more people in the provinces than in Bangkok. Urban forest marketing aims to capture consumers in the provinces as the primary target, allowing filmmakers to reach more consumers than any other form of marketing.

A Model for Community Development and Economic Value Addition within the Thai Film Industry based on the concept of the Forest Surrounding City Strategy

From the second finding of Thai films, Tier 2, the sample group of 10 films applied the Forest Surrounding the City Strategy through all aspects of film work, including content, characters, scenes, language use, and costumes. Artistic elements in each film present a sense

of being 'Thai Folk,' with the identity of each area appearing distinctly. Moreover, the success of the films in applying the Forest Surrounding the City strategy is evident in the positive response and popularity among audiences in the provinces, especially in the regions or provinces featured or associated with as a set in a movie. This popularity in the provinces leads to the creation of trends and interests among audiences in other regions or provinces, including Bangkok, and garners attention from national and international media.

The action of producing Thai Tier 2 Films using the strategy of the forest surrounding the city contributes to the creation and development of the Thai film industry, making it more widely known and successful. It has the potential to advance further in the future. This concept aligns with the research of Maneekarn Chainon and Nattawut Suinta (2015) on film design to promote tourism at Ban Luang, Lhong Kot Subdistrict, Phrao District, Chiang Mai Province. The results indicated that most audiences were satisfied with the Ban Luang tourism promotion film, reflecting the success of filmmaking using the urban jungle strategy. Additionally, the research of Sermsak Khunphon and Fareeda Ooh (2019) on promoting cultural resources in creative tourism through advertising films of the Ranot community, Songkhla Province, showed that the sample group expressed interest in creative tourism in the Ranot district. Such films influenced interest and the need for creative tourism in the Ranot community.

The research also found that all 10 films were related to community development and economic value creation, whether directly or indirectly. The presentation of local identity through the films not only promotes local people to love and cherish their hometowns but also inspires people in the area who may have migrated to other places to learn about the stories in their locality, fostering a feeling of love and a desire to develop the local community. Moreover, people outside the area have the opportunity to recognize the beauty and charm of the northeastern, northern, and southern regions, leading to a trend in movie tourism and community development to support tourism, stimulate the economy for the community, and encourage the sale of local products. This contributes to the development of both the film industry and the community, fostering growth and persistence. These findings are consistent with the research of Pinyaluck Weerapatratwara (2014), who studied community development by the film industry based on the creative economy concept: a case study of Ban Mai Market Community, Chachoengsao Province. The results suggested development guidelines: creating and encouraging everyone in the community to learn, realize, and maintain what they have to attract the film industry to continue using the Ban Mai community as a shooting location. This can increase the number of tourists seeking a retro atmosphere, which serves as a community capital for sustainable development.

The findings are also consistent with previous studies emphasizing that creative and cultural activities can improve social well-being and strengthen community engagement (Pholprasert et al. 2025). Community participation observed through Thai Tier 2 films resembles cultural ecosystem approaches that support sustainable social development and neighborhood engagement (Damrhung 2025).

The researcher would like to conclude the research by presenting the new research findings model as follows:

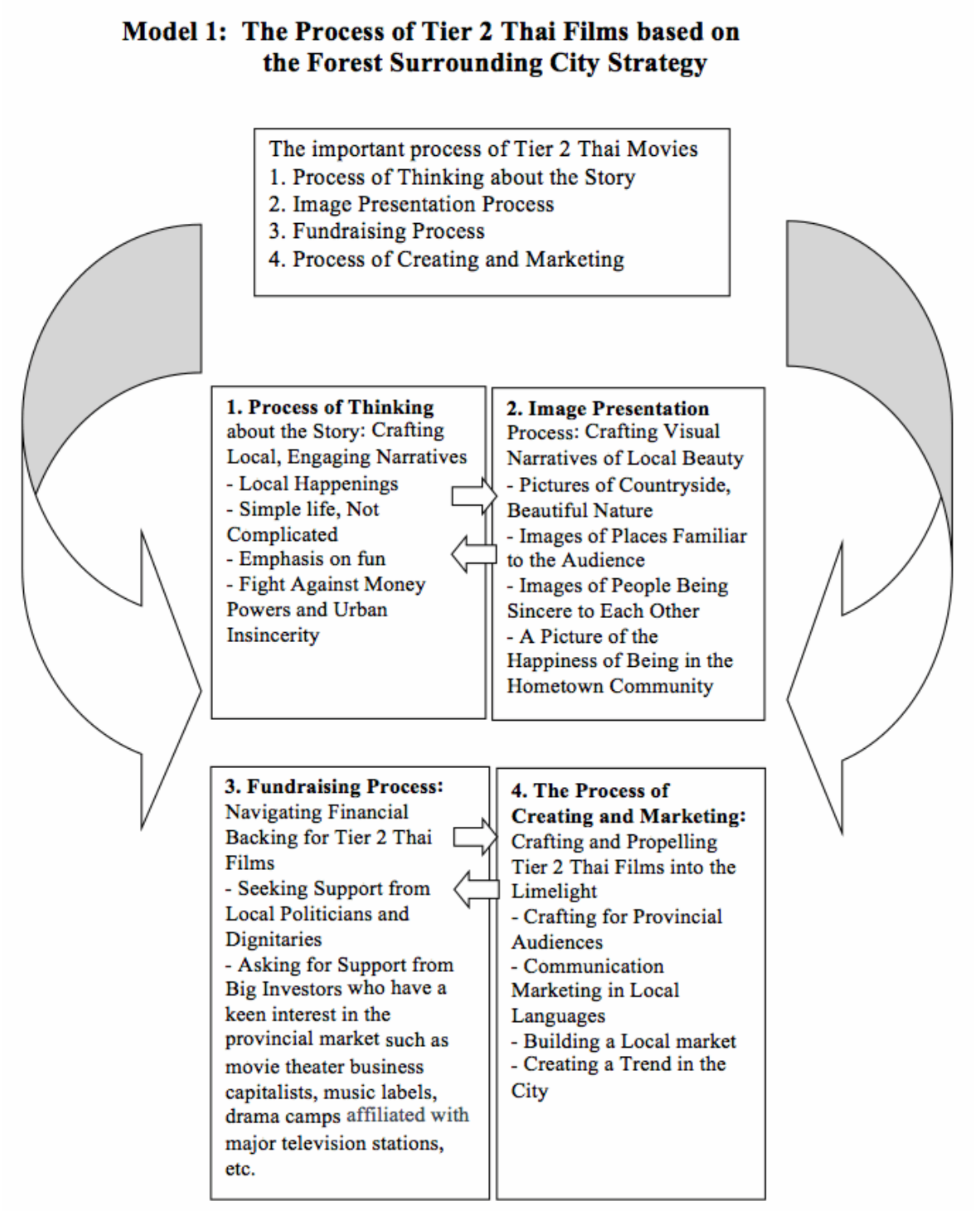


Figure 7. The process of Thai film Tier 2 based on the Forest-Surrounding City Strategy.Source: Author, 2021.

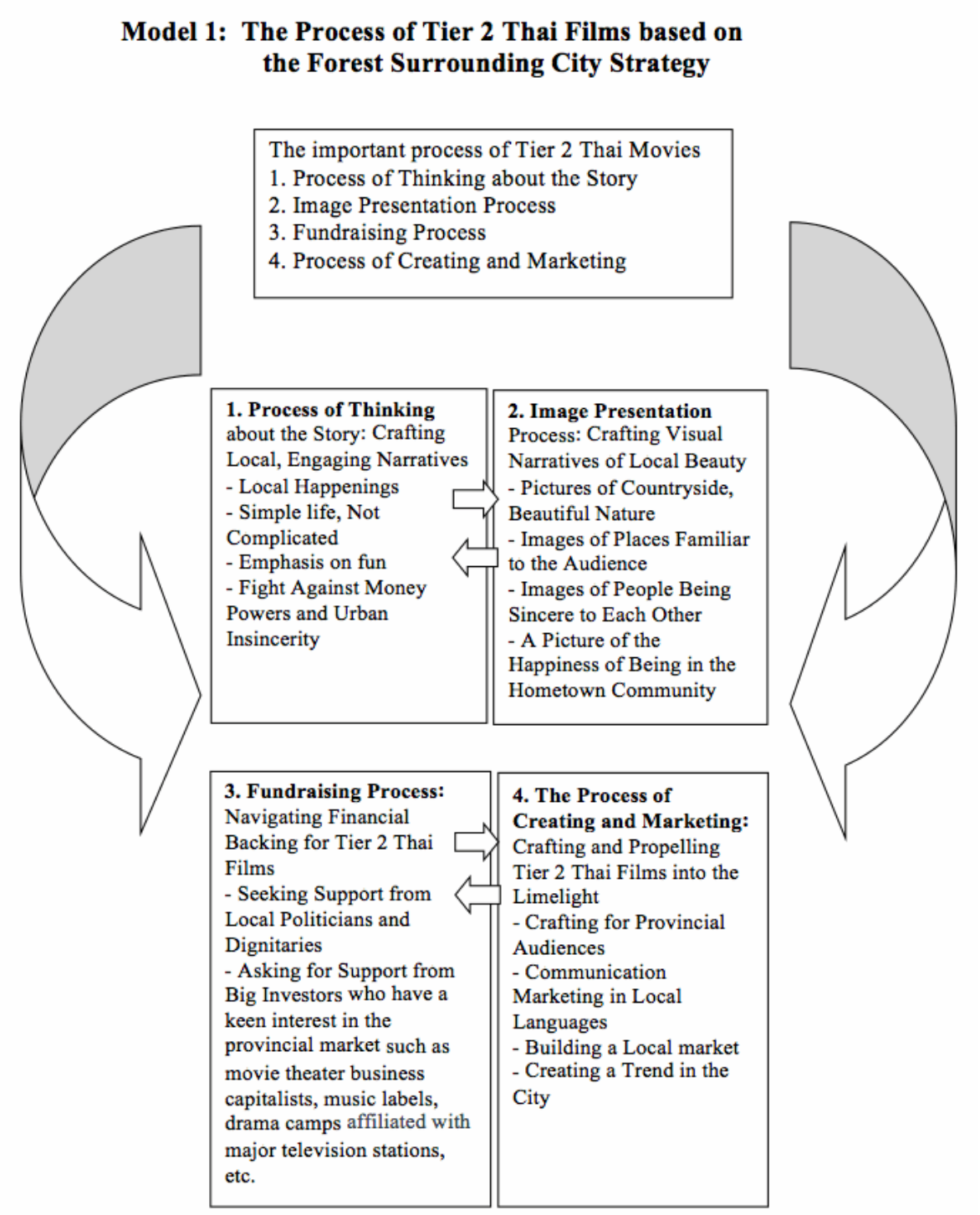


Figure 8. Guidelines for Community Development and Economic Value -Added through the Adoption of Tier 2 Thai Film Industry: The Strategy of Forest Surrounding the City. Source: Author, 2021.

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Reflecting Role of Culture in Place Branding:

A Literature Review

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Abstract

Culture is a complex and contested concept that cannot easily be understood through a single definition. Nevertheless, culture plays an important role in place branding strategies and is interpreted in diverse ways within place branding scholarship. This study aims to identify and reflect upon the various roles of culture in place branding through a review of previous studies, particularly within the fields of Social Studies and Arts & Humanities published between 2008 and 2026. Using a literature review approach, the study collected data from the Scopus database and employed thematic analysis to examine how culture is conceptualized and positioned within place branding discourse. The findings reveal ten major themes representing different cultural roles in place branding, including everyday culture, cultural identity, gastronomy, sports, cultural heritage, festivals, community participation, cultural critique, cultural production, and the relationship between traditional and contemporary culture. Based on these findings, this study proposes a reflective checklist consisting of critical questions that may be used as an initial framework for identifying and reflecting on the role of culture within place branding practices, particularly in the context of urban culture and city branding. Rather than functioning as an evaluative measurement tool, the checklist is intended to encourage deeper reflection on the cultural dimensions and potentials embedded within place branding strategies.

Keywords: *Culture, Place Branding, Urban Culture, Literature Review, Thematic Analysis, Reflective Checklist*

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Introduction

Place branding has developed as a significant area of inquiry within urban, cultural, and management studies, evolving from earlier practices of place promotion and marketing into a more complex process of meaning-making and identity construction (Anholt, 2010; Kavaratzis, 2004). Although place branding is frequently associated with global competition among cities (particularly in attracting tourists, investment, and international visibility), this perspective represents only one dimension of a broader phenomenon. Beyond its economic and promotional functions, place branding also shapes how places are experienced, represented, and understood through social and cultural processes.

Within this context, culture is frequently positioned as a key element of place branding strategies. It is often mobilized through festivals, heritage narratives, creative industries, and visual representations to differentiate places and enhance their attractiveness. However, such approaches tend to frame culture as a resource or asset, raising critical concerns about reductionism and instrumentalization. Previous studies have pointed to issues such as the commodification of culture (Rius-Ulldemolins & Klein, 2022), commodification of music in tourism (Jurková& Cernáková, 2017), the framing of cities as participants in an "international beauty contest" (Boland, 2013), and the phenomenon of "cultural hijacking," where local meanings are appropriated to fit branding agendas (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2015; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2015).

These debates indicate that the relationship between culture and place branding is not simply a matter of application, but one of interpretation. Culture itself is a complex and contested concept, encompassing multiple meanings across different contexts. As Raymond Williams (1983) famously argues, culture may refer not only to artistic production or cultural objects, but also to a "whole way of life," including everyday practices, values, beliefs, and social relations. This broader understanding challenges more instrumental approaches to culture, particularly when branding practices prioritize visibility and economic outcomes over lived cultural experience.

Despite the increasing attention given to culture in place branding literature, many studies continue to approach culture from a management-oriented perspective. In these works, culture is often framed as a strategic resource to support tourism development, economic competitiveness, and branding performance (Maheshwari et al., 2011; Plaza et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2019; He et al., 2020). It is frequently operationalized through events, experiences, and representational elements such as heritage, architecture, or local products (Bursiewicz, 2021; Chuang, 2018; Yiannakou et al., 2022; Pongsakornrungsilp et al., 2021).

While these approaches demonstrate the practical role of culture in place branding, they tend to privilege instrumental and representational dimensions, with less emphasis on culture as a lived and everyday social practice.
Based on this issue, this study formulates the following research questions:

- RQ1: How is culture conceptualized in place branding literature?
- RQ2: What are the various roles and positions of culture within place branding discourse?

This study aims to critically examine how culture is conceptualized within place branding literature, with particular attention to the positioning of culture as a *"way of life."* To achieve this, a structured literature review of 78 articles indexed in Scopus is conducted, combined

with a thematic analysis approach. The analysis draws on Raymond Williams' framework of cultural meanings to identify patterns in how culture is interpreted and operationalized across studies.

Theoretical Framework

Williams (1983) notes that the notion of culture is widely employed across various scientific disciplines and diverse knowledge systems, rendering it a complex word to interpret clearly. In general, we can associate at least four meanings of culture. Quoting Inglis (2005), the primary meaning of 'culture' today is:

- 'High culture,' a meaning related to the words 'art' and 'civilization';
- Personal refinement, such as when discussing a 'cultured person.'
- Cultural objects and products such as books, films, and TV shows;
- The 'whole way of life' of a given group. It is a way of thinking, understanding, believing, and acting that is a 'characteristic' of a particular group.

Regarding the culture of a place, Inglis (2005) quotes Raymond Williams's three levels of culture in exploring culture and everyday life, as follows:

- 'Lived culture' of a particular time and place
- 'Recorded culture' of every kind, from art to the most everyday facts; the culture of the period
- 'Culture of the selective traditions.'

Accessing 'Lived Culture' is the most challenging among 'recorded culture' and 'traditional selective cultures.' It requires exploring the two other levels with a skeptical attitude toward cultural facts that immediately appear naturally. Therefore, understanding 'Lived Culture' is essential when discussing the role of culture in a place.
Turning into place branding theories, which developed from place promotion to place marketing to place branding, has quite strong roots in management and marketing sciences (Yanada & Salamah, 2014). Therefore, place branding is more commonly referred to as the most relevant strategy for gaining popularity in a place (Anholt. 2010). Regarding the role of culture in place branding, the meaning of place branding cannot force the culture to become a part of a strategy toward gaining popularity. Culture is not a tool for gaining popularity; it is a part of human life that carries out and maintains a better life.

Kalandides et al. (2012) identified cultural meanings related to place branding as Cultural goods, Cultural industry products, and Heritage. He also uses terms such as 'cultural resources' and 'cultural planning.' Cultural planning is a tool to achieve cultural resources.

Developing places, infrastructure, essential events, arts, and culture packaged in city branding efforts are risks of ignoring local culture and creating a standard global city image. Such circumstances can induce feelings of isolation among residents, potentially leading to long-term harm to the city's image (Riza, 2015). Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2014) propose rethinking the role of culture in place branding. Furthermore, Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2015) use the term 'Cultural Hijacking' to describe the tension between culture and place branding and propose a conceptual framework to mitigate the relationship. Nursanty et al. (2023) propose a conceptual framework to address the tension between place branding and authenticity: focus on uniqueness and authenticity, Citizen and stakeholder engagement, Balance between the need for branding, and continuous evaluation and adjustment.

Methodology

Research Methods

This study adopts a structured literature review approach to examine how culture is interpreted within the discourse of place branding. Rather than simply collecting previous studies, this research applies a systematic filtering process to ensure the relevance and quality of selected literature. The data were collected using the Scopus database, accessed via its official platform. The search process was conducted in several stages to progressively refine the dataset. In the initial stage, the keywords "place branding" AND "culture" were used within the fields of article title, abstract, and keywords. The search was limited to publications from 2008 to 2026, resulting in 452 articles.

In the second stage, the results were refined using subject-area and document-type filters. Only publications within the Social Sciences and the Arts and Humanities were included. Additionally, the document type was limited to journal articles, the source type to journals, and the language to English. This refinement reduced the dataset to 181 articles.

In the third stage, an accessibility criterion was applied by selecting only open-access publications, ensuring full-text availability for in-depth analysis. This final filtering process resulted in 78 articles, which formed the dataset for this study.

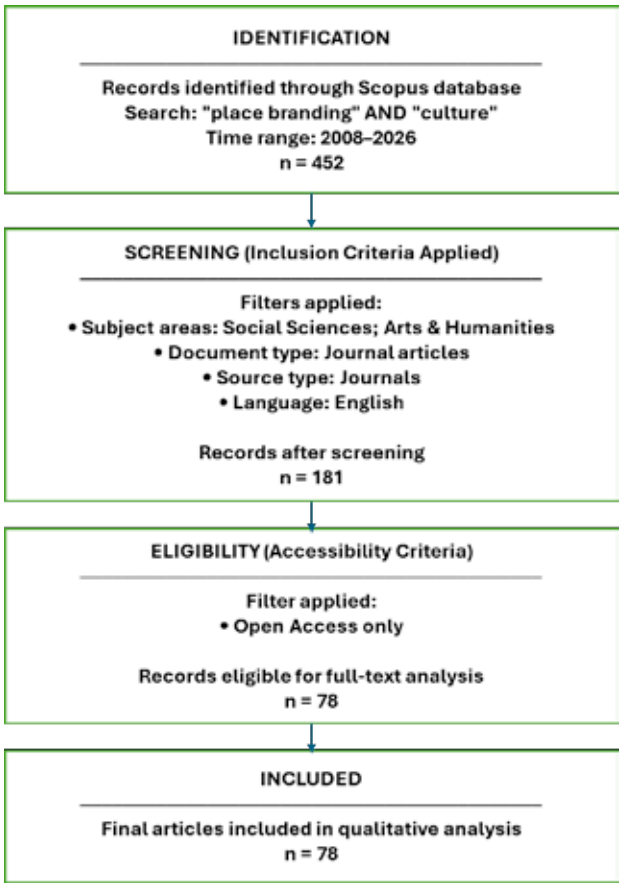


Figure 1. Literature search and selection process showing progressive filtering from 452 initial records to 78 final articles included in qualitative analysis.

Data Analysis

Following the data collection process, qualitative analysis was conducted using ATLAS.ti to systematically organize and interpret the selected literature. The analysis began with initial coding, in which each article was examined based on key concepts related to culture, place, and branding. The coding process focused on identifying how culture is defined, interpreted, and positioned within place branding discussions. To structure the analysis, this study adopted Raymond Williams' framework of cultural definitions, which categorizes culture into four dimensions: high culture, personal refinement, cultural object/product, and a whole way of life. These categories served as analytical lenses to examine variations in cultural interpretation across the selected literature.

The study employed a thematic analysis approach following Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun (2013) to identify recurring patterns, relationships, and tensions between culture and place branding. This stage moved beyond descriptive analysis by critically comparing how different studies conceptualized and operationalized culture. The findings were then synthesized to address the research questions.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the collected data and the results of the analysis conducted to address the research questions.

Figure 2 presents a thematic map that illustrates the relationship between culture and place branding across the reviewed literature. The findings identify ten major themes that demonstrate the various ways culture is positioned and operationalized within place branding discourse. These themes include: (1) culture as a way of life; (2) cultural identity; (3) gastronomy culture; (4) sports culture; (5) heritage; (6) cultural events and festivals; (7) community culture; (8) cultural criticism; (9) cultural production; and (10) cultural traditions.

The thematic map illustrates that culture in place branding extends beyond promotional and economic functions. Culture is positioned not only as a representational asset, but also as a lived, social, symbolic, and experiential dimension that shapes the identity and meaning of place. Several themes, such as community culture, cultural traditions, and culture as a way of life, emphasize the role of everyday cultural practices in constructing place identity. Meanwhile, themes such as gastronomy, sports, heritage, and cultural festivals demonstrate how culture is frequently operationalized as a strategic and visible element within branding initiatives.

At the same time, the emergence of themes such as cultural criticism and cultural production reflects tensions within place branding discourse, particularly regarding the commodification, negotiation, and circulation of culture. These findings suggest that culture in place branding is not static, but continuously produced, interpreted, and contested across social, political, and economic contexts.

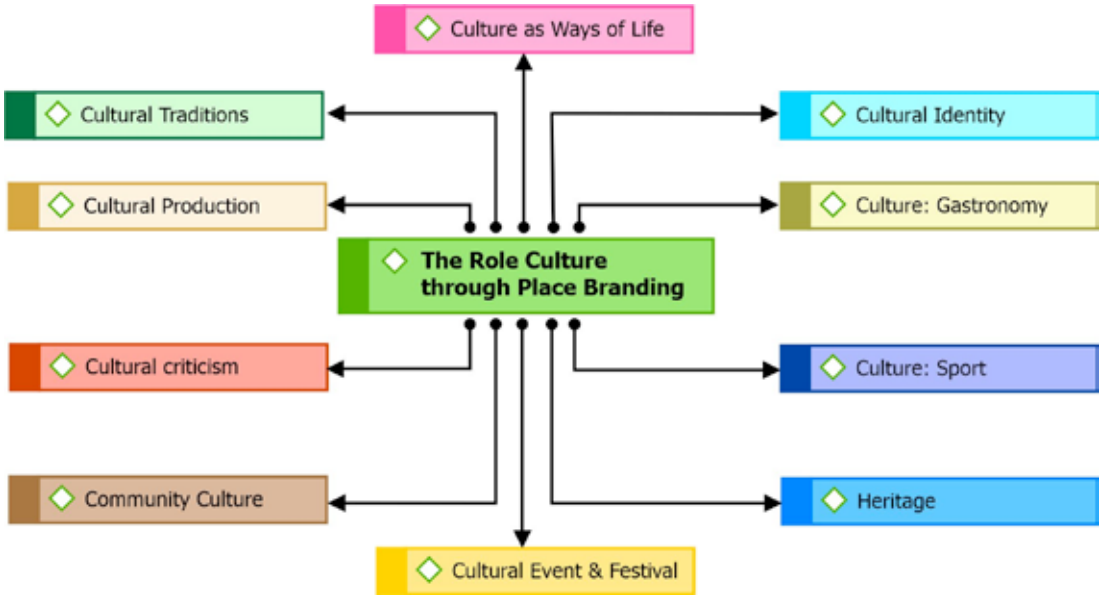


Figure 2. Thematic Map of Role of Culture through Place Branding.

'Way of Life' in Place Branding

> "If everyday life is so banal, why would one want to write about it? The answer to that question is: because everyday life contains within it more significance than we might think…" (Inglis, 2005:2).

Inglis (2005) statement reflects one perspective on culture in everyday life. In this context, culture can be understood as part of a "way of life," referring to Raymond Williams' concept of lived culture: *"There is the lived culture of a particular time and place, only fully accessible to those living in that time and place"* (Williams, 1961:66). From this perspective, culture is not limited to artistic products or formal cultural expressions, but also includes everyday routines, values, and social practices embedded within community life. Anwar et al. (2025) demonstrate this perspective through their study on sustainable historical city identity and place attachment. Their findings show that communities living in riverside settlements possess stronger attachment to historical meanings and values than residents in city centers. This suggests that everyday culture may represent urban identity more effectively than formalized cultural expressions concentrated in central urban areas.

Everyday culture is also inherently diverse because it emerges from interactions among different social and cultural groups within a city. Hassen and Giovanardi (2018), through their study on Leicester, argue that cultural diversity does not hinder city branding; instead, it can strengthen urban identity and social cohesion. In Leicester, multiculturalism is promoted through festivals and ethnic celebrations organized by different communities, positioning diversity itself as part of the city's identity. Everyday culture is further reflected through daily social routines such as Fika in Sweden and Hygge in Denmark. These practices represent local values and social interaction while simultaneously providing distinctive cultural experiences for visitors. Consequently, everyday culture functions not only as symbolic representation, but also as an experiential dimension through which people engage with and interpret a place.

Culture and Identity in Place Branding

One key role of culture in place branding is its ability to shape a place's identity. Place identity becomes inseparable from the branding process, serving as the foundation for constructing and communicating meanings, perceptions, and a place's distinctive character.

One important dimension of place identity relates to the naming of places. An interesting study conducted by Hayward (2021) analyzed several place names in Canada associated with mermaids and sirens. These mermaid-themed names contributed to the construction of local tourism appeals, such as *Mermaid Cove* and *Mermaid Rock*. However, the study found that such naming practices were largely arbitrary and lacked strong connections to local folklore or significant local cultural traditions. Instead, the names were more closely associated with cultural imperialism and colonial history. Similar findings were also identified in several tourist destinations in Australia (Hayward & Fleury, 2021), where the use of mermaid symbolism was found to have little relation to Indigenous Australian culture. These findings suggest that place identity in branding practices may sometimes be shaped by externally imposed cultural symbols rather than by locally rooted cultural meanings.

Research on place identity was also conducted by Lombard and Du Plessis (2016), who examined several regions in Montana, United States, where local identity was connected to the historical use of cattle branding irons from local ranches. The various branding symbols identified in the study were closely linked to the history and cultural heritage of local ranching communities. Within place-branding discourse, such forms of everyday cultural heritage are often overlooked and receive limited scholarly attention. Nevertheless, the study demonstrates that cattle branding symbols have become embedded within the local system of meaning and identity formation. Consequently, place branding strategies should pay greater attention to forms of local culture that continue to exist within everyday community practices.

Apart from *mermaid* and cattle branding irons, horses also represent an important cultural identity maintained in Seoul, South Korea. Podoler (2025) discusses horses as part of the city's cultural landscape, arguing that horses symbolize South Korea's national aspirations within place branding strategies through public artworks distributed across urban spaces. Through this study, Podoler introduces the concept of a "collage cultural landscape" to analyze the interaction between humans, animals, and cultural landscapes in the construction of place identity. This perspective highlights that place identity is shaped not only by architecture and visual symbols but also by the cultural meanings attached to living beings, historical memory, and spatial experience.

The Role of Gastronomic Culture in Place Branding

Although the term *culinary* is more commonly used, gastronomy encompasses a broader spectrum related to the relationship between humans, food, culture, and the surrounding world (Soeroso & Turgarini, 2020). In this sense, gastronomy functions not only as food consumption, but also as a cultural system connecting food, place, and social life within place branding strategies.

Blom (2024) examines the Swedish culture of *fika* as a form of cultural experience and tourism value creation. As an everyday social tradition centered on coffee, conversation, and togetherness, fika demonstrates how simple daily practices can become authentic cul-

tural experiences attractive to tourists. This finding suggests that gastronomy contributes to place branding through the relationship between food, social interaction, and cultural identity.

Similarly, Farrelly and Makkar (2023) discuss artisanal food culture in Tasmania, showing that artisanal food represents not only products, but also the stories, experiences, and everyday lives of local producers. Consequently, gastronomy strengthens place identity through narratives of authenticity and local culture. Kladou and Trihas (2022) further introduce the concept of *gastro-cultural* experiences, emphasizing that gastronomy reflects local traditions, social relationships, and cultural participation through activities such as food festivals, culinary tours, and cooking classes. In this context, gastronomy enhances tourism attractiveness while enriching place branding through experiential engagement.

Beyond tourism, gastronomy also functions as a form of cultural diplomacy. Cabral et al. (2025) argue that food and eating culture contribute to the construction of national identity and strengthen a country's international image, positioning gastronomy as a symbolic medium through which nations communicate cultural identity in global contexts. Similarly, Songcharoen et al. (2024) highlight the importance of integrating design with local culture and gastronomy to enhance audience perception, as demonstrated through the identity of Phetchaburi as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

The Role of Sports Culture in Place Branding

Sport represents one form of culture that contributes significantly to the development of place branding. According to Girginov and Gorginova (2025), sport cannot be separated from culture because it constitutes part of social practices, collective identity, and the representation of societal values. Within the context of place branding, global sporting events such as the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, Southeast Asian Games, and other international competitions exert substantial influence on the image of host regions and the branding strategies developed around them. This perspective is reinforced by Richelieu (2018), who argues that sport can shape place perception at the urban, regional, and national scales.

Edensor and Millington (2008) discuss a campaign conducted by Manchester City F.C. to strengthen Manchester residents' loyalty to the club. The campaign, titled Our City, cultivated fan culture by portraying Manchester City as an authentic club rooted in traditional working-class communities. The campaign demonstrates how urban myths and sports club identities can be combined to produce a city identity that is emotionally resonant and closely aligned with local communities. In this context, sport functions as a medium for the production of urban cultural identity.

A similar case regarding the contribution of football club identity to urban identity is reported by Xu (2019). The study demonstrates that the blue color associated with Leicester City F.C. plays a significant role in constructing place identity through place branding, identity mediation, and the development of urban visual culture. Within the multicultural society of Leicester, the color blue functions as a unifying symbol across diverse cultural groups and social identities. Thus, visual symbols associated with sport can operate as mechanisms of social integration within culturally diverse urban contexts.

Meanwhile, John and McDonald (2020) examine the role of sport in shaping Melbourne's branding. They argue that sport serves as a form of "cultural glue" connecting public values to the city's neoliberal ideology. This finding illustrates how sports culture can simultaneously generate civic identity, economic narratives, and political symbolism within place branding strategies.

The Role of Cultural Heritage (Tangible and Intangible) in Place Branding

Cultural heritage is one of the most recognizable forms of culture within place branding and is generally categorized into tangible and intangible heritage. Tangible heritage includes buildings, historical sites, artifacts, and cultural landscapes, while intangible heritage encompasses rituals, traditions, local knowledge, and social practices.

Jacobsen et al. (2024) discuss the transformation of Odense through the redevelopment of the historic house of Hans Christian Andersen. By integrating museum design with the surrounding urban environment, the project connects Andersen's narratives with the broader cultural experience of the city. The study demonstrates that cultural heritage can strengthen spatial experience, tourism, and place identity.

Similarly, Liu et al. (2025) examine private art museums in Eastern China, showing that museums function not only as exhibition spaces but also as social spaces that foster interaction and community formation. Their findings suggest a reciprocal relationship between culture and place branding, where culture shapes place image while place branding supports cultural preservation and revitalization.

Wei et al. (2022) further demonstrate the role of heritage in national identity through the Mausoleum of the Yellow Emperor. Rituals, architecture, and cultural landscapes at the site communicate spiritual meaning, national unity, and historical identity through the relationship between space, symbolism, and historical narratives.

Beyond tangible heritage, Tillotson et al. (2020) examine sauna culture in Finland as a form of intangible cultural heritage. Their study shows that sauna culture functions as a symbolic resource embedded within Finland's national branding discourse, illustrating how everyday cultural practices can become part of national cultural identity and international image-building.

The Role of Cultural Events and Festivals in Place Branding

Cultural events and festivals are effective strategies for destination branding because they promote cultural diversity, social interaction, local economies, tourism awareness, and longer visitor stays (Yalçınkaya & Çaylan, 2026). Many international festivals originate from local community traditions that gradually develop into larger cultural events (Yoopetch, 2022), allowing places to communicate identity and collective cultural experiences.

Brokalaki and Comunian (2021) discuss the Athens Fringe Festival as a community-based arts festival that transforms public urban spaces into participatory cultural environments. Similarly, Šepetavc and Majsova (2024) show how folk-pop festivals in Slovenia combine traditional and popular culture to support heritage tourism and national identity.

However, cultural mega-events may also create tensions within place branding. Howcroft (2023) highlights the UK City of Culture 2017 program in Kingston upon Hull, which

promoted civic "pride" as a branding narrative but was criticized for overlooking local socio-economic concerns and citizen participation. Likewise, Baker et al. (2025) discuss the Eurovision Song Contest as a mega-cultural event where popular culture, politics, and national identities intersect, illustrating how festivals also function as platforms of cultural diplomacy and symbolic projection

The Role of Community Culture and Local Residents in Place Branding

This theme represents various studies discussing place branding strategies through two main approaches: top-down and bottom-up approaches. In recent developments, bottom-up approaches have received increasing attention because top-down strategies are often considered insufficient for building place identity without the involvement of local communities and public participation. Consequently, residents are no longer positioned merely as objects of branding, but rather as key actors in shaping the identity and meaning of a place. Contemporary developments in place branding are increasingly moving toward the concept of community branding. Daldanise (2020) highlights the transformation from place branding to *community branding* as a consequence of the growing role of local communities in the branding process. This approach positions residents as central participants in the formation of place identity, narratives, and experiences, enabling the resulting image of a place to become more authentic and closely connected to the social realities of everyday life.

Mihalis Kavaratzis and Gregory Ashworth (2015) provide an important discussion regarding the relationship between culture and place branding. Their study demonstrates that limited understandings of place branding may result in the disconnection between local culture and branding strategies. Through the concept of "hijacking culture," they argue that local communities are often marginalized within branding processes, causing the resulting place image to diverge from the lived culture of local residents. This critique highlights the importance of community participation so that place branding does not merely function as a promotional tool but also reflects the cultural realities and everyday experiences of local society.

In relation to planning approaches, King et al. (2025) examine how top-down policies may inhibit bottom-up place-making initiatives. Their study emphasizes the need for new governance structures capable of integrating both top-down and bottom-up approaches. Such integration is considered necessary not only for enhancing tourism development, but also for balancing relationships between culture, tourism, and the quality of life of local communities. This finding suggests that successful place branding requires collaborative governance rather than purely centralized image management.

Trapp (2020) discusses the successful implementation of a volunteer ambassador program in Aarhus, Denmark. The program represents a form of direct community participation in place branding strategies. The study demonstrates that local volunteers were able to provide richer and more authentic understandings of the city compared to formal tourism managers. The volunteers shared personal experiences, local stories, and direct cultural interactions with visitors. This study illustrates that bottom-up place branding can produce stronger, more participatory, and more authentic cultural experiences grounded in the everyday lives of local residents.

The Role of Culture as a Mechanism of Critique in Place Branding

Culture within place branding discourse also functions as a mechanism of critique and resistance against the excessive exploitation of culture that ignores local social realities. Bermúdez (2019) discusses the development of the cultural district *Cidade da Cultura* in Galicia as an example of *Disneyfication*, where culture and urban space are transformed into visual spectacles and tourism commodities within neoliberal urbanism. In this context, culture is treated more as a consumable image than as a representation of everyday community life. Similarly, Brokalaki and Comunian (2021) criticize cultural initiatives centered on "shiny flagship buildings" that primarily benefit governments and elite groups rather than local residents. Their study emphasizes the importance of repositioning everyday culture as a central component of urban life instead of merely a tool for urban competitiveness.

Caprioli et al. (2021) further argue that culture in destination branding is often represented superficially while overlooking lived local practices such as *Fika* in Sweden and *Hygge* in Denmark. These findings demonstrate that culture cannot simply be reduced to visual symbols or promotional slogans but should instead be understood as an actively lived social practice.

This critique is reinforced by Mihalis Kavaratzis and Gregory Ashworth (2015) through the concept of *Hijacking Culture*. They argue that dominant place branding approaches frequently disconnect branding strategies from local culture by reducing culture to a promotional instrument. Instead, culture should function as a medium connecting identity, perception, and community values. Therefore, effective place branding should articulate meanings genuinely experienced and understood by local residents.

The Role of Cultural Production and Circulation in Place Branding

Within cultural studies perspectives, culture is not understood as something inherently given through ancestry, ethnicity, or geographical origin. Rather than being fixed and static, culture is continuously produced, negotiated, and circulated through social practices, media, and power relations. Consequently, culture is viewed as an ongoing process that continually changes in response to the surrounding social, political, economic, and technological contexts.

Luo (2025), for example, introduces anti-poverty dramas *(fupin ju)* as a television genre produced for contemporary Chinese society, representing governmental efforts to alleviate poverty. These dramas function as forms of cultural production that bridge state propaganda and popular culture, while simultaneously constructing anti-poverty cultural symbolism that reimagines marginalized regions as spaces of hope and development. In this context, cultural production serves as an important mechanism for strategically constructing and communicating place identities and social narratives to broader audiences.

Efforts to examine cultural production and circulation are also reflected in the study by Jiang and Kuang (2023), which investigates the image of Suzhou in Eastern China. Although the city is recognized as a rapidly developing economic and cultural center, it remains relatively less visible internationally. Their findings demonstrate that cultural circulation through media platforms produces different constructions of urban image depending on the interests, narratives, and audiences associated with each media channel. This suggests

that place branding is shaped not only by physical environments or official campaigns but also by mediated cultural representations that circulate across communication networks.

Meanwhile, Wang and Zhang (2025) examine representations of ancient cities in the Jiangnan region through social media platforms. They propose the concept of *symbolic effects on platform media* to explain how local culture is reconstructed and disseminated within digital environments. In this context, culture becomes something continuously reimagined through platform-based media systems and digital visual consumption. Their study highlights how social media platforms contribute to the transformation of local culture into circulating symbolic content, shaping how places are perceived, experienced, and consumed in contemporary digital culture.

The Role of the Alignment Between Traditional and Contemporary Culture in Place Branding

The relationship between traditional and contemporary culture emerges as an important theme in place branding, where both are often negotiated as complementary rather than opposing elements in shaping place identity. Bermudez (2019) examines the contrast between the historic Santiago de Compostela Cathedral and the contemporary *Cidade da Cultura* in Galicia, Spain. While the cathedral represents traditional culture and sacred heritage, *Cidade da Cultura* symbolizes contemporary global cultural tourism. The study highlights Galicia's transformation from a pilgrimage destination toward a globally oriented cultural tourism landscape. Similarly, Bursrewicz (2021) discusses contemporary architecture in Wrocław, Poland as part of urban identity and place branding. The study suggests that contemporary architecture can strengthen tourism attractiveness and contribute positively to city image.

In contrast, Gupta (2015) critiques The World Islands in Dubai as an example of neoliberal tourism culture centered on luxury and spectacle. The project is described as a "false" concept that blurs the relationship between culture and nature while prioritizing globalized elite tourism imagery. These studies demonstrate that place branding often involves negotiations between preserving local traditions and embracing contemporary cultural expressions in shaping urban and regional identities.

Study's Implications

The findings of this study highlight at least ten cultural roles within place branding identified through previous studies related to the keywords *culture* and *place branding* within the fields of social sciences, arts, and humanities over an 18-year period (2008–2026) indexed in the Scopus database.

Based on these thematic findings, this study proposes a reflective checklist that may be used for future research as well as by policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders interested in examining the role of culture in place branding. The checklist is formulated as a set of reflective questions intended to evaluate whether existing place branding strategies have adequately considered the cultural dimensions identified in this study.

Themes	Reflective Questions of Role Culture through Place Brading
Culture as a Way of Life	Has [place branding] _____ considered everyday culture as part of its place branding strategy?
Culture and Identity	Has [place branding] _____considered the role of culture in shaping place identity as part of its place branding strategy
Gastronomic Culture	Has [place branding] _____ considered the role of gastronomic culture as part of its place branding strategy?
Sports Culture	Has [place branding] _____ considered the role of sports culture as part of its place branding strategy?
Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage	AHas [place branding] _____ considered the role of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage as part of its place branding strategy?
Cultural Events and Festivals	Has [place branding] _____ considered the role of cultural events and festivals as part of its place branding strategy?
Community Culture and Local Residents	Has [place branding] _____ considered the role of community culture and local residents as part of its place branding strategy?
Culture as Critique	Has [place branding] _____ considered the role of cultural critique as part of its place branding strategy?
Community Culture and Local Residents	Has [place branding] _____ considered the role of cultural production and circulation as part of its place branding strategy?
Traditional and Contemporary Culture	Has [place branding] _____ considered the role of cultural production and circulation as part of its place branding strategy?

Figure 3. Table of Reflective Questions on the Role of Culture in Place Branding.

However, it should be emphasized that this reflective checklist is intended only as a guiding tool to encourage deeper exploration of the cultural potential within existing place branding practices. The checklist is not designed to provide quantitative evaluations of the role of culture in place branding. Furthermore, it is not procedural in nature, meaning that every question does not need to be answered in order to complete the reflective process comprehensively. Instead, the checklist may be used flexibly, allowing researchers and practitioners to select one or more themes that are most relevant to their specific context of reflection.

Conclusion

The role of culture in place branding remains an important topic for understanding the continuing development of place branding practices today. Culture cannot be reduced to fixed entities such as tangible and intangible cultural heritage alone. Rather, culture continuously evolves and becomes embedded within everyday life and social practices. This study sought to address the research questions concerning how culture is positioned within place branding and what kinds of cultural forms and perspectives emerge within existing literature on culture and place branding.

The findings demonstrate that the role of culture in place branding has expanded alongside the diversity of perspectives and theoretical approaches adopted by scholars interested in this topic. This study identifies ten thematic roles of culture in place branding that

may serve as reflective tools for examining existing place branding practices. Based on these themes, the study proposes ten reflective questions that can be used as preliminary reflective instruments before exploring more specific cultural dimensions within place branding contexts.

Importantly, these reflective questions are not intended to evaluate or measure the success of previous place branding practices. Instead, they are designed to encourage deeper consideration of the cultural possibilities and potential that may contribute to the development of more context-sensitive and culturally grounded place branding strategies. These objectives are embedded within each reflective question presented in this study.

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Critical Participatory Action Research for Revitalizing

Local Music and Performing Arts in the Post-Pandemic Transition of Salaya

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Abstract

This study employs Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) to examine the adaptive revitalization of local music and performing arts in Salaya's post-pandemic transition. Through the Collaborative Cultural Action Network (CCAN – comprising artists, academics, administrators, and citizens – the research facilitates a collaborative ecosystem for cultural asset co-creation. Implementation operates across two levels: strategic management of intersubjective agreements, and artistic creativity via a dual-track strategy. This strategy combines active conservation of *phleng lae, phleng ruea, lakhon chatri, likay,* and *trae wong* with creative deconstruction, specifically the *luk thung* song *"Yu Yen Pen Suk Na Salaya"* and the *Kanlapaphruek* project. Findings demonstrate that peri-urban cultural resilience is achieved through community agency, shifting residents from passive participants to active co-designers. Recommendations advocate institutionalizing sustainability through local policy integration, preserving living expressions while fostering artistic fluidity and responsiveness to unpredictable volatility.

Keywords: *Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR), Local Music, Performing Arts, Community Agency, Active Conservation, Creative Deconstruction*

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented global crisis, profoundly disrupted social interactions and cultural practices, particularly impacting the transmission of Intangible Cultural heritage (ICH) and the vitality of community-based cultural events (UNESCO, 2021). As societies grapple with ongoing health uncertainties and the emergence of novel infectious diseases (WHO, 2023), the critical reassessment of cultural engagement strategies – specifically those designed to mitigate activity cessation and restore communal well-being – is imperative, While existing literature acknowledges the pandemic's impact on cultural sectors and various restorative efforts have been implemented, there remains a parallel necessity to address the social and spiritual suffering at the grassroots level, characterized by the enforced silence of communal spaces and the severance of cultural transmission lines. Furthermore, a significant research gap exists in understanding how peri-urban communities (McGee, 1991), such as the Salaya sub-district, Phutthamonthon district, Nakhon Pathom province in central Thailand, adapt and sustain their local music and performing arts. These communities serve as critical transition zones where rapid urbanization directly intersects with deep-rooted, agrarian cultural practices and collective festivities, making them uniquely vulnerable to rapid cultural erosion when crises destabilize their transitioning social fabrics. Consequently, socio-cultural resilience within these areas becomes a vital indicator of a community's capacity to navigate developmental pressures, underscoring that the adaptive revitalization of cultural festivities is as fundamental to the communal heart and stability as economic or infrastructural development in an increasingly volatile and unpredictable world.

This study addresses the aforementioned gaps through a flagship frontier research initiative supported by the Program Management Unit for Human Resources & Institutional Development, Research and Innovation (PMU-B). The project investigates the interplay between cultural resilience and collaborative creativity, prioritizing the intrinsic value of the arts in addressing social challenges over mere economic metrics. As Schippers (2016) asserts, the vitality of musical practices depends significantly on a community's capacity to maintain cultural relevance. This stance is further reinforced by Schippers and Seeger (2022), who emphasize the necessity of bridging the gap between global intangible cultural heritage ideologies and the lived realities of musical practices. Within this framework, effective cultural sustainability is understood as inherently responsive to social and cultural shifts; thus, this inherent artistic fluidity underscores the importance of adapting traditions to contemporary contexts while preserving their core essence. For practitioners, this implies that cultural activities must remain flexible, empowering artists to transform their creative processes into resilient pathways that sustain artistic integrity amidst evolving environmental constraints.

The research process commenced with an empirical survey titled Quality of Life Under the COVID-19 pandemic context, assessing 100 residents in the Salaya sub-district. Findings revealed that 85% of respondents experienced severe disruption in communal participation, while 88% expressed a clear mandate for onsite cultural activities held in open-air environments. These results directly informed the adoption of a Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) framework (Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon 2014). Within this model, the project employs a dual-track strategy of active conservation and creative deconstruction: while active conservation focuses on perpetuating the community's musical and performing arts legacies, creative deconstruction is simultaneously utilized to adapt and reimagine these forms in response to contemporary situations and emerging contexts. By centering

community agency, this process facilitates close collaboration through the Collaborative Cultural Action Network (CCAN), bridging the expertise of artists, academic networks, local government administrators, and community representatives.

The primary objective of this research is thus to explore and implement adaptive revitalization strategies for local musical and performing arts in Salaya. By focusing on the post-pandemic transitional era, the study aims to foster cultural resilience through collaborative creativity. This overarching aim is operationalized through the aforementioned CPAR framework, which serves to bridge theoretical insights with communal practice, ensuring the sustainability of Salaya's living cultural expressions amidst contemporary disruptions.

Literature Review

Cultural Adaptation and Resilience in Peri-Urban Contexts: A Socio-Ecological Perspective

The Salaya community offers a compelling lens through which to examine cultural resilience within transitional landscapes. As articulated by McGee (1991), these peri-urban zones exhibit a dynamic interplay of urban and rural characteristics, fostering unique socio-spatial configurations. Salaya's hybridity is evidenced by the shift from subsistence farming toward market-oriented entrepreneurship, a transformation that has fundamentally altered local livelihoods and social relationships (Wannarat, 2017). This socio-economic transition necessitates analytical approaches that transcend traditional urban-rural dichotomies (Brenner and Schmid, 2011), recognizing that cultural expressions are embedded within complex adaptive systems. Drawing on a socio-ecological perspective and systems theory, this research recognizes that cultural expressions are embedded within complex adaptive systems of social and environmental interactions. In this context, cultural resilience, defined as the ability of communities to maintain and adapt their cultural practices in response to socio-economic and environmental changes, and adaptive capacity, the ability to adjust to change, moderate potential damages, and take advantage of opportunities (IPCC, 2014), are conceptualized as emergent properties of these systems. Furthermore, cultural ecosystem services, the contributions of cultural practices to human well-being, are analyzed to understand how Salaya's traditions support community resilience. The study extends beyond the immediate boundaries of Salaya to encompass the broader region, acknowledging the fluidity of cultural spaces and the historical significance of shared living cultural expressions (Chandransu et al., 2023). In this transitional context, the interplay between cultural conservation and cultural deconstruction becomes pivotal, driving a strategic reconfiguration of local expressions to ensure their continued relevance.

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Protection and Community Engagement

Building upon the socio-ecological perspective, this research acknowledges the critical role of ICH protection in fostering cultural resilience. As Schippers notes, "From the middle of the past century, the concept of protecting music as ICH emerged, identifying specific traditions and people that deserved to be supported" (Schippers, 2024). This concept, which inspired UNESCO's 2003 ICH Convention, underscores the importance of recognizing and safeguarding diverse musical expressions. However, it is crucial to address the "Pros and Cons of the 2003 Convention," as highlighted by Schippers. While the convention has successfully raised international awareness and spurred significant investments in ICH, it has also faced criticism for its nation-state-centric approach, which can "take away agency from the people to whom the music means most" (Schippers, 2024). Moreover, the tendency to treat music practices as "objects to preserve rather than as living traditions" (Schippers,

2024) overlooks the complex social, cultural, and economic factors that sustain them. This gap is further addressed by Schippers and Seeger (2022), who emphasize that music sustainability is inherently linked to its responsiveness to social and cultural shifts, requiring practices that remain meaningful within lived realities. This study further aligns with the perspective of Harnish (2005, 1-2), who argues that for cultural festivals to remain meaningful, they must "adjust to contemporary realities." In his analysis of the Lingsar Festival, Harnish demonstrates that what officials or outsiders might perceive as a loss of tradition is often viewed by the community as *perkembangan* (development) or *perbaikan* (improvement) – strategic shifts that allow a festival to maintain its core identity while navigating socio-political changes. By applying this lens to Salaya, the current research posits that the "shifting identities" and reconfiguration of local performances during the pandemic are not signs of cultural erosion, but rather evidence of agency and identity formulation (Harnish, 2005, 2) necessary for living cultural expressions to survive in a volatile world.

Collaborative Creativity and Cultural Resilience: A Social Constructionist Lens

This research explores the local music and performing arts legacies of Salaya by examining how social interactions shape and sustain cultural meanings. As Chandransu et al. (2023) observe, music serves as a vital medium that reflects the complex identity and diversity of a community. Central to this study is the process of collaborative creativity, which fosters an open environment where the perspectives of artists, academics, and local practitioners converge. This collaborative framework aligns with the concept of festival liminality, suggesting that periods of crisis – such as the COVID-19 pandemic – can serve as transformative spaces where social norms are temporarily eased, allowing for a strategic restructuring of cultural systems (Chan, 2023). Therefore, this collective creative process acts as both a remedy for pandemic fatigue and a mechanism that empowers these living cultural expressions to remain resilient and responsive within contemporary social contexts.

Connecting Theory to Practice: Adaptive Revitalization in Salaya

To operationalize the aforementioned conceptual frameworks, this research synthesized the local music and performing arts repository of the Salaya community to implement a unified adaptive revitalization process. This approach focuses on the systematic integration of active conservation and creative deconstruction as follows:

- Active conservation: This includes the repertoire of *phleng lae,* the domestic theatrical practices of the *Theppradanporn (lakhon chatri)* and *Saidara Thidathep (likay)* troupes, the *Suwannasin (trae wong Suwannasin)*, and the *phleng ruea* artist networks inheriting the wisdom of national artists from neighboring communities.
- Creative deconstruction: To address contemporary social challenges, the research employs interdisciplinary restructuring for new creative outputs. For instance, the *luk thung song* "*Yu Yen Pen Suk Na Salaya*" incorporates community keywords and narratives of a happy community, recomposed within the stylistic identityof the genre. Similarly, the *Kanlapaphruek* project integrates contemporary Thai dance, visual arts, and classical music compositions to foster collective emotional healing and communicate a shared symbolism of hope within public spaces.

The synthesis of this literature review demonstrates that the sustainability of local music and performing arts in a peri-urban context like Salaya, amidst a crisis, is not confined to

maintaining static forms. Rather, it necessitates collaborative creativity to strategically reconfigure these living cultural expressions, ensuring they remain meaningful and responsive to contemporary social shifts.

Research Methodology

This study employs Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) (Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon 2014) to facilitate the adaptive revitalization of local music and performing arts in Salaya. The research aims to implement cultural activities during the transitional period after the peak of the pandemic as the situation began to stabilize. This was achieved by establishing a communicative space (Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon 2014, 21) where stakeholders could identify strategies for future resilience. Central to this approach is reaching an intersubjective agreement among a diverse range of participants (Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon 2014, 4–5), including artists, academics, local government representatives, and community representatives acting as the Collaborative Cultural Action Network (CCAN). Acting as partners in the co-creation of knowledge, these stakeholders work together to reconfigure community cultural practices, a process framed by the transformation of practice architectures (Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon 2014, 31–34). This participatory ethos ensures that the revitalization process remains strictly responsive to the lived realities of the community throughout the study.

Collaborative Inquiry and Documentation

The data collection was designed as a collaborative inquiry to document the local music and performing arts of Salaya. This involved a participatory documentation strategy, where researchers and the CCAN co-identified significant cultural markers and narratives. Participant observation was conducted during local performances to gain a situated understanding of the community's lived experiences (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). The study also utilized semi-structured dialogues – conducted as flexible exchanges – to capture oral histories and in-depth perspectives of artists and local practitioners (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015). This approach ensured that the documentation of community music and performance was grounded in intersubjective validation. Given the scarcity of written records, this process was vital in representing the community's collective voice and memory regarding annual festivities, categorized by specific local music and performing arts genres.

Research Procedures: Dual-Level Cycles

The research was operationalized through nested cycles operating at two levels: strategic management and artistic creativity.

Phase 1: Planning and Aesthetic Setting (Plan)

At this stage, the framework served as a platform for stakeholders to decide which local music and performing arts resources would be used to communicate COVID-19 pandemic prevention and provide healing:

- Strategic level: The CCAN designated Wat Suwannaram, a local Buddhist temple, as the operational hub because it is a community center with open-air spaces suitable for cultural activities under safety protocols.
- Artistic level: Researchers and artists conducted local music and performing arts repository mapping to select genres for the project. The group prioritized the traditional repertoire of *phleng lae, lakhon chatri, likay, trae wong,* and *phleng ruea*. These were reimagined as resilient pathways that provided both COVID-19 pandemic education and entertainment.

Phase 2: Action and Negotiated Creativity (Act)
This phase is the core of the creative process where collaborative decision-making guided the content:

- Active conservation via script interjection: For local artists and troupes – including the *phleng lae* of *Mae Bamrung Phinitkul,* the *phleng ruea* networks, *Theppradanporn (lakhon chatri)*, *Saidara Thidathep (likay)*, and the *Suwannasin (trae wong Suwannasin)* – the process led to script interjection. Artists and researchers co-designed performances where artists and local practitioners integrated health protocols, such as mask-wearing and sanitizer use, into comedic improvisations. This preserved the core of the entertainment while adapting the script to contemporary situations.
- Creative deconstruction via creative recomposition:
  1. *Co-creation of "Yu Yen Pen Suk Na Salaya:"* The production of this *luk thung* song extracted local cultural codes through a community keywords bank. Residents co-authored lyrics reflecting their identity, and the music video involved multi-sectoral participation – from farmers to government officials – as co-performers, reinforcing the community's representational agency.
  2. *Interdisciplinary symbolism in the "Kanlapaphruek" project:* This initiative integrated the Bangkok Metropolitan Orchestra (BMO), a trumpet soloist, and contemporary dancers to achieve a symbolic consensus. The process allowed artists and academics to negotiate the interpretation of the *Kanlapaphruek* (Wishing Tree) into a structured choreography symbolizing hope and resilience.

Phase 3: Participatory Observation and Field Documentation (Observe)
This phase focused on the systematic monitoring of the implemented cultural activities. Researchers and the CCAN conducted structured field observations and audiovisual documentation during the live performances at Wat Suwannaram. The observation criteria prioritized tracking community engagement levels, the seamlessness of health protocol integration within the modified scripts, and audience emotional responses. Gathering this empirical data was crucial to providing a verified baseline of field realities for subsequent analytical evaluation.

Phase 4: Collaborative Reflection and Lesson-Learned Reflection (Reflect)
The final phase used a structured reflection process to ensure the sustainability of the interventions:

- Intersubjective validation: Representatives from the government, clergy, artists, and the community analyzed whether the local music and performing arts outputs effectively revitalized Salaya's identity.
- Policy integration and sustainability: This reflection resulted in a consensus to transition to a sustainable model. Proposals were made to local administrative organizations to integrate these community festivities into annual budgets. Synthesizing these lessons provided a roadmap for proactive revitalization, ensuring these living cultural expressions remain a resilient mechanism for social survival.

Research Findings

Strategic Management

At this level, the research crystallized into an Integrated Collaboration Model, driven by the *"Yu Yen Pen Suk Na Salaya"* community festivity during the post-pandemic transition. This process underscores the capacity to manage a transition zone – the intersection of urban and peri-urban landscapes – by reconfiguring the roles of existing government and

local agencies. Within this framework, the research team acted as a facilitator, bridging the established mandates of various sectors to co-create a local music and performing arts system that revitalizes the community's social well-being.

Infrastructure and Logistics Management

The coordination of cultural activities amidst public health constraints was a collaborative manifestation between the Subdistrict Administrative Organization (SAO) and the Subdistrict Municipality. Together, they developed a support system that encompasses:

- Multilateral traffic and transport management: Strategic access points connecting roads, waterways (Khlong Mahasawat), and railway-adjacent areas were co-managed to ensure a safe and systematic flow to the event sites.
- Sanitation and environmental management: Waste management and cleanliness were handled by local authorities to ensure that the activity space reflected the principle of ecological aesthetics. The findings highlight an aesthetic of safety – where beauty is inherently linked to sanitation. Transforming the event space (Wat Suwannaram) into a well-ventilated and hygienic environment became a vital part of the aesthetic experience. The audience's sense of safety and trust in public health protocols served as the essential foundation, allowing them to engage deeply with the local music and performing arts. This management ensured that the activity space harmonized with Salaya's actual environment through a shared commitment to the project's goals.
- Communication systems and public address: The process integrated traditional community communication (local public address systems) with digital platforms to broaden public awareness and foster emotional restoration among residents.

Safety and Health Management

As the activities were organized during the post-pandemic transition, public health management became a fundamental factor in the design process:

- Public health and hygiene protocols: Collaborative planning with local health authorities allowed for the establishment of preventive measures tailored for open-air environments. This ensured that activities could proceed without posing risks to the public.
- Public order management: The integration of security personnel helped maintain public safety and minimize external disturbances. This effort preserved an environment conducive to social retreat, providing a safe communal space for residents to reconnect and mitigating the social isolation experienced during previous lockdowns.

Educational and Cultural Asset Management

The research utilized these activities as a platform for community capacity building while respecting the existing mandates of local organizations:

- Educational integration: The project facilitated learning processes in local music and performing arts for local youth, encouraging their participation in contemporary performances and innovative musical works. This approach utilized the arts as a catalyst for inspiration and the development of new skills in the younger generation.
- Fostering a sense of belonging: By employing techniques to brainstorm and identify local cultural assets and history, the *"Yu Yen Pen Suk Na Salaya"* initiative became a space where the community could exercise collective decision-making and achieve self-representation.

Artistic Creation

This dimension is focused on the actual creation and adaptation of artistic works in Salaya. To align with the CPAR framework, the research process actively engaged with local performers through collaborative creativity. This approach ensured that traditional art forms remained responsive to the lived realities of the community during the post-pandemic recovery, effectively functioning as mechanisms for socio-psychological healing.

Active Conservation: Mobilizing Tradition in Crisis

This section presents the research findings on mobilizing traditional local music and performing arts to address contemporary social challenges. The project targeted specific art forms identified through the community's local music and performing arts repository mapping: *phleng lae,* domestic theatrical practices *(lakhon chatri* and *likay), trae wong,* and the *phleng ruea* artist network.

- *Phleng lae:* This performance, titled *"Chom Khlong Mahasawat"* (Admiring Khlong Mahasawat), was utilized for narrating history and fostering commemoration by highlighting the distinctive features of the waterway and local identity. Facilitated by Apilak Kasempholkoon, the performers, Bamrung and Khanittha Phinitkul, co-developed new lyrics while preserving the authentic traditional *lae* vocal style. This creation functioned as a tool for reviving community pride and encouraging agricultural tourism by guiding the audience through significant local landmarks along the canal.



Figure 1. Performance of *phleng lae "Chom Khlong Mahasawat"* by Bamrung and Khanittha Phinitkul, integrating new local narratives within the traditional vocal style. (Source: Authors, 2022).

- *Phleng ruea:* Working with the *Mae Srinuan Kham-at* network, this initiative focused on collective emotional healing through an aural repatriation process. Artists, researchers, and local youth co-authored new *phleng ruea* lyrics, transforming traditional lively interactions into a platform for sharing communal emotions. The narrative began with acknowledging the enforced silence of the lockdown before transitioning into a joyful, resilience-building performance, effectively empowering the community to exercise agency in revitalizing the waterfront.



Figure 2. Collaborative performance of *phleng ruea* involving youth and senior artists from the *Mae* Srinuan Khamat network, demonstrating the adaptive reconfiguration of the lively genre for emotional healing. (Source: Authors, 2022).

Health Communication through Theatrical Performance (Performing Arts and Script Adaptation): This group leveraged the inherent flexibility of folk drama to integrate safety information, utilizing the artists' specific skills to interact with the audience:

- *Lakhon chatri*: The Theppradanporn troupe presented the story *Sang Thong: Leap Mueang,* utilizing a script interjection strategy. This process was a direct manifestation of artist agency, where performers selected appropriate moments during the performance to integrate COVID-19 pandemic prevention content. This involved designing *chamaut* (clown) characters to discuss disease prevention while incorporating actual props, such as face masks and hand sanitizer, into the stage performance. This implementation proves the role of artists as co-designers of communication capable of adapting traditional practices to contemporary lived realities.



Figure 3. *Lakhon chatri* performance by the Theppradanporn troupe, demonstrating artist agency and script interjection in *"Sang Thong: Leap Mueang."* (Source: Authors, 2022).

- *Likay*: The *Saidara Thidathep* Troupe utilized improvisation – the core skill enabling local arts to adapt. Performers used their wit to modify dialogue and humor every 2 to

3 minutes based on real-time audience reactions. All communication methods were determined solely by the artists, such as spontaneously inventing jokes about social distancing or incorporating popular songs to reduce stress. This process effectively transformed complex medical information into accessible content that resonated with the cultural preferences of the Salaya community.



Figure 4. *Lakhon chatri* performance by the Theppradanporn troupe, demonstrating artist agency and script interjection in "*Sang Thong: Leap Mueang.*" (Source: Authors, 2022).

Building a Positive Atmosphere in Public Spaces

This group utilized music as a strategic tool to manage the communal environment, focusing on alleviating the psychological impact of isolation by creating safe, culturally familiar spaces for social interaction:

- *Trae wong Suwannasin:* The brass band performed popular *ramwong* and *luk thung* songs, blending classics with contemporary favorites familiar to the residents. This performance at Wat Suwannaram, supported by local government sanitation protocols, functioned beyond mere entertainment. It served as a strategic use of music to alleviate the communal isolation experienced during lockdowns, creating a safe space for community interaction and reconnection within a supervised open-air environment.



Figure 5. *Trae wong* Suwannasin performance, utilizing brass band music for social reconnection and emotional well-being at Wat Suwannaram. (Source: Authors, 2022).

Creative Deconstruction: Adaptive Interdisciplinary Adaptation

This level of implementation serves as the "central axis" of the entire research project, functioning as the link between all activities. It focuses on the structural reconfiguration of traditional artistic elements to create innovative art forms that address contemporary social needs. This process is driven by representational agency, where local community members participate as cultural owners through two primary activities:

- *Luk Thung Song "Yu Yen Pen Suk Na Salaya": Communicating identity through community narrative:* This activity utilizes *luk thung* as a tool for communal unity and psychological healing. The key output is not merely a new song, but the creation of a community keywords bank. The research team conducted field interviews to collect the villagers' feelings and stories regarding happiness in Salaya, which were then synthesized into lyrics reflecting local history, cultural assets, and authentic lifestyles. In the music video production, community members – ranging from farmers and vendors to government officials – participated as co-performers, representing their true identities. Furthermore, the song was performed by Seri Rungsawang, a renowned *luk thung* artist with a significant local fan base, transforming the song into a concrete voice of the community that projects pride and collective spirit. Currently, this piece has been adopted as an official community song for various local festivals.



Figure 6. QR code for the *"Yu Yen Pen Suk Na Salaya"* music video, performed by *luk thung* artist Seri Rungsawang. (Source: Authors, 2026).

Kanlapaphruek project: Art adaptation as the heart of collective healing: The "Kanlapaphruek" project stands as a central axis in this research. It is an interdisciplinary artistic adaptation that required six months of intensive planning and preparation to transition from a traditional performance to a work where the community oversees and selects content at every stage:

- Conceptual design: Initiated by artist Wichit Apichatkriengkrai, the project deconstructs the traditional meaning of *Kanlapaphruek* into a symbol of spiritual healing. The artist conducted field research on Thai craftsmanship patterns and religious art forms in Salaya to design a sculptural structure representing strength and flexibility, established as a Wishing Tree in a public space.
- Community consultation and oversight: Over six months, the community and the Collaborative Cultural Action Network (CCAN) played a vital role in reviewing and providing feedback:
- Site selection and participation: The community collaboratively selected Wat Suwannaram as the exhibition site to ensure maximum accessibility. They organized the "Write-and-Hang" activity, where the artist designed *Kanlapaphruek* flowers modeled after the form of the COVID-19 virus. Residents were invited to write prayers or express their feelings and hang them on the tree. This process transformed a visual arts piece into a safe space for collective emotional release and healing.

- Interdisciplinary integration: Once the sculpture was installed, it became the stage for a performance weaving multiple disciplines together:
- Music: A collaboration with the Bangkok Metropolitan Orchestra (BMO) and other project artists.
- Contemporary dance and youth engagement: Youth from Wat Salawan School were selected to perform alongside professional artists. The students were given the opportunity to co-design movements reflecting life's adaptation, fostering cultural pride and a sense of value in their living cultural expressions.



Figure 7. *Kanlapaphruek* performance at Wat Suwannaram: Collective healing and spiritual resilience. (Source: Authors, 2022).



Figure 8. The "Write-and-Hang" activity on the "*Kanlapaphruek*" flowers, demonstrating community engagement and emotional release on the Wishing Tree during the post-pandemic transition. (Source: Authors, 2022).

Figure 9. QR code for the recorded "*Kanlapaphruek*" performance, showcasing the interdisciplinary artistic innovation and intersectoral collaboration. (Source: Authors, 2026).

Synthesizing Research Findings into a Project Overview

The research findings in active conservation and creative deconstruction demonstrate a unified connection throughout the project. While the conservation efforts involving *phleng lae, phleng ruea, lakhon chatri, likay,* and *trae wong* functioned as the foundation for preserving traditions and communicating critical information through community familiarity, the creative projects – specifically the song *"Yu Yen Pen Suk Na Salaya"* and the *"Kanlapaphruek"* activities – served as a bridge. This bridge utilized cultural capital to create interdisciplinary adaptations that reached younger generations and external audiences more extensively.This synergistic workflow indicates that the project's success did not stem from a top-down shepherd role exercised by the researchers. Instead, it emerged from a collaborative ecosystem where all stakeholders – including academics, professional artists, local students, government officials, and various networks – collectively participated in decision-making and project oversight. This process transformed artistic works into living cultural expressions and essential tools for restoring the spiritual well-being of Salaya. However, the heart of this success was not merely the revival of disrupted activities, but the demonstration of local music and performing arts adaptability. This proves that local music and performing arts can dynamically respond to and flow with changing social circumstances. This research serves as a conceptual foundation for artists and the community to view culture as a strategic tool – one that is ready to be deconstructed and reconstructed to remain meaningful.

Discussion

This research demonstrates that revitalizing local music and performing arts in Salaya's peri-urban landscape is more than just keeping old traditions alive; it is a strategic way to heal the community's spirit and build social strength. These findings support the argument by Schippers (2016) that music stays alive only when the community can make it relevant to their current lives. By moving away from a top-down approach where researchers make all the decisions – the shepherd role – and instead acting as facilitators within a critical participatory action research (CPAR) framework, this project filled a major gap in how we handle the social and spiritual pain caused by the pandemic's lockdowns. The results prove that living cultural expressions are not fragile objects that must be frozen in time, but a living, adaptive system that can change to survive social and environmental pressures.

The success of active conservation in this project – involving *phleng ruea, lakhon chatri, likay,* and *trae wong* – shows that using what is familiar to the community is an effective tool for communication during a crisis. Traditional models of protecting local music and performing arts often treat music as something to be stored away, but our use of script interjection and aural repatriation allowed the performers to use their own artist agency. This aligns with Harnish's (2005) observation that when a community changes a performance to fit the times, they do not see it as losing their tradition, but as necessary development. Specifically, the trae wong was utilized as a strategic tool to manage the communal environment and atmosphere, helping to alleviate social isolation. By weaving public health messages into the improvisation of these entertaining shows, we demonstrated that folk arts possess a natural fluidity that allows them to speak to the reality of the pandemic while keeping their original spirit intact.

Furthermore, the peri-urban nature of Salaya presented a unique administrative challenge due to its overlapping jurisdictions and diverse social structures. As a transition zone be-

tween urban expansion and rural traditions, implementing cultural activities required navigating complex power dynamics among local government bodies, such as the Subdistrict Administrative Organization (SAO) and the Subdistrict Municipality. Managing these multisectoral collaborations was not merely a matter of logistics, but a process of reconciling different institutional mandates with the lived needs of the community. The primary challenge lay in working with people from varied backgrounds – ranging from traditional folk artists to local authorities – who often held differing perspectives. By acting as facilitators, the research team created a 'communicative space' where these diverse stakeholders could reach an intersubjective agreement. This proves that in peri-urban contexts, cultural resilience is built through the successful negotiation of social and administrative boundaries.

The creative deconstruction track, seen in the song *"Yu Yen Pen Suk Na Salaya"* and the *"Kanlapaphruek"* project, further proves the power of representational agency. Instead of just following basic participation rules, we used Chan's (2023) idea of festival liminality, which views a crisis as a rare space where old social norms can be broken and rebuilt. The creation of a community keywords bank – where the residents themselves chose the words for the lyrics – ensured that the community's voice was the foundation of the work, not just an afterthought. This approach directly challenges the usual government-led ways of managing local music and performing arts by giving the power back to the local community, making community members the true owners of their culture.

Finally, the focus on managing the event at Wat Suwannaram shows a deep connection between ecological aesthetics and the aesthetic of safety. We found that in a post-pandemic world, you cannot fix a community's spiritual well-being unless you also show a clear commitment to safety and health protocols in the space where people gather. This management turned the temple into a safe communal space, proving that cultural ecosystem services can be used as a tool to bring people back together after long isolation. In summary, this research offers a practical roadmap for others, showing that for culture to survive in an unpredictable world, we must be willing to intentionally and collaboratively transform living cultural expressions so they serve the real, daily lives of the people.

Recommendations

1. Transform the research project into a locally-owned Salaya Model: While this research successfully demonstrated collaborative creativity, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations as a time-bound project. To ensure continuity, the initiative should transition into a "Salaya Model" that is locally owned, moving beyond a reliance on national policy. Empowering the Core Working Group (CWG) to independently manage cultural assets ensures that the community retains the tools to sustain their living cultural expressions and respond to future crises through established local networks.
2. Scale cultural resilience strategies to other peri-urban landscapes: The lessons learned from Salaya provide a practical roadmap for other peri-urban areas facing similar developmental pressures. Future initiatives in different locations should prioritize understanding local power dynamics rather than waiting for national solutions that may not fit the context. By fostering intersubjective agreements at the local level, other communities can adapt conservation and deconstruction strategies to their specific local music and performing arts repositories effectively.
3. Empower local authorities to lead cultural policy independent of national mandates:

Local authorities, such as the Subdistrict Administrative Organization (SAO), should enhance their capacity to view the arts as essential cultural ecosystem services. This study suggests that local governments do not need to wait for national directives to prioritize community well-being. By integrating "aesthetic of safety" standards into local ordinances, subdistricts can take immediate action to protect their social fabric, proving that the arts are a strategic tool driven by local mandates and community-funded initiatives.

Note

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Destandardization of Art at Flash Mob Performance in Public Space:

A Case Study of Beksan Wanara from the Yogyakarta Court, Indonesia

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Abstract

Flash mob performances in Indonesia emerge in response to urban affluence. Flash mobs, as an activity, explore unconventional performance spaces. The goal of this article is not only to address previous research gaps but also to explain how flash mob art performances have challenged aesthetic standards. Information about traditional dance flash mobs is widely discussed on various social media platforms. Data were collected through an intensive literature study, including desk review and document analysis. The findings suggest that flash mob articles are successful in engaging people of all ages as participants in public space dance performances. Visually, flash mobs provide a recreational understanding to the community in public spaces. In this context, the potential of flash mob performances extends into non-art activities like marketing and specific therapies. In this regard, participant audiences are aware that they do not need special skills to join flash mob performances.

Keywords: *Destandardization, Traditional Art, Flash Mob, Performance, Public Space, Indonesia*

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Introduction

Indonesia is widely recognized as a country with exceptionally rich cultural diversity, including in the realm of dance, which has developed across regions with distinctive characteristics. Each form of traditional dance emerges from a close interrelation with the values, worldviews, and ideas of the communities that sustain it. These characteristics are reflected in modes of presentation, movement structures, aesthetic principles, and performance contexts that represent the cultural identity of each community. In contemporary developments, ethnic or traditional dances that are strongly rooted in these cultural value systems have increasingly become a source of inspiration for flash mob performances. This phenomenon indicates a process of aesthetic adaptation and transformation, in which elements of tradition are reworked into performance formats that are more popular, collective, and communicative within modern public spaces.

Traditional dance flash mob has become part of a new genre in public activities. Traditional dance flash mob has also become a tool for new artistic expression. Some flash mob activities are carried out in frequently visited public spaces such as tourist attractions, main roads, and even malls. The presence of public spaces as the target of flash mob performances actually holds a unique meaning of communal art in supporting the presence of flash mob. In fact, flash mob is no longer just a dance. Flash mob itself always begins with one person suddenly appearing in the midst of a crowd as a sign of a performance. As stated by León et. al. (2019), who argues about the impact of an activity, flash mob is always seen as the latest expression tool consisting of actions that appear spontaneous, developed by a group of people. Furthermore, flash mob has a widespread social impact thanks to mass media and social media. The end of a flash mob activity is marked by a crowd of dancers performing a dance together. The meeting of dancers with the audience reflects a release of free and spontaneous expression in the aesthetics of urban public spaces. From these facts, flash mob also carries the culture, values, and events of the present time.

Among flash mob performances rooted in traditional arts, the one that has attracted the greatest attention from researchers and art observers is *Beksan Wanara,* initiated by dancers of the Yogyakarta Court. The success of this performance in capturing public attention is closely related to the strategic selection of public spaces as performance venues. *Beksan Wanara* is a dance that represents monkeys and forms part of the *wayang wong* performance tradition of the Yogyakarta Court. *Wayang wong* itself is a form of dance drama associated with state rituals and occupies a crucial position within the royal performing arts tradition. Consequently, numerous normative conventions regulate its presentation, including costume design, performance venues, musical accompaniment, movement vocabulary, and other supporting aspects, including the presentation of *Beksan Wanara* as part of *wayang wong.* Nevertheless, artists and dancers of the Yogyakarta Court have reconfigured *Beksan Wanara,* transforming it into a flash mob dance performance format. This transformation demonstrates a shift in presentation style from one that was previously exclusive and bound by normative conventions to one that is more communal, spontaneous, and open within public spaces. Such changes indicate a shift in values that carries implications for the aesthetic destandardization of traditional dance performance.

This article aims to critically examine the phenomenon of flash mob performances that adapt traditional dance materials and gain widespread attention across various social media platforms, with particular emphasis on the case study of the *Beksan Wanara* performance packaged and popularized by dancers of the Yogyakarta Court in public spaces. The

focus of the study is directed toward how this transformation in presentation form takes place and how the shift in performance context influences the aesthetic dimensions, values, and norms previously embedded in traditional dance practices within the Yogyakarta Court. As a conceptual foundation, this research positions the work of Bagoes and Eko (2020) as an important reference that responds to the flash mob performance of Beksan Wanara by the Indonesian Air Force in Yogyakarta, particularly in highlighting the experience of dancing together within a crowd context. Building on this framework, the article develops further analysis by examining the aesthetic implications of the shift in dance presentation from a normative institutional context toward a more open and participatory performance format. Accordingly, this study assumes that flash mob practices utilizing traditional dance material have the potential to blur previously established aesthetic standards while simultaneously encouraging the destandardization of artistic values that have long served as the foundation of traditional dance presentation.

A number of studies indicate that the flash mob phenomenon has developed into an interdisciplinary research object that demonstrates its connections with various fields, ranging from physical education (Zyuz et al., 2020), ecological issues (Cissé-Depardon and Papetti, 2015), and innovations in bodily expression (Rebullido and Lameiro, 2016), to marketing strategies (Casals, 2011). This diversity of perspectives confirms that flash mob is no longer understood merely as a performative event, but rather as a contemporary cultural practice that embodies dimensions of values, social events, and present-day cultural dynamics. The use of public space as a performance stage generates significant aesthetic implications in shaping the aesthetics of everyday life beyond the established framework of performing arts (Salwa, 2019), while also emphasizing the balance between urban aesthetics and the social function of public space (García-Doménech, 2015). Within the performance context, the flash mob process from beginning to end often culminates in the formation of a dancing crowd that produces a shared experience of dancing together, as demonstrated by Christensen and Calvo-Merino (2013), and unfolds amid the everyday activities of society in public spaces (Torres and Gómez, 2017). Accordingly, flash mob can be understood as a representation of the collective dance experience of urban communities, as exemplified by the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob performance that successfully attracted widespread public attention. Nevertheless, previous studies have not comprehensively examined the aesthetic implications of transforming traditional dance material into the flash mob format. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by critically examining the potential shift in aesthetic standards and artistic values within contemporary performance practices.

This article is based on the assumption that destandardization has become a material risk for traditional dance when used in flash mob performances. Furthermore, there is an assumption that art inherently upholds aesthetic standards in performances, but with the presence of flash mob, a shift has occurred. Additionally, flash mob performances make art appear less ethical in public spaces. The character of public spaces is inclusive, where everyone is part of the space. This aligns with Mady's (2012) statement that public space is not just about the location but more about the situation for engagement. If traditional dance flash mob materials are presented in public spaces, it would be within an urban setting. Through this, flash mob performances prioritize the situation of engagement over considering the original standards of dance material for the flash mob performance itself.

In the context of destandardization, this concept refers to the phenomenon of the development of established standardized activities in society that then lose their status as standardized activities (Jager et al., 2022). The developmental events involved encompass integral aspects of socio-historical changes that prompt communities to depart from prevailing norms (Grondelaers et al., 2016). This process of destandardization can be caused by both internal and external factors. The internal process is seen as individuals' ability to calculate risks and make their own choices rather than adopting lifestyles inherited from tradition or previous generations (Muszynski, 2020). Meanwhile, the external process views destandardization as changes resulting from factors beyond the individual's internal needs and capabilities, such as the effects of labor market deregulation and economic factors. Both of these aspects indicate that destandardization is clearly socially structured and partly driven by changes in structural conditions (Jager et al., 2022).

In the context of art, destandardization refers to dynamic changes that no longer align with the original norms or aesthetics of art (Bergh and Sloboda, 2010). There are three common characteristics that define the formation of destandardization. Firstly, destandardization pertains to changes in form or appearance (Al-Betawi et al., 2020). Secondly, artistic destandardization involves a significant shift in purpose (Carr, 2015). The changes that occur are closely related to the emotions within society (Locsin et al., 2021). Thirdly, this destandardization is closely connected to the field of education related to the advancement of knowledge about art, thus undergoing various changes involving new technologies (Galustov et al., 2021). These three characteristics demonstrate that artistic destandardization is a process that generates dynamic change, presenting new challenges for an art form (Carr, 2015). Therefore, artistic destandardization becomes a phenomenon that affects all aspects of life unevenly (Jager et al., 2022).

The general understanding of flash mob is considered as the intentional or unintentional gathering of people in public spaces to perform various coordinated movements (Colomina-Molina, 2021; Maximova and Lukyanova, 2020; Pasquier et al., 2020). Public space in this context is characterized by gatherings that create a crowd, not necessarily limited to physical space (Albacan, 2014). This activity is highly popular and widely participated in by people of various age groups, especially young adults (Cuellar-Moreno et al., 2018; Guimarães, 2025). In terms of its evolution, the emergence of flash mob initially aimed to portray these gatherings as social activities entertaining the public. However, as it progressed, flash mob has been utilized more extensively as a marketing tool, for political, social, economic campaigns, and more (Chapman, 2017). In general, flash mob captures the public's enthusiasm and becomes a massive and entertaining global trend (Sykes et al., 2011).

In the modern era, flash mob address many current and globally trending issues (Albacan, 2014; Maximova and Lukyanova, 2020). Flash mob are used as a form of expression in the Eastern world to campaign for women's empowerment in India and Southeast Asia (Colomina-Molina, 2021). These social activities are carefully planned in advance, where people agree to gather at a specific location, perform certain activities, and attract the attention of others (Raykoff, 2022). This becomes a part of the activism of a movement or campaign (Aripova and Johnson, 2018). Flash mob are always seen as a contemporary expression tool consisting of actions that appear spontaneous, developed by a group of people. Flash

mob have even been used in education and have been employed on several occasions as a source for physical expression development. Furthermore, flash mob have a widespread social impact thanks to mass media and social media (León et al., 2019).

In the modern era, flash mob address many current and globally trending issues (Albacan, 2014; Maximova and Lukyanova, 2020). Flash mob are used as a form of expression in the Eastern world to campaign for women's empowerment in India and Southeast Asia (Colomina-Molina, 2021). These social activities are carefully planned in advance, where people agree to gather at a specific location, perform certain activities, and attract the attention of others (Raykoff, 2022). This becomes a part of the activism of a movement or campaign (Aripova and Johnson, 2018). Flash mob are always seen as a contemporary expression tool consisting of actions that appear spontaneous, developed by a group of people. Flash mob have even been used in education and have been employed on several occasions as a source for physical expression development. Furthermore, flash mob have a widespread social impact thanks to mass media and social media (León et al., 2019).

The functions of public spaces can be categorized into three forms. Firstly, from a sociological perspective, public spaces serve as settings for community activities or public life, such as parades, meetings, and informal gatherings (Mady, 2012). Public spaces are places for everyone to occupy without exclusion due to economic or social reasons (Cox and Guaralda, 2016). In other words, public space is not about the physical location but more about the situation for engagement (Mady, 2012). Secondly, public spaces fulfill the needs of the community. Public spaces support their needs, whether it be markets, sacred celebration sites, or local ritual locations. As centers of social, economic, and political life in cities, they play various roles in human life at physical, psychological, social, political, economic, and symbolic levels (Bonilla, 2012). Thirdly, public spaces are highly important and have a regulatory role in providing access. These public spaces are constructed through the interaction of structured social realities (Pospech, 2013). These three functions underscore the importance of public spaces for society.

Method

This study examines the phenomenon of dance gatherings in the form of flash mob performances taking place in public spaces, with a specific case study of a *Beksan Wanara* flash mob choreographed by artists and dancers from the Yogyakarta Court, Indonesia. The performance material is derived from *Beksan Wanara* within the *wayang wong* dance drama tradition, which is subsequently reconfigured and staged across diverse public spaces. The decision to limit the study to a single case is intended to produce a more focused and in-depth analysis, without diminishing the relevance of the findings to the broader discourse on the transformation of traditional dance within contemporary performance contexts.

The selection of the research object is based on three primary considerations assumed to be manifested in the chosen case study, namely the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob. First, the ethical dimension relates to the growing role of public space as a responsive, democratic, and meaningful arena for social, cultural, and recreational activities. Second, the aesthetic dimension is embedded in the use of traditional dance material within the flash mob format. Third, the sensory dimension emerges through the formation of dynamic and participatory dance gatherings. Based on this framework, the study specifically examines the risks of the destandardization of art in the use of traditional dance material in *Beksan Wanara* flash mob performances, which are assumed to occur across three dimensions: ethical risk,

when the public space employed does not represent the original stage context of the dance material; aesthetic risk, when the presentation displays only selected movement elements without the integrity of the traditional structure; and sensory risk, when the dance crowd becomes the peak of the performance experience.

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine the phenomenon of traditional dance flash mobs as a form of creative activity in urban public spaces. The research data are drawn from various digital media that extensively document and discuss Beksan Wanara flash mob performances, particularly social media platforms, online magazines, online newspapers, and YouTube channels. These sources are selected as primary data because they represent the digital traces, visual documentation, and public discourse accompanying the emergence of these performances. Data collection is conducted through an intensive literature study, carried out by means of a desk review and document study. The desk review is carried out by selecting and examining data that contain indications of ethical, aesthetic, and sensory risks in Beksan Wanara flash mob performances. Meanwhile, the documentation study focuses on identifying and categorizing visual and textual evidence that demonstrates forms of destandardization across these three dimensions. Accordingly, this method enables a systematic analysis of the transformation of traditional dance presentation within the context of flash mob performances in public spaces.

Not all YouTube channels were used as research data sources. An initial selection was conducted by choosing channels featuring Beksan Wanara flash mob content that gained wide public attention and achieved viral status, which were then analyzed in conjunction with the desk review findings from online magazines and newspapers. Prior to in-depth analysis, the data were first mapped to identify indications of destandardization across three main aspects: the ethical aspect related to the use of public space as a performance stage, the aesthetic aspect involving the reduction of traditional dance material, and the sensory aspect associated with the formation of crowds as the climax of the flash mob performance. The subsequent stage involved data display through the organization of visual data into tables and analytical narratives, which were then presented as part of the findings in this article.

Results

Flash mob performances in Indonesia have emerged as a response to the urban lifestyle. Flash mob, as an activity, always considers unconventional performance spaces. Urban environments are chosen as the venue for flash mob performances due to various reasons related to the nature of flash mob presentations. Flash mob performances consistently appeal to a wide range of audiences. Each flash mob display is marked by a crowd, and this atmosphere is often associated with mass gatherings. Flash mob involving a large number of participants become more captivating as the crowd size increases (Wahid, 2020). Initially, when flash mob first appeared in Indonesia, participants were predominantly young people (Wahid, 2021). However, over time, participants from various age groups have become increasingly involved. Flash mob are no longer just about dancing. Within flash mob, there is also culture, values, and events that reflect contemporary society. The current era of flash mob performances is often associated with specific cultural events or particular occasions.

In the community era, the age of social media, and even the era of reality shows, flash mob performances have consistently been part of specific events (Wahid, 2020). The origin

of flash mob involvement in particular events dates back to the 1990s in the Netherlands when a group called the *Zebra Pedestrian Theater* organized flash mob. Following this, a few years later, Bill Wasik, a senior editor at *Harper's Magazine,* gathered people to participate in flash mob. In May 2003, Wasik attempted to organize a flash mob in a store in Manhattan, but it was unsuccessful. In the second flash mob attempt in June 2003, Wasik changed the location to a department store called Macy's. Around one hundred people gathered, each pretending to be engaged in their own activities. They then simultaneously applauded for fifteen minutes, causing several visitors to crowd the hotel lobby and hallways and join in the dancing. One significant event in Indonesia featured a flash mob performance during the campaign of one of the gubernatorial candidates for Jakarta (Jokowi-Ahok) ("Sejarah Lahirnya Gerakan Massa Flash Mob," 2012).

The flash mob event in Indonesia that garnered the widest attention is the flash mob titled *Beksan Wanara,* initiated by the palace dancers of the Yogyakarta Court. The *Beksan Wanara* flash mob video, performed on Malioboro Street, Yogyakarta (18 June 2019), captured the attention of the general public. The video became a hot topic and briefly went viral on social media. All the dancers were young *abdi dalem Mataya* (*Mataya* palace servants), presenting a traditional monkey dance performance that engaged audience participants along Malioboro Street. The flash mob material, the monkey dance, managed to captivate the attention of audience participants from various age groups, including children, teenagers, and even parents around Malioboro Street. This event was initiated as a form of revitalizing traditional art (Setiawan, 2019; Rahman, 2019). After briefly going viral on social media by featuring the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob Dance or *Kethekan* Dance (*wanara* = *kethek* = monkey) in the Malioboro area, they performed at two tourist attractions in the city of Banjarmasin, namely the Bekantan Statue area and the Siring Menara Pandang, Banjarmasin (Diskominfotik_bjm, 2019; Zainuddin, 2019). The trigger role on Malioboro was still performed by Mohan Kalandara, also known as Momo, in the flash mob performance (Ivan, 2019). This can be observed in Figure 1, where Momo is depicted as the trigger dancer.



Figure 1. Single dancer as a trigger at the beginning of the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob on Malioboro Street. (Source: Screenshot from https://youtu.be/LAJ1sohKcfg?si=dBU5zc580J_cQHLu, 2023).



Figure 2. Trigger follower dancers in *Beksan Wanara* flash mob on Malioboro Street.
(Source: Screenshot from https://youtu.be/LAJ1sohKcfg?si=dBU5zc580J_cQHLu, 2023).



Figure 3. The audience participated as dancers in the Beksan Wanara flash mob on Malioboro Street.
(Source: Screenshot from https://youtu.be/LAJ1sohKcfg?si=dBU5zc580J_cQHLu, 2023).

From the facts of its performance, one of the successes of a flash mob show can be seen from the involvement of people of all ages becoming dancers in a crowd in public space. This moment is when the trigger dancer and participant audience of the flash mob merge into a collective dance. In Figure 1, it is a primary characteristic of a flash mob that starts with a trigger dancer. The illustration is shown in Figure 2, where the trigger dancer begins to draw their community into a small crowd. The trigger dancer actually understands public space as a non-standard stage. Similarly, participant audiences in the vicinity of public space treat it as a space for artistic expression together in the flash mob. A trigger dancer will dance as if spontaneously, eventually capturing the attention of the surrounding community to engage in a gathering (Setiawan, 2019). This atmosphere ultimately lures the public audience into the mass dance, as shown in Figure 3, where the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob performance has truly become a mass dance gathering.



Figure 4. *Beksan Wanara* or the monkey dance in wayang wong performances with a story derived from the Ramayana Epic at the Yogyakarta Court. (Source: Screenshot from https://www.youtube.com/live/I2XtQ0Scqmg?si=vlJahw-wUc3cy04 & https://youtu.be/Nyh44nrzoMU?si=LWchq3iG2ydU3Ebk, 2023).



Figure 5. The costume design of the monkeys with the characters Kapi Harima or Jaya Harima (left) and Jaya Susena (right) in the *wayang wong* performance at the Yogyakarta Court.
(Source: Downloaded from https://twitter.com/lantip/status/1148251522179842051/photo/3 & https://twitter.com/lantip/status/1148251522179842051/photo/2, 2023).

The *Beksan Wanara* flash mob with a mission to refresh traditional art truly breaks away from conventional artistic standards. *Beksan Wanara* translates to monkey dance. Traditionally, monkey dance movements are only presented in the Ramayana epic performances. Visually, the monkey dance is performed using costumes with masks to cover the dancer's face. The entire body of the dancer wears clothes, pants, and socks of the same color, symbolically representing the monkey's body (See Figure 4 and Figure 5). Some types of dance movements also represent monkey movements. The body as the dancer's expressive tool has aesthetic standards in producing monkey dance movements. The stage as a performance space is predetermined according to dance space rules. What is presented in the flash mob performance doesn't pay as much attention to the standard performance. The

visual appearance of costumes differs from traditional monkey dance attire, as it is performed using casual clothing or contemporary millennial attire.

In the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob performance, the dancers break free from the traditional artistic standards of *Beksan Wanara*, completely departing from conventions. This is also evident in the role of the trigger dancer. The presence of a real dancer as the trigger initially aimed to capture the attention and entertain the people around the public space. In Figure 6, you can see the Hotel Indonesia Roundabout in Jakarta, which was chosen as a strategic space for the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob performance. After the audience was captivated by the trigger, participants from the community approached and began imitating the dancer's movements piece by piece. The same can be observed in Figure 7, where tourist attractions in Banjarmasin were selected as strategic locations for the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob performance. Likewise, in Figure 8, Jogja City Mall, which is the largest shopping center in Yogyakarta, became the chosen target for the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob performance.



Figure 6. The *Beksan Wanara* flash mob performed at the Hotel Indonesia Roundabout in Jakarta. (Source: Screenshot from https://youtu.be/jsCrm2r_3qg?si=WSgYu7cGJ5VAD572, 2023).



Figure 7. The *Beksan Wanara* flash mob at Siring Menara Pandang Banjarmasin. (Source: Screenshot from https://youtu.be/R2T2q2FiP2A?si=oh7PA-BH-r01AOoK, 2023).



Figure 8. The *Beksan Wanara* flash mob at Jogja City Mall. (Source: Screenshot from https://youtu.be/jkbyuj4koLY?si=WeDdeqDiv38elk-p, 2023).

In the flash mob performance, several dancers, grouped together, pretended not to know each other. They entered the public space from various directions while engaging in their own activities. Suddenly, each group started dancing, following the movements of the trigger dancer and others who had danced earlier. Eventually, the participating audience in the public space formed a crowd of dancers ("Sejarah Lahirnya Gerakan Massa Flash Mob," 2012). This can also be observed in several videos uploaded on the Kraton Jogja YouTube channel with content related to the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob, accessible through the following links:

- https://youtu.be/LAJ1sohKcfg?si=dBU5zc580J_cQHLu
- https://youtu.be/jkbyuj4koLY?si=WeDdeqDiv38elk-p
- https://youtu.be/jsCrm2r_3qg?si=WSgYu7cGJ5VAD572

The presence of flash mob activities indirectly represents a new effort to redefine the communal nature of traditional dance movements in the format of a flash mob performance. The objectives of these activities can vary depending on the organizers' needs ("Pengertian Fashmob dan Contoh Penyelenggaraanya," 2022). Visually, a flash mob provides a sense of recreation for the people in the surrounding public space. There are several communication messages that can be conveyed through a flash mob. There is an element of surprise when the dancers gradually appear amidst the crowd. There is also a sense of dynamics and innovation conveyed when unusual movements emerge amidst the everyday activities of the crowd. A good flash mob should be able to create a shock effect and, if necessary, send shivers down the spines of the audience watching it (Wahid, 2020).



Figure 9. The communal nature of the flash mob with participants from various segments of society. (Source: Screenshot from https://youtu.be/jkbyuj4koLY?si=WeDdeqDiv38elk-p, 2023).



Figure 10. The audience participation of children in the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob, which is part of art communalism. (Source: Screenshot from https://youtu.be/jkbyuj4koLY?si=WeDdeqDiv38elk-p, 2023).

In Figure 9, it represents the common form of placing a flash mob performance as a situation of engagement among its participants. One characteristic of a flash mob performance's massiveness is the culmination of the performance in the form of a dance crowd. This is a common feature when the end of the crowd will disperse by itself once the peak of the dance crowd has been achieved. In this engagement situation, the dance crowd is considered successful when all layers of society, from children to the elderly, do not consider age and are in the same engagement situation (See Figure 10).

Discussion

Flash mob, as an urban activity, always selects strategic urban locations. The choice of these strategic locations is a crucial factor in the success of a flash mob performance. Hence, the audience participants are aware that they do not require any special expertise when entering a flash mob crowd. The performance pattern of the trigger role as a sign that the flash mob is about to begin is a common pattern in presenting flash mob performances. Several public spaces that become trigger targets always exhibit this pattern and are spontaneous. The trigger dancer serves as a signal that the flash mob is commencing. Its presence seems to defy the conventions of traditional dance. This is demonstrated by the choice of flash mob's traditional art spaces, which are no longer confined to traditional dance stages. Flash mob performances have created new spaces within the perform-

ing arts. From the beginning of flash mob's existence, urban public spaces have been the primary choice. For example, Wasik's experiment in 2003 aimed to demonstrate that flash mob activities in urban public spaces provide an alternative stage. Wasik's activity serves as evidence that failures can occur during flash mob performance preparations. As stated by Langenheim et. al. (2020), based on its history, the idea of public spaces emerges when we are involved in unconsolidated and unformalized urban situations. Wasik attempted to organize a flash mob performance in a store in Manhattan, but his efforts failed. In the second flash mob experiment in June 2003, Wasik changed the location to a Department Store named Macy's. Approximately one hundred people gathered, each pretending to engage in their own activities. Then, they clapped their hands simultaneously for fifteen minutes, leading some visitors to crowd the hotel lobby and corridors and join in the dance ("Sejarah Lahirnya Gerakan Massa Flash Mob," 2012). Micara's (2021) statement suggests that public spaces can also provide a solution to urban voids. This statement aims to compare Wasik's failure in a flash mob experiment in a store with his second performance in a mall with larger voids, resembling urban spaces.

Public spaces in urban areas always have central points that attract visitors. There is an element of utilizing a public space as a stage for flash mob performances. Almost every flash mob performance can be characterized by a crowd, beyond aesthetic considerations, and there is an effort to create and interpret communalism in art. The interpretation of communalism in traditional dance materials has great potential as a flash mob activity in public spaces. Thus, traditional dance flash mob performances are staged as an effort to create and interpret communalism in art. The presence of the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob performance in Yogyakarta is a phenomenon that is in line with the way of seizing opportunities to interpret communalism in art. This utilization aspect is a creative way of choosing the location for flash mob performances. Albacan (2014) stated that flash mob performances are seen as both performance and a re-emergence of creative communities. Additionally, the choice of public space is also based on the visual aesthetic representation of the public space. Mróz's (2021) statement emphasizes the importance of visual aesthetic representation in the selection of public spaces as venues for flash mob performances.

The common pattern of traditional dance flash mob performances represents a transformation of the aesthetic norms associated with traditional dance movement materials. When the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob performance is considered to have received the widest response on social media, it becomes a form of destandardization in the transformation of aesthetic norms. Traditionally, the transformation of aesthetic norms in dance has been discussed by Hastuti and Supriyanti, as well as Jazuli. Hastuti and Supriyanti's (2015) statement places aesthetic value obtained through standard transformation. Another statement also considers the position of aesthetic norms in traditional dance (Jazuli, 2015). Both of these statements demonstrate the inherent transformation of aesthetic standards with the artistic values displayed on the performance stage. The strength inherent in the transformation of aesthetic norms is achieved through the practice studio or training space. Flash mobs do not require this process and tend to disregard the patterns of studio or training practice. Flash mob activities are a visual presentation when dance is performed on the public stage. If traditional art stage spaces have binding aesthetic standards, flash mobs are not dependent on aesthetic standards.

Flash mob performances of traditional dance become attractive because the material originally has established performance stages. In flash mob performances, the choice of stages in public spaces seems to mirror the boredom of established norms. The contemporary era of a flash mob performance will be linked to specific cultural events or particular occasions. The most explicit visual representation of traditional dance art is the use of complete costumes. In the visual representation of the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob, the artistic value of the costumes has undergone destandardization. The visual presentation of the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob differs from traditional monkey dance, which uses special costumes. This flash mob dance is performed using casual attire or contemporary millennial clothing. In the context of art, destandardization refers to dynamic changes that no longer conform to the original norms or aesthetics of art (Bergh and Sloboda, 2010). This statement seems to reinforce the presence of specific characteristics in understanding destandardization. There are three common characteristics that shape its formation. First, destandardization refers to changes in form or appearance (Al-Betawi et al., 2020). Second, artistic destandardization involves a significant shift in purpose (Carr, 2015). The changes that occur are closely related to the emotions within society (Locsin et al., 2021). Third, this destandardization is closely related to education in the field of art, involving advancements in knowledge about art and the incorporation of new technologies (Galustov et al., 2021).

The discussion about the presence of traditional dance flash mob performances needs to be directed towards a creative phenomenon that utilizes public spaces as a stage. From an artistic perspective, this is an effort to argue for destandardization as a new phenomenon. In Jager et. al. (2022) statement, it is mentioned that the destandardization of art has become a phenomenon that unevenly affects all aspects of life. This statement has been supported by the responses of the participants in flash mob performances, which have been widely reported through various social media. Furthermore, Jager et. al. views the phenomenon of destandardization as a concept that refers to the development of standardized activities that were well-established in society but have lost their status as standard activities. The facts in social media news about the Beksan Wanara flash mob performance are the best examples of the shift from standardized activities on the stage to public spaces. For instance, the traditional monkey costumes with all their accessories have been replaced with sports shoes, no masks, and jeans by the participants of the *Beksan Wanara* flash mob. This appearance is very simple and departs from the original aesthetic concept. The illustrations in Figure 6, Figure 7, and Figure 8 clearly demonstrate this phenomenon. The public space in the illustration in Figure 6 is located at the Hotel Indonesia Roundabout in Jakarta, which is iconic in the city center of Jakarta. The choice of this space seems to represent the center of social, economic, and political activities. The participants' choice of an iconic public space strengthens the argument for destandardization as a new phenomenon. As mentioned by Bonilla (2012), the Hotel Indonesia Roundabout, as a center of social, economic, and political activities in urban areas, plays a role in human life on physical, psychological, social, political, economic, and symbolic levels. Therefore, it is indeed true that flash mob performances require a new direction to provide creative space without disregarding well-established standardized activities.

This research is positioned as an initial step toward a broader global discourse on the destandardization of aesthetic values in traditional dance that is repackaged through flash mob practices in public spaces. The findings remain foundational and therefore call for expanded future research to map more comprehensively the position and transformation of

flash mobs rooted in traditional dance. Future research agendas should be directed toward cross-regional and cross-cultural exploration in order to compare variations of flash mob practices across different global and regional contexts. Such studies may examine diverse uses, the digital platforms that facilitate the mobilization of participants, and the dynamics of distribution and consumption of performances in both physical public spaces and virtual environments. In addition, subsequent studies need to investigate the diversity of participants involved, including demographic differences, age groups, gender, social backgrounds, and thematic orientations such as political expression, special-interest advocacy, and responses to issues of economic inequality and poverty. Through this broader perspective, flash mobs can be understood as complex and multidimensional socio-cultural phenomena.

In this context, further research is also required to examine legal implications, cultural policies, and governance models relevant to flash mob practices derived from traditional dance. In line with Boonserm and Chandransu's (2025) view regarding the potential of public art to address social challenges, foster social healing, and contribute to cultural preservation and economic development, flash mob performances in public spaces with broad community participation present significant opportunities to strengthen both the artistic ecosystem and the creative economy. However, destandardization processes that occur without a clear policy framework risk eroding the stylistic characteristics, values, and knowledge systems embedded in traditional dance. Therefore, future research is expected to formulate conceptual models and policy frameworks capable of balancing the need for open creative space with the preservation of established artistic values and standards. In this sense, the present article serves as a foundational point for the development of a broader and more interdisciplinary research agenda on traditional dance–based flash mob practices in a global context.

Conclusion

Flash mob performances have evidently become a new trend in bridging the gap between artistic and non-artistic values. This is demonstrated by the difference in the materials used in flash mob performances compared to traditional stage settings in public spaces. Flash mobs are highly inclusive, as they blur the line between the performance area and the audience. They come together in a dance crowd without barriers. This article has illustrated that the phenomenon of traditional dance flash mob performances represents a liberation of artistic values with the choice of public spaces as their stage.

This can also be interpreted as if it were a reflection of boredom with conventionality. Flash mob performances simultaneously capture the enthusiasm of the public and become a massive and entertaining global trend. Flash mob performances take public spaces and make them accessible to everyone, regardless of economic or social reasons. This article, of course, does not provide a complete representation of the material in traditional flash mob performance art. Naturally, this article has limitations in terms of field data. This is also related to the fact that the approach of this article has not involved direct observation of the phenomena that have developed in recent years.

Therefore, a comprehensive study of flash mob is needed, examining data obtained from field studies. From the facts of traditional dance flash mob performances, a new interpretation of the urban art genre that uses traditional dance material can be seen. This is a significant contribution to the study of performing arts, especially in the field of dance and the emerging new public space stage.

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Art in Health: Angklung Musical-Based

Interventions for Older Adults in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

Arts in healthcare can support emotional, cognitive, and social well-being among older adults. Angklung, a traditional Indonesian bamboo instrument recognized by UNESCO, has potential as a culturally grounded, music-based intervention in older adult care. This systematic review, guided by the PRISMA framework, examined Angklung-based interventions for older adults in Southeast Asia. Searches were conducted in PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar, with the final search completed on 19 November 2024. English-language studies published between 2010 and 2024 were included if they focused on Angklung-based or Angklung-related interventions involving older adults and reported outcomes related to well-being, cognition, emotion, social engagement, motor function, or accessibility. A total of nine studies met the eligibility criteria. The findings suggest that Angklung-based interventions may support memory recall, emotional regulation, social interaction, motor coordination, and accessibility. Three intervention types were identified: Music Angklung, involving listening-based engagement; Activity Angklung, involving group performance; and Assistive Angklung, involving Smart Band and Internet of Things-based support. Music and Activity Angklung were mainly associated with emotional, cognitive, and social engagement, while Assistive Angklung supported participation among older adults with physical or functional limitations. However, the evidence remains preliminary due to small samples, varied study designs, inconsistent reporting, and limited long-term follow-up. Further research is needed to examine effectiveness, scalability, and integration into community-based older adult care programmes. This review contributes by positioning Angklung as a culturally relevant, non-pharmacological approach with potential application in arts-in-health and older adult care in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: *Angklung, Older Adults, Music Therapy, Arts in Health, Assistive Technology, Southeast Asia*

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Introduction

The integration of arts in healthcare has gained increasing recognition for its therapeutic, educational, and expressive benefits (Goodman & Sims, 2009). Arts-based interventions, including music therapy, have been shown to support emotional and psychological well-being, particularly among older adults (Grebe, 2019). As the global ageing population continues to rise, with 80% of older adults projected to reside in low- and middle-income countries by 2050 (World Health Organization, 2024), non-pharmacological approaches to enhance quality of life have become increasingly important. Music-based interventions can reduce fear, anxiety, and discomfort while providing participants with a sense of control, engagement, and emotional expression (El Geziry et al., 2018). Previous research further supports the relevance of music and arts-based activities for older adult well-being in Southeast Asia. Passive and active music participation has been associated with healthy ageing among older Thai adults, while arts-based interventions have also been reported to support quality of life and cognition among elderly individuals with mild cognitive impairment (Ponprasit, Tuicomepee & Wiwattanapantuwong, 2024; Sangvanich, Tawankanjanachot & Tangwongchai, 2023).

Among traditional musical instruments, Angklung is uniquely suited for older adult care because of its collaborative, accessible, and culturally familiar characteristics. Unlike many instruments that require advanced technical skill, Angklung is lightweight, easy to hold, and played through simple shaking movements, making it suitable for older adults with varying physical and cognitive abilities. Its ensemble-based structure also requires participants to play individual notes together to create a complete melody, encouraging cooperation, attention, turn-taking, memory recall, and social interaction. In this way, Angklung supports not only musical engagement but also group participation, communication, motor coordination, and emotional connection.

Angklung is also culturally meaningful in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, where community music-making and collective participation are familiar social practices. Its cultural resonance may strengthen emotional engagement and make the intervention more acceptable in elderly care contexts. Therefore, Angklung musical therapy represents a culturally significant art-based approach that may support cognitive function, emotional well-being, and social connectedness among older adults (Mohd Bakri, 2024). This study explores the potential of Angklung musical-based interventions for older adults in Southeast Asia, with emphasis on their role in supporting mental health, quality of life, and community-based care.

Literature Review

Art in Health

The field of arts in health is an expanding multidisciplinary domain that integrates various artistic expressions to enhance healthcare delivery and overall well-being (National Organization for Arts in Health, 2017). By incorporating literary, performing, visual, and design arts into therapeutic and educational settings, these interventions promote stress reduction, emotional resilience, and mental health support (Goodman & Sims, 2009).

Among these interventions, music, art, and dance therapies have proven particularly effective in alleviating pain, anxiety, and depression, especially among elderly populations (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Non-pharmacological approaches, such as music therapy, empower patients by providing emotional relief and a sense of control over their well-being (El Geziry et al., 2018; University of Michigan Injury Prevention Center, 2023).

Traditional musical art forms, such as Angklung, a bamboo musical instrument from Indonesia, have shown promising potential in elderly care. Research suggests that Angklung-based interventions foster cognitive function, emotional regulation, and social connectedness through group music-making (Raglio et al., 2015). While research on Angklung therapy remains limited, existing studies on collective musical engagement underscore its benefits for aging individuals, reinforcing its role as a valuable non-pharmacological tool for enhancing well-being and social inclusion.

Music Therapy

Music therapy is a critical component of arts-based interventions in healthcare, offering a non-pharmacological approach to enhancing emotional and psychological well-being. As a recognized form of therapy, music engages patients in both active and passive participation, contributing to cognitive function improvement, anxiety reduction, and social interaction enhancement (González-Ojea et al., 2022).

Research indicates that music therapy provides significant benefits for elderly populations, particularly those in institutionalized care settings. It has been shown to alleviate depressive symptoms and encourage creative expression through structured musical activities such as singing, rhythmic exercises, and instrumental play. These interventions play a crucial role in maintaining daily life functions, reinforcing independence, emotional stability, and overall well-being (World Health Organization, 2023).

Studies further highlight that music therapy facilitates emotional regulation and helps alleviate feelings of loneliness, particularly among individuals with cognitive impairments such as dementia (Chu et al., 2014). Given its ability to enhance quality of life, music therapy stands as a viable alternative to conventional treatments, promoting holistic and patient-centered care (Mohd Bakri & Sabran, 2022).

Aging

Aging is a global phenomenon that poses significant challenges to healthcare and social systems worldwide. By 2050, an estimated 80% of older adults will reside in low- and middle-income countries, as the global aging population continues to expand rapidly. In 2020, the number of individuals aged 60 and older exceeded that of children under five years old, with projections indicating that by 2050, the over 60 population will nearly double, increasing from 12% to 22% (World Health Organization, 2024).

Aging also significantly increases the prevalence of dementia, which is the seventh leading cause of death globally. Alzheimer's disease accounts for 60–70% of dementia cases, affecting over 55 million people worldwide, with the majority residing in low- and middle-income countries. As global life expectancy rises, the number of dementia cases is expected to escalate further (World Health Organization, 2023).

Women are disproportionately affected by dementia, both as patients and caregivers, providing nearly 70% of global dementia care hours. Additionally, approximately 15% of the world's population over 1 billion individuals live with disabilities, with older adults being particularly vulnerable to age related impairments that compromise independence and quality of life (United Nations, 2023).

Angklung

Angklung is a traditional bamboo idiophone consisting of two to four tubes bound with rattan. It is primarily crafted from Gigantochloa atroviolacea Widjaja (black bamboo) due to its durability and acoustic resonance (Mohd Bakri, Surip, & Sabran, 2021). Originally used in agricultural rituals and theatrical performances, Angklung has evolved into a medium for visual art appreciation, entertainment, and modern musical expression (Masunah, 1999). On January 18, 2011, UNESCO officially recognized Angklung as part of Indonesia Intangible Cultural Heritage, reinforcing its status as a cultural symbol and artistic heritage (Rosyadi, 2012). In adapting Angklung for therapeutic and elderly care contexts across Southeast Asia, cultural sensitivity is important to ensure that the instrument is not treated merely as a clinical tool, but as a living heritage practice. This includes respecting its Indonesian cultural origins, acknowledging local performance traditions, using culturally appropriate songs and facilitation methods, and adapting activities in ways that preserve the instrument's communal, collaborative, and heritage-based values.

As a percussive instrument, Angklung produces sound when shaken and is traditionally performed in ensemble settings, requiring multiple players to generate harmonized melodies, although solo performances are also possible (Wahono, 2010; Zainal et al., 2009). Beyond its artistic and cultural significance, Angklung has gained increasing recognition in education, therapy, and assistive interventions, expanding its role into cognitive, social, and rehabilitative domains.

The implementation of Angklung therapy varies depending on the setting. Trained music therapists provide structured interventions for cognitive and psychological support Ariani (2012), while community musicians and volunteers, such as those in the Angklung Community of Senang Barokah Sesama (SBS), facilitate cultural and social engagement programs (Prajogi & Daryanto, 2024). Additionally, educators and caregivers incorporate Angklung into interactive learning and therapeutic activities, although not all possess formal music therapy qualifications (Maramis et al., 2021).

Research Questions

This study aims to explore the role of Angklung musical-based interventions in elderly well-being. The following research questions guide this investigation:

1. What are the cognitive, emotional, and social benefits of Angklung musical based interventions for elderly individuals in Southeast Asia?
2. How do Music Angklung, Activity Angklung, and Assistive Angklung differ in their effectiveness as non-pharmacological interventions for elderly well-being?
3. What are the roles of trained music therapists, community musicians, and caregivers in delivering Angklung musical-based interventions for the elderly?

Methodology

Systematic literature reviews provide a structured approach for synthesizing existing knowledge, identifying research gaps, and informing future research directions (Paul & Barari, 2022). Following a scientific, reproducible, and transparent method (Tranfield et al., 2003), systematic literature reviews (SLRs) have become increasingly common across disciplines (Ghorbani et al., 2022). SLRs can summarize state-of-the-art findings, identify

research gaps, and suggest future research directions (Moher et al., 2009). They may also be organized according to domain, theory, or method, depending on the purpose of the review (Paul & Criado, 2020).

Systematic reviews offer several advantages over traditional literature reviews because they use clear search strategies, predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and transparent selection procedures. These features help reduce research bias and improve the reliability of the findings (Mallett et al., 2012). Although global systematic reviews of arts-based interventions and ageing have been conducted, studies focusing specifically on Angklung as an art-based or music-based intervention for older adults remain limited. Therefore, this review examines how Angklung has been used in older adult care and synthesises available evidence on its cognitive, emotional, social, motor, and accessibility-related outcomes. The review also aims to clarify the scope of Angklung-based interventions in Southeast Asia and identify areas requiring further empirical research.

This study focuses on Angklung musical-based interventions for older adults. The methodology section explains the PRISMA framework, search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, article selection process, and data abstraction and analysis procedures used in this review. The review was designed to address the research questions by identifying, selecting, and synthesizing relevant studies on Music Angklung, Activity Angklung, and Assistive Technology Angklung interventions.

PRISMA

PRISMA, which stands for Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses, is a widely recognized framework for conducting and reporting systematic reviews. The purpose of PRISMA is to support transparent, complete, and rigorous reporting of the review process (Moher et al., 2009). In this study, the PRISMA framework was used to guide the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion of studies related to Angklung musical-based interventions for older adults. The framework helped ensure that the search and selection process was systematic, traceable, and aligned with the objectives of the review.

Resources

The search strategy was informed by previous literature and developed to identify studies on Angklung musical-based interventions for older adults. The search focused on Angklung as an art-based, music-based, activity-based, and assistive technology-supported intervention. Three databases were used: Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar. As no single database provides complete coverage of all relevant literature, the use of multiple sources increased the likelihood of identifying suitable studies (Younger, 2010). Additional manual checks of relevant papers and reference lists were also conducted to identify related studies.

The Systematic Review Process for Selecting the Articles

Identification

The systematic review process involved three main stages: identification, screening, and eligibility assessment. In the identification stage, keywords related to Angklung, older adults, music therapy, music-based intervention, well-being, health, assistive technology,

and Southeast Asia were identified. These keywords were combined using Boolean operators and applied in Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar. The final search was conducted on 19 November 2024 (see figure 1). The search produced 163 records in total.

Screening

The screening stage involved removing duplicate records and applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria. A total of 10 duplicate records were removed. The remaining records were screened according to publication timeline, document type, language, study focus, and relevance to Angklung-based interventions for older adults. Studies were included if they were published between 2010 and 2024, written in English, and focused on Angklung musical-based interventions, Angklung-related activities, or Angklung-supported assistive technology involving older adults. Studies were excluded if they were conference proceedings, book chapters, books, non-English publications, or did not focus on Angklung-based interventions for older adults. After screening, records that did not meet these criteria were excluded from further assessment.

Eligibility

During the eligibility stage, the titles, abstracts, and full texts of potentially relevant studies were reviewed to determine whether they met the inclusion criteria. Studies were assessed for relevance to the review objectives, intervention type, participant group, and reported outcomes. After eligibility assessment, nine studies were included in the final review. These studies were then grouped into three categories: Music Angklung, Activity Angklung, and Assistive Technology Angklung. The article selection process followed the PRISMA framework, beginning with database identification, duplicate removal, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion. The complete selection process is shown in Figure 3.

Database	Search string strategy Boolean operators	No. Articles
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Angklung") AND ("Elderly" OR "Senior Citizen") AND ("Music Therapy" OR "Musical-Based Intervention") AND ("Health" OR "Well-being") AND ("Southeast Asia") AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English"))	7
PubMed	(("Angklung"[Title/Abstract]) AND ("Elderly"[MeSH Terms] OR "Older Adults"[Title/Abstract] OR "Senior Citizens"[Title/Abstract])) AND ("Music Therapy"[MeSH Terms] OR "Musical-Based Intervention"[Title/Abstract]) AND ("Health"[MeSH Terms] OR "Well-being"[Title/Abstract]) AND ("Southeast Asia"[MeSH Terms] OR "Indonesia"[Title/Abstract] OR "Malaysia"[Title/Abstract] OR "Thailand"[Title/Abstract]) AND (english[Filter]) from 2010/1/1 - 2024/11/19	100
Google scholar	"Angklung" AND ("Elderly" OR "Older Adults" OR "Senior Citizens") AND ("Music Therapy" OR "Musical-Based Intervention" OR "Music Intervention") AND ("Health" OR "Well-being" OR "Cognitive Function") AND ("Southeast Asia" OR "Indonesia" OR "Malaysia" OR "Thailand"), English, from 2010/1/1 - 2024/11/19	56
Scopus, PubMed & Google scholar	Total databases	163

Figure 2. Table of search strings and number of records identified from Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication timeline	2010-2024	2010 and before
Document type	Article (with empirical data), thesis and review	Conference proceeding, chapters in book, book series, books etc
Language	English	Non-English
Nature of the study	Focus on methodology	Not focus on methodology

Figure 2. Table of inclusion and exclusion criteria used for article screening.

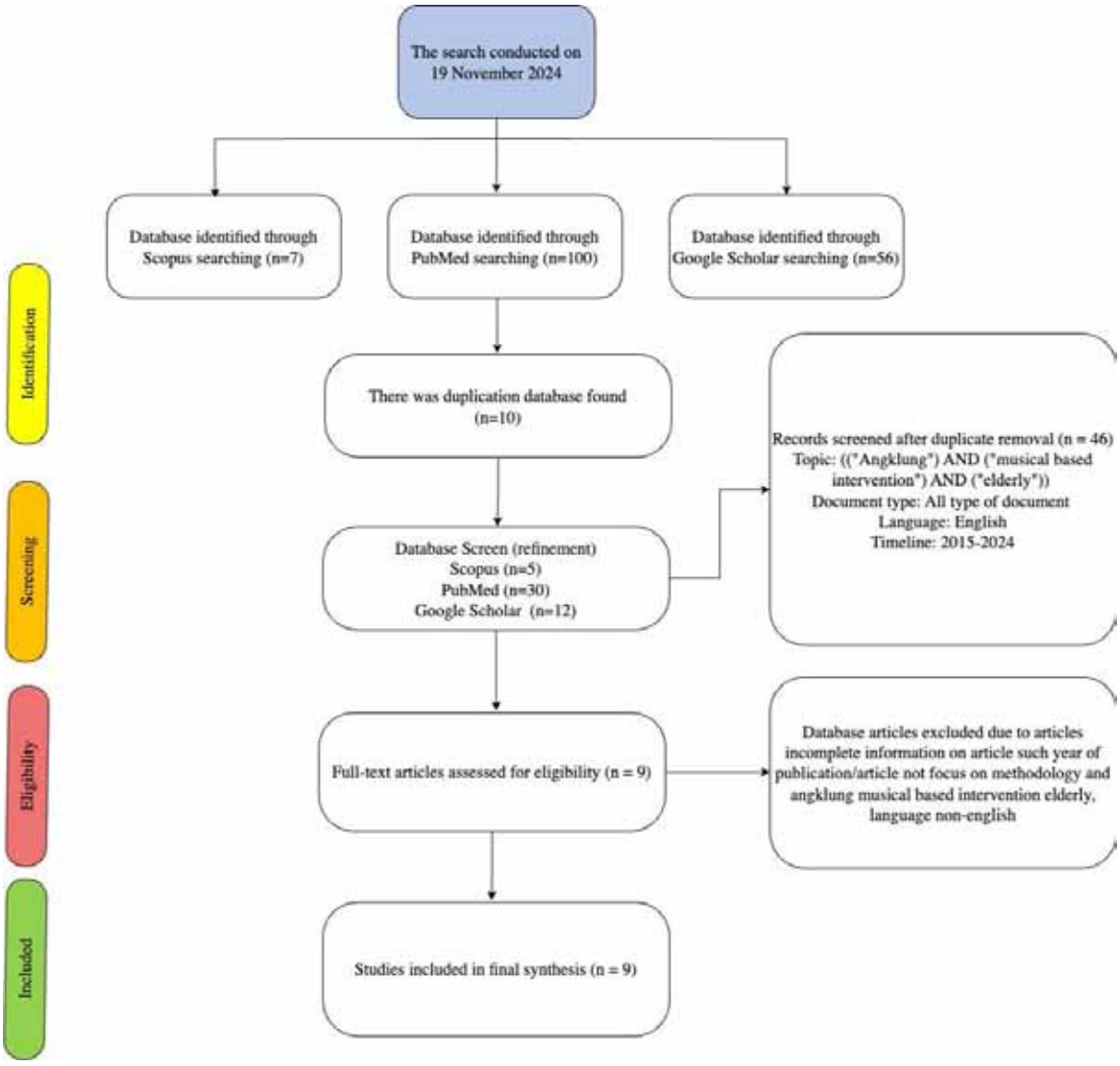


Figure 3. PRISMA flow diagram showing the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion of studies.

Data Abstraction and Analysis

This study employed an integrative review approach to analyze evidence from qualitative, quantitative, mixed-method, and technology-based studies. An integrative review is appropriate because it allows findings from different research designs to be compared, categorized, and synthesized within a single review framework (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). In this review, nine eligible studies were examined in detail to extract information relevant to the research questions. The extracted data included study characteristics, country of origin, participant profile, intervention type, provider roles, methods, reported outcomes, and key findings. The studies were then coded and grouped into three intervention categories: Music Angklung, Activity Angklung, and Assistive Technology Angklung. The analysis focused on identifying patterns across the studies, particularly in relation to cognitive, emotional, social, motor, and accessibility-related outcomes. Notes were also maintained during the analysis process to record emerging themes, methodological differences, limitations, and implications for future research. This process enabled the review to distinguish between empirical findings, conceptual interpretations, and future directions for Angklung musical-based interventions among older adults in Southeast Asia.

Study & Country	Participants	Aim	Intervention / Method	Provider Roles	Findings
Music Angklung					
Komariyah (2016) *Indonesia*	15 older adult women aged 60–90 years	To examine the effect of Angklung music on quality of life among older adult women in nursing homes.	Experimental pre-test and post-test design using Angklung music as the intervention.	Facilitated by music therapists and community volunteers.	Angklung music was reported to improve physical, psychological, social, and environmental domains of quality of life.
Tallutondok (2019) *Indonesia*	22 older adults aged 60 years and above	To explore reminiscence-based memory screening through childhood-related activities, including music.	Mental activation using Angklung music and music listening.	Delivered by caregivers and community musicians.	Participants showed satisfaction and enthusiasm. Music-based reminiscence activities supported memory recall.

Figure 4. Selected literature matrix of music-based Angklung interventions for older adults. Note: Music Angklung refers to Angklung-based interventions that primarily use listening, sound exposure, or music-based reminiscence rather than active group performance. This category emphasizes emotional stimulation, relaxation, memory recall, and quality-of-life support through familiar Angklung sounds and music-related engagement.

Study & Country	Participants	Aim	Intervention / Method	Provider Roles	Findings
Activity Angklung					
Putri (2017) *Indonesia*	30 older adult women aged 60–90 years	To compare the effects of brain movement exercises and Angklung music therapy on quality of life among older adult women.	Experimental pre-test and post-test design using Angklung music practice as one of the interventions.	Conducted by therapists and caregivers in older adult care homes..	Both interventions had positive effects on selected quality-of-life domains, with Angklung music showing benefits in emotional and social aspects.
Wattanasoei (2016) *Thailand*	118 older adults	To evaluate the impact of an Angklung-based intervention on older adults' well-being.	Angklung-based music activities designed for social and cognitive engagement.	Implemented by community musicians and caregivers.	Angklung activities supported quality of life, promoted social interaction, and showed potential as a low-cost non-pharmacological intervention.
Fitria et al. (2022) *Indonesia*	41 older adults	To identify factors associated with depression among nursing home residents.	Cross-sectional study involving various social and activity-based interventions, including Angklung.	Conducted under the supervision of nursing home caregivers.	No direct correlation was found between Angklung participation and depression reduction, but social activities were reported to support overall well-being.
Mohd Bakri et al. (2024) *Malaysia*	11 older adults	To examine the role of Angklung as an art-based intervention for older adult well-being.	Qualitative study using literature review, expert interviews, and participatory observation.	Facilitated by music therapists, caregivers, and community volunteers.	Angklung was reported to support quality of life in physical, psychological, independence, social interaction, and environmental domains.

Figure 5. Selected literature matrix of activity-based Angklung interventions for older adults. Note: Activity Angklung refers to active, group-based Angklung participation in which older adults play the instrument together rather than only listening to music. This category emphasizes collaborative music-making, rhythmic movement, turn-taking, memory recall, motor coordination, and social interaction. In this review, Activity Angklung includes interventions delivered in older adult care homes, community settings, and culturally based group activities.

Study & Country	Participants	Aim	Intervention / Method	Provider Roles	Findings
Assistive Technology Angklung					
Phoasavadi (2022) *Thailand*	30 older adult women aged 60–84 years	To develop a user-friendly device to support Angklung-based music activities for older adults in foster homes.	Integration of Smart Band devices into Angklung group sessions to assist rhythm and timing.	Supervised by therapists and technology developers.	Smart Band-assisted Angklung playing was reported to support motor and cognitive functions, including concentration during music-based tasks.
Hiranpanthaporn et al. (2022) *Thailand*	Older adults elderly care facility	To introduce an IoT-based system for Angklung music activities to support older adult well-being.	Development and implementation of an IoT-supported Angklung system.	Managed by caregivers and community trainers.	The Smart Band system supported participation, interaction, and accuracy in Angklung music activities.
Cooharojananone et al. (2022) *Thailand*	Older adults in nursing homes	To evaluate an IoT-based system that supports Angklung music activities for older adult engagement.	Development and implementation of an IoT-supported Angklung system.	Facilitated by technology developers and nursing home caregivers.	The Smart Band system supported participation, interaction, and accuracy in Angklung music activities among older adults.

Figure 6. Selected literature matrix of assistive technology-based Angklung interventions for older adults. Note: Assistive Technology Angklung refers to Angklung interventions supported by Smart Band or Internet of Things (IoT) systems to improve rhythm, coordination, accessibility, and participation among older adults. IoT refers to connected digital devices or sensors used to support interactive music activities.

Results

This study focuses on the analysis of musical-based interventions using the Angklung musical instrument for elderly individuals. The findings demonstrate that Angklung-based interventions significantly contribute to cognitive, emotional, social, and motor function improvements among the elderly. These studies primarily originate from Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia, highlighting the cultural and therapeutic relevance of Angklung.

Publication Trends

The publication timeline reveals a growing research focus on Angklung musical-based interventions for elderly well-being, with studies expanding across Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia. Mohd Bakri et al. (2024) highlight Angklung's potential beyond its traditional settings, reinforcing its role in non-pharmacological elderly care. Earlier works, including Komariyah (2016) and Wattanasoei (2016), demonstrated Angklung effectiveness in mu-

sic therapy, enhancing emotional well-being and social interaction. Putri (2017) and Tallutondok (2019) explored its role in cognitive stimulation and reminiscence therapy. Fitria et al. (2022) found that Angklung participation contributed to emotional health in elderly individuals with depression. Recent advancements in assistive technology, particularly by Phoasavadi (2022), Hiranpanthaporn et al. (2022), and Cooharojananone et al. (2022), integrate Smart Band and IoT applications to enhance participation, cognitive function, and motor coordination. These studies collectively indicate that Angklung is evolving from a cultural and musical tradition into a structured intervention for elderly cognitive, emotional, and social well-being, with increasing cross-cultural adoption and technological innovation expanding its applications in elderly care.

Angklung Musical-Based Interventions for the Elderly

The reviewed studies categorize Angklung musical-based interventions into three primary approaches: Music Angklung, Activity Angklung, and Assistive Technology Angklung.

Music Angklung Intervention

Music Angklung is widely used as a therapeutic tool for the elderly due to its lightweight nature, unique timbre, and capacity to enhance cognitive and emotional well-being. The studies reviewed suggest that Angklung music therapy contributes significantly to reducing stress, enhancing memory recall, and improving social engagement among elderly individuals.

- Komariyah (2016) examined the effects of Angklung music therapy on elderly quality of life in a 4-week intervention with 15 participants (aged 60-90 years) in a nursing home setting. The results showed notable improvements in physical, psychological, social, and environmental well-being.

- Tallutondok (2019) investigated reminiscence screening through Mental Activation interventions involving Angklung music in a homecare center. The study found that elderly participants exhibited heightened enthusiasm and engagement in memory recall activities.

Activity Angklung Intervention

Activity Angklung incorporates group-based music playing as an interactive method to enhance motor skills, cognition, and social engagement. These interventions often involve structured sessions that encourage elderly individuals to engage actively in music performance, thereby strengthening their motor coordination, memory, and emotional well-being.

- Putri (2017) conducted a comparative study on Angklung Music Practice versus Brain Training Exercises, involving 30 elderly individuals (60-90 years old). The findings confirmed that Angklung music significantly enhanced cognitive and emotional well-being.

- Wattanasoei (2016) assessed the impact of Angklung interventions in Thailand among 118 elderly participants, using a quasi-experimental WHOQOL-OLD framework. The study validated that music-based activities promoted social interaction and improved elderly quality of life.

- Fitria et al. (2022) conducted a cross-sectional study on the determinants of depression among elderly individuals in nursing homes. While no direct correlation was found between Angklung participation and depression reduction, the study suggested that social activities, including Angklung, contributed positively to overall well-being.

- Mohd Bakri et al. (2024) examined the role of Angklung as an art-based intervention in Malaysia, using qualitative methods, expert interviews, and participatory observation. Their study found that Angklung interventions improved physical, psychological, and social well-being, fostering independence among elderly participants.

Assistive Technology Angklung Intervention

Recent advancements have integrated technology with Angklung interventions, expanding accessibility for elderly individuals with motor and cognitive impairments. The integration of assistive devices, such as wearable technology, into Angklung-based therapy demonstrates the growing potential for digital tools to support music interventions for aging populations.

- Phoasavadi (2022) introduced a Smart Band device for Angklung group activities, assessing motor and cognitive skill development in 30 elderly women.

- Hiranpanthaporn et al. (2022) and Cooharojananone et al. (2022) developed IoT-supported Angklung systems, which enhanced participation and coordination among elderly individuals.

Angklung musical-based interventions provide a holistic, non-pharmacological approach to elderly well-being by integrating cultural, musical, and therapeutic elements. Beyond its traditional role, Angklung has been shown to enhance cognitive function, emotional resilience, and social engagement, making it an effective tool in reminiscence and cognitive therapy. The involvement of community musicians and caregivers highlights its accessibility beyond clinical settings, positioning it as a cost-effective intervention for elderly care. Cross-cultural adoption in Malaysia and Thailand demonstrates its adaptability in diverse healthcare environments, while advancements in technology, such as Smart Band and IoT integration, suggest promising applications in digital music therapy. These insights underscore the versatility of Angklung in aging care, emphasizing the need for further research on its scalability, long-term impacts, and integration into modern therapeutic techniques to maximize its benefits for elderly populations worldwide.

Discussion

This study explores the cognitive, emotional, and social benefits of Angklung musical-based interventions for older adults in Southeast Asia. Findings from the selected studies highlight the potential of Music Angklung, Activity Angklung, and Assistive Angklung as non-pharmacological interventions for older adult well-being. Additionally, the role of trained music therapists, community musicians, and caregivers in delivering these interventions is examined to understand their contributions to older adult care. To strengthen analytical clarity, this discussion distinguishes between empirical findings reported in the reviewed studies, conceptual interpretations of why Angklung may be suitable for older adult care, and future implications for research and practice. However, the findings should

be interpreted cautiously because the included studies vary in sample size, study design, intervention type, outcome measurement, and regional coverage.

Cognitive, Emotional, and Social Benefits of Angklung-Based Interventions

Angklung-based interventions may offer cognitive, emotional, and social benefits for older adults. Empirically, the reviewed studies associate Angklung engagement with memory recall, concentration, and mental activation, particularly in studies involving reminiscence activities, structured music participation, and cognitive screening. Studies using WHOQOL-BREF and MMSE assessments (Komariyah, 2016; Putri, 2017; Wattanasoei, 2016) indicate that Angklung interventions may stimulate cognitive function, supporting their potential use in reminiscence therapy and mental activation exercises. Conceptually, these outcomes may be linked to the rhythmic, repetitive, and participatory nature of Angklung playing, which can support attention, cue-based memory recall, and coordinated responses. Nevertheless, these findings should not be interpreted as definitive evidence of cognitive improvement because the reviewed studies used different research designs, sample sizes, intervention durations, and assessment tools.

Emotionally, Fitria et al. (2022) highlighted the positive impact of Angklung-related social activities on emotional well-being. Angklung music provides sensory and rhythmic stimulation, contributing to emotional resilience and psychological well-being. From a conceptual perspective, familiar sound, rhythm, and collective participation may create emotionally meaningful experiences that support enjoyment, relaxation, and a sense of belonging among older adults. However, emotional outcomes were not measured consistently across the reviewed studies. Some studies focused on quality of life, while others discussed satisfaction, enthusiasm, depression, or general engagement. This variation limits direct comparison and suggests that the emotional benefits of Angklung should be understood as promising but still preliminary.

Socially, Angklung fosters interpersonal engagement and social inclusion. Angklung sessions require collaborative music-making, encouraging participants to coordinate, communicate, and interact within a group setting. Wattanasoei (2016) found that group-based Angklung activities significantly improved social engagement, strengthening community bonds among older adult participants. This collaborative nature is one of Angklung's key strengths compared with many individual musical activities, as each participant contributes to a shared melody. Conceptually, the ensemble format transforms individual participation into a shared musical task, supporting turn-taking, listening, cooperation, and mutual dependence. Even so, the regional evidence base remains limited, with studies concentrated mainly in Indonesia and Thailand, and fewer studies from Malaysia or other Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, wider regional studies are needed before the findings can be generalized across Southeast Asia.

Effectiveness Among Music Angklung, Activity Angklung, and Assistive Angklung

The studies reviewed classify Angklung musical-based interventions into three approaches; Music Angklung, Activity Angklung, and Assistive Angklung, each offering distinct benefits. However, the current evidence does not yet allow strong conclusions about which approach is most effective because the studies differ in design, participant characteristics, outcome measures, and intervention delivery.

- Music Angklung focuses on listening to Angklung music and its effects on cognitive function and emotional well-being. Komariyah (2016) and Tallutondok (2019) demonstrated that listening to Angklung music aids reminiscence, reduces loneliness, and promotes relaxation. However, passive engagement may not provide the same level of cognitive and motor stimulation as interactive Angklung activities. Future studies should compare passive listening with active Angklung participation using standardised cognitive, emotional, and quality-of-life measures.

- Activity Angklung emphasizes group-based music playing, which integrates motor coordination, cognitive engagement, and social interaction. Putri (2017) found that participatory Angklung sessions significantly enhanced motor skills, memory function, and social connectedness. These findings indicate that active engagement in Angklung playing may offer stronger cognitive, motor, and social benefits than passive listening. Conceptually, this may be because Activity Angklung requires coordinated shaking movements, attention to timing, response to musical cues, and interaction with other players. However, the sample sizes remain relatively small and intervention procedures are not always reported in detail, including session length, frequency, facilitator training, and follow-up assessment.

- Assistive Angklung incorporates technology to facilitate Angklung participation among older adults with motor or cognitive impairments. Phoasavadi (2022), Hiranpanthaporn et al. (2022), and Cooharojananone et al. (2022) demonstrated that IoT-based and Smart Band-assisted Angklung interventions improved coordination, accuracy, and cognitive response times among older adult participants. These studies suggest that technological integration can enhance accessibility and effectiveness, particularly for older adults with limited mobility or declining cognitive functions. Nevertheless, these studies are more focused on technological development, usability, and participation accuracy than on long-term clinical or psychosocial outcomes. Further research is needed to determine whether Assistive Angklung produces sustained benefits in cognition, emotion, motor function, and quality of life.

Roles of Trained Music Therapists, Community Musicians, and Caregivers in Angklung Interventions

The effectiveness of Angklung musical-based interventions is influenced by who delivers the therapy. The selected studies highlight three main categories of facilitators: trained music therapists, community musicians, and caregivers or volunteers. This diversity reflects the accessibility of Angklung, but it also creates methodological differences in intervention quality and delivery.

- Trained Music Therapists: Studies such as Komariyah (2016) found that Angklung therapy delivered by trained music therapists in nursing homes led to significant improvements in emotional and cognitive well-being. This suggests that formal training in music therapy enhances the structure and effectiveness of Angklung interventions. However, not all studies clearly reported facilitator qualifications, therapeutic protocols, or fidelity monitoring, making it difficult to assess how facilitator expertise influenced outcomes.

- Community Musicians: Several studies (Wattanasoei, 2016) show that Angklung interventions are often led by community musicians. This reflects the accessibility and cultural adaptability of Angklung-based therapy, allowing local communities to integrate music interventions into older adult care without requiring formal therapeutic certification. However, future studies should clarify how community musicians are trained, supervised, and guided to ensure participant safety and consistency of delivery.

- Caregivers and Volunteers: In settings such as older adult care homes and community centers, Angklung sessions are frequently facilitated by caregivers and volunteers (Fitria et al., 2022; Putri, 2017). While they may lack formal music therapy training, their role in delivering structured Angklung activities contributes to maintaining engagement and social interaction among older adult participants. Clear manuals, simple training modules, and fidelity checklists would strengthen the reliability of caregiver-led Angklung interventions.

Angklung musical-based interventions offer promising but still preliminary cognitive, emotional, and social benefits for older adults in Southeast Asia. Music Angklung aids reminiscence therapy and emotional well-being, Activity Angklung enhances motor coordination and social interaction, while Assistive Angklung integrates technology to improve accessibility for those with impairments. Taken together, the empirical evidence suggests potential benefits, the conceptual interpretation highlights Angklung's collaborative, rhythmic, accessible, and culturally familiar qualities, and the future implications point toward the need for stronger research designs and community-based implementation models. The role of trained music therapists, community musicians, and caregivers varies across interventions, highlighting both professional and community-driven approaches to implementing Angklung-based therapy. However, the current evidence base remains limited by small sample sizes, varied study designs, inconsistent outcome measures, limited follow-up, and uneven regional representation. These limitations suggest that the findings should be treated as preliminary rather than conclusive. Future research should explore scalability, long-term effectiveness, and personalized intervention models, ensuring that Angklung therapy remains an inclusive, culturally relevant, and sustainable intervention for older adult care.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article highlights the potential of Angklung musical-based interventions in enhancing older adults' well-being across cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. The findings suggest that Music Angklung may support memory recall and emotional regulation, Activity Angklung may enhance motor coordination and social engagement, and Assistive Angklung may improve accessibility through technology integration. The studies reviewed from Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia underscore the cross-cultural adaptability of Angklung therapy in Southeast Asia, while the involvement of trained music therapists, community musicians, caregivers, and volunteers plays an important role in delivering these interventions. For practical integration, healthcare providers in Southeast Asia could introduce Angklung-based activities into community-based older adult care programmes, day-care centres, nursing homes, and community centres through short group sessions led by trained facilitators, community musicians, caregivers, or volunteers, with support from healthcare professionals where available. Music Angklung can be used for listening, relaxation, and reminiscence activities; Activity Angklung can support group

participation, rhythm exercises, social interaction, and light motor coordination; while Assistive Angklung can be introduced for older adults with mobility or cognitive limitations through Smart Band or IoT-supported systems. To ensure safe and consistent delivery, community centres should provide simple facilitator training, culturally appropriate song selection, clear session guidelines, and basic monitoring of participation, comfort, and well-being outcomes. However, despite these promising outcomes, gaps remain in research on long-term impact, scalability, and the development of assistive technologies for older adults with physical and cognitive limitations. Given UNESCO recognition of Angklung as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, integrating it into older adult care provides a unique opportunity to preserve cultural traditions while improving quality of life. Future research should focus on expanding its application across Southeast Asian community care settings, optimizing intervention strategies, and ensuring inclusivity in therapeutic approaches for ageing populations. Such efforts can help position Angklung not only as a traditional musical instrument, but also as a culturally grounded, accessible, and community-based resource for promoting healthy ageing in Southeast Asia.

Ethical Considerations

This systematic review was based solely on previously published sources and did not involve direct human participation, interviews, experiments, or new data collection. Therefore, formal human-subject ethics approval was not required. All included studies were reviewed using publicly available academic information, and all sources were appropriately cited.

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Analyzing the Transformation of Urban Open Spaces *in the Historical Process with Cultural Codes: The Case of Konya Kültürpark*

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Abstract

Urban spaces undergo significant physical and social transformations in response to changes in socio-cultural structures. In this process, the functions and meanings of public space are redefined. Urban open spaces, as key components of public space, provide important insights into social structure and cultural dynamics. This study examines Konya Kültürpark, located near the historical city center, through three main periods: pre-Republican, Republican, and post-Republican. The transformation of Kültürpark as an urban open space was analyzed through a literature review and interpreted using cultural codes. Cultural function diagrams were produced to represent spatial use, and a comparative analysis was conducted across the identified periods. The findings indicate that both the boundaries and functional structure of Kültürpark have evolved in parallel with socio-cultural changes. While some functions disappeared over time, others were transformed or sustained. The study demonstrates that urban open spaces can be interpreted as dynamic environments shaped by the interaction between spatial transformation and socio-cultural change.

Keywords: *Urban Open Space, Kültürpark, Cultural Codes, Transformation, Public Space, Historicity*

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Introduction

Cities have important roles in shaping social life. Streets, urban open spaces and squares, as components of public space, are the areas where citizens come together and express themselves (Erdönmez and Akı, 2005). Public space is a "place" where social events take place (Akyol et al., 2017). Each "place" has a unique character and "spirit of place" (Norberg-Schulz, 1979). Public spaces are an important factor in the formation of a socio-cultural structure that people can easily use and relate to their environment (Akyol et al., 2017). Good planning of public spaces greatly affects the socio-cultural structure and economy of the city (Giddings et al., 2011). When well designed, urban open spaces, including parks and squares, provide social, economic and environmental value to the city and its people, determining their quality of life (Beck, 2009, 240–248). Moreover, the planning of such spaces requires an understanding of cultural context and user interaction, as highlighted in cultural planning approaches applied in urban parks, where spatial organization is shaped by social practices and cultural dynamics (Nilipour, 2023). In this context, there is a need for well-designed public spaces where the urban community can interact with each other (Mattson, 1999). Urban green areas, which function as recreational public spaces, have been developed to counterbalance rapid urbanization and to support social interaction (Tekeli, 1981). In these spaces, users actively participate through movement, interaction and everyday practices, transforming them into lived public spaces (Gehl, 1987). This transformation is closely related to how public spaces are socially used and consumed, varying across different user groups and socio-economic contexts (Rabiei et al., 2021).

Public spaces and society are transformed over time according to the cultural and social structure in which they exist. Cultural values are affected by changes in social needs and political conditions, and spaces adapt to the era they are in (Bal et al., 2022). Public spaces that have cultural value in the historical process have symbolic elements to emphasize the historicity of the space. In public spaces, a layer of information is formed by the combination of symbols, signs and traditions. While symbols express intangible assets such as ideas, feelings and memories, they are also transmitted as material features such as buildings, sculptures and monuments (Monnet, 2011). Studies on urban regeneration emphasize that collective memory plays a crucial role in maintaining the continuity of place identity while guiding spatial transformation processes (HaghighatBin et al., 2024). Furthermore, the concept of placemaking highlights that public spaces gain meaning through user participation, sense of belonging and collective experience (Meetiyagoda et al., 2023). Similarly, collective space production approaches underline that culture and space are co-produced through social practices and shared experiences, reinforcing the social role of urban spaces (Larasati et al., 2022). However, social transformations may also lead to the loss or transformation of cultural values over time, making it necessary to analyze how these values are preserved or reinterpreted within spatial processes (Bal et al., 2022). There is a direct relationship between changes in social behavior and the transformation of public spaces (Akyol et al., 2017). This study examines the transformation of urban open spaces as a component of public space through cultural codes in the historical process. The scope of the study is to identify the cultural codes of the social structure of the period in which Konya Kültürpark was located in the pre-Republican, Republican and post-Republican periods and to analyze the functional changes of the spaces in the area. The transformation of Konya Kültürpark in the historical process was investigated through a literature review. When the literature review about Konya Kültürpark is made; In the study conducted in 2002, the dates and spatial developments of the squares planned in Konya City Center were

examined and Kültürpark is one of the squares examined (Onder and Aklanoglu, 2002). A later study evaluated the reorganized Kültürpark based on quality criteria and emphasized planning processes between 1922–1954, 1955–1999 and 2000–2016 (Çalık, 2018). Another study examined Kültürpark within the framework of space-politics and analyzed its transformation after 1923 (Topçuoglu and Gürel, 2020). However, the existing literature does not address the transformation of Kültürpark through the lens of social structure and cultural change across different historical periods. This study aims to fill this gap by identifying all spatial functions throughout the historical process, determining cultural codes of space use, and developing cultural function diagrams. The transformation of the area is then analyzed comparatively through these diagrams.

Historical Transformation of Konya Kültürpark

Konya Kültürpark is located in the northwest of the historical city center of Konya and constitutes an important urban open space for public use. The area is actively used by citizens for recreation, social interaction, and cultural activities. It includes green areas, walking paths, seating areas, and significant historical elements such as the Dede Mansion and Tacülvezir Tomb. Due to its central location and accessibility, Kültürpark plays an important role in daily urban life and contributes to the socio-cultural structure of the city. The area is characterized by its multi-functional use and continuous public accessibility. Today, it functions as a multi-functional urban open space where different user groups come together.

The current condition of Kültürpark represents the latest stage of its transformation process, as illustrated in Figure 1. Based on map analyses, it is evident that the boundaries of the area have changed over time. Located within the historical city center, Kültürpark functions today as an actively used urban open space. As shown in Figure 1, the transformation of the area can be traced through three main periods: pre-Republican (1910), Republican (1972), and post-Republican (2026). These periods reflect the spatial and functional evolution of the area and provide a basis for analyzing cultural change.

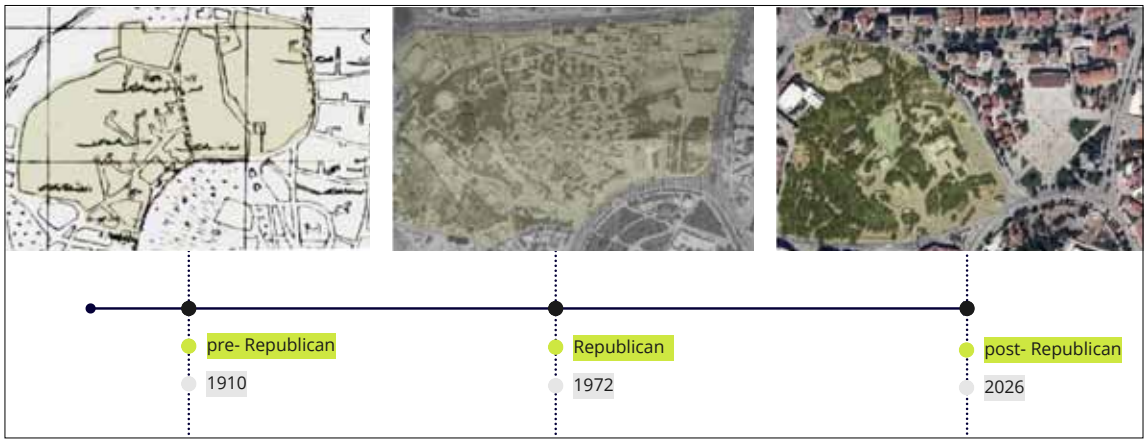


Figure 1. Historical transformation of the location of Konya Kültürpark (Karpuz archive, URL 3).

When the historical development of the area where Konya Kültürpark is located is examined, it is known that Dede Garden, one of the historical gardens of Konya, was situated in this area. Within the boundaries of Dede Garden, Tacülvezir Lodge was located, as shown in Figure 2 (Önder and Aklanoglu, 2002). The lodge was positioned to the east of the garden,

adjacent to the Tacülvezir Tomb within the present-day borders of Kültürpark. Built by Taceddin Ahmet in 1239 during the reign of Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev II, the complex included a madrasah and a zawiyah. Initially used as a lodge (hankah), it was later transferred to the Mevlevi order and functioned as both a madrasah and a lodge. The structure remained in active use as a madrasah, zawiyah, masjid, and lodge until the end of the Ottoman period. During the Ottoman era, the Tacülvezir madrasah and its associated foundations, including the adjacent garden, were recorded in official documents (Küçükdag, 2020). Originally constructed as a tomb and later expanded with the addition of a madrasah, the structure began to be used as a zawiyah in 1556–1557 and was completely demolished in 1896 (URL 1).



Figure 2. Tacülvezir Lodge (URL 2).

Dede Garden was used for many years as a summer garden by the Mevlevi sheikhs and served as a place where foreign guests visiting the city were hosted. In the late 19th century, a pool and a dervish lodge were constructed by Abdülvacit Çelebi, as shown in Figure 3. Individuals associated with the Mevlana Dervish Lodge organized sema performances and gatherings around this pool (Odabası, 1998).



Figure 3. In 1930 pool and lodge in the Dede Garden (URL 2).

In the area where Dede Garden was located, several important structures such as Karatay Madrasah, Ali Gav Lodge-Foundation, and Alaeddin Darüssifa were present, as shown in Figure 4. These buildings were positioned to the east of the garden, forming a spatial cluster of religious, educational, and health-related functions. The area, known as the Dervish gardens, included resting areas, a two-story lodge, a pool, and pelit trees. This spatial configuration indicates that the area functioned as a semi-private space reserved for statesmen and dervishes (Topçuoglu and Gürel, 2020). This limited accessibility reflects a socio-cultural structure centered on religious institutions use, distinguishing it from later periods where public accessibility increased.

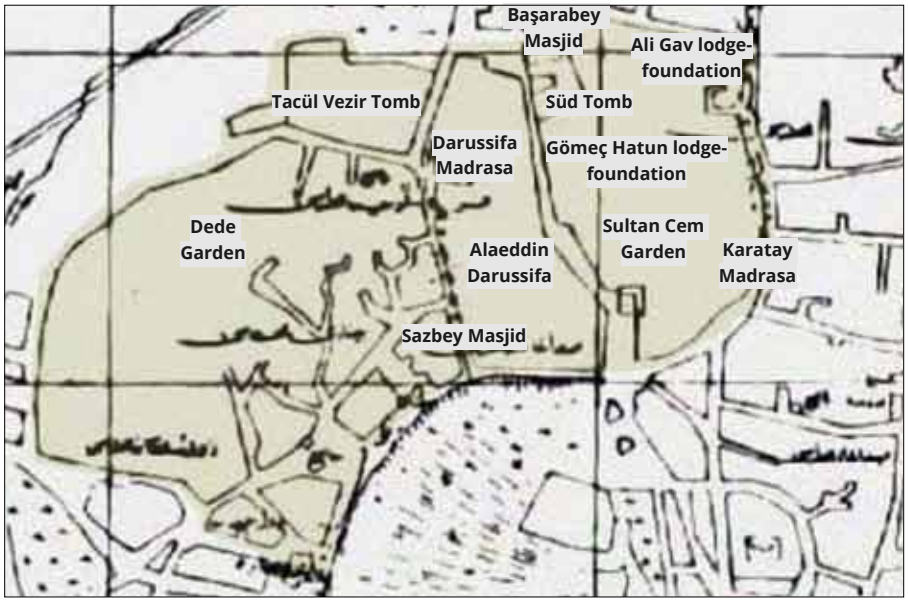


Figure 4. In 1910 Kültürpark area and important buildings (Author, based on Küçükdag (1989, 347–359) and the Karpuz Archive).

Dede Garden was opened to public use between 1915 and 1920 by Postnisin Abdülhalim Çelebi Efendi. Following the proclamation of the Republic, dervish lodges were closed in 1926, and the area was first transferred to the treasury and later to municipal ownership in 1931 (Sahin and Ceylan, 2013). As shown in Figure 5, the area where the pavilion and pool were located was transformed into a family casino, and its function was redefined with the addition of a dance floor (Isık, 2010). In this period, the municipality reorganized the garden, introduced new landscaping elements, and added functions such as a zoo, tennis courts, and recreational facilities (Önder and Aklanoglu, 2002). This transformation marks a significant shift from a semi-private, religiously oriented space to a publicly accessible urban open space with recreational and social functions. The diversification of uses indicates a change in socio-cultural structure, reflecting the emergence inclusive urban practices. Over time, some of these functions, such as the zoo and tennis courts, were removed, while new functions like the fairground were introduced, demonstrating the dynamic nature of the area. Today, Kültürpark continues to function as an important urban open space that

meets the recreational and social needs of the public. The surrounding urban context also played a significant role in shaping the area. Important structures such as Karatay Madrasa, the Courthouse building, and Atatürk Vocational High School for Girls contributed to the socio-cultural and spatial development of the area. Kültürpark and its surroundings are perceived as a unified urban zone, reinforcing its role as a central recreational and social space. In addition, the nearby Sazibey (Ak) Mosque, located to the northwest of Alaeddin Hill and built in 1424 during the Karamanoglu period, reflects the historical continuity of the area (URL 4).

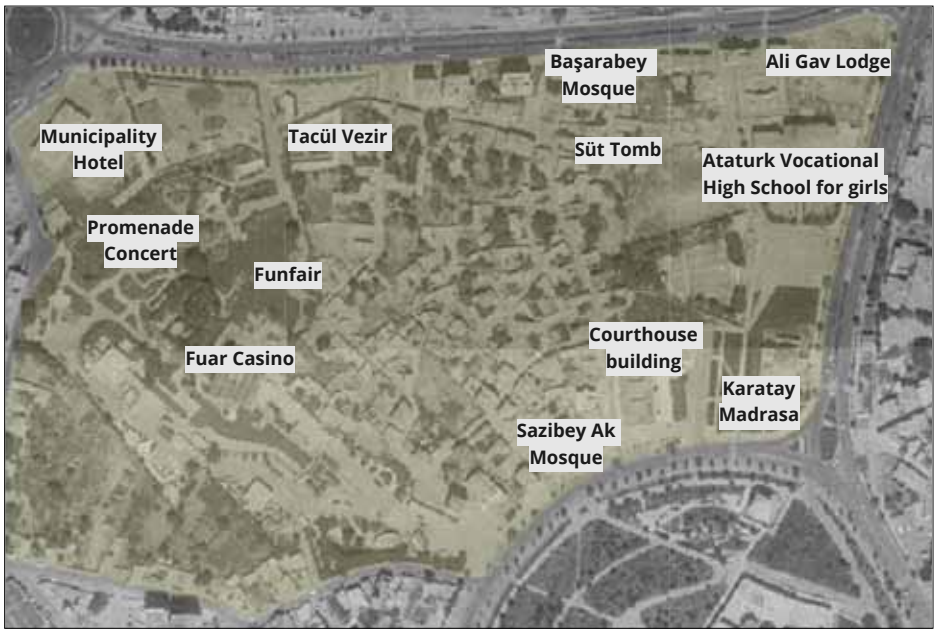


Figure 5. In 1972 area of Kültürpark and important buildings (Author, based on URL 3).

In 2009, Kültürpark underwent another transformation and today functions as a multifunctional urban open space with various social and recreational facilities. With the introduction of the tram line, the boundaries of Kültürpark have become clearly defined, as illustrated in Figure 6. Historical elements such as the Tacülvezir Tomb, Dede Lodge, and the pool, preserved from the pre-Republican period, are located within the boundaries of the park. The area where the Dede Lodge and the pool are situated has been adapted for use as a café, reflecting the integration of historical structures into contemporary urban functions. In addition, to the east of Kültürpark, Konya City Square and the Payitaht Museum are located on the site of the former Courthouse building (Sahin and Ceylan, 2013). The transformation of Kültürpark demonstrates how urban open spaces evolve in response to changing socio-cultural needs. Over time, user demands and expectations have shifted, leading to the emergence of new functions while some traditional uses have been preserved. This process highlights the dynamic relationship between space, function, and cultural change, which constitutes the main focus of this study.



Figure 6. In 2023, the area where Kültürpark is located and important buildings (Author, based on URL 3).

Methodology

This study aims to examine and concretely express the socio-cultural structure by analyzing the changes in landscaping and architectural arrangements of urban open spaces throughout the historical process. The use of urban open spaces during the pre-Republican, Republican, and post-Republican periods and their reflections on the socio-cultural structure were evaluated.

The methodology of the study consists of six main stages, as illustrated in Figure 7. First, the relationship between urban open space and culture was examined to establish the conceptual framework of the study. Second, the transformation periods of Konya Kültürpark were identified as pre-Republican, Republican, and post-Republican periods. Third, the functions of the area were determined for each period through a literature review structured according to the three historical periods. For the pre-Republican period, historical sources and archival documents were used; for the Republican period, planning documents and secondary literature were examined; and for the post-Republican period, recent studies, current maps, and field-based observations were utilized. Fourth, cultural codes were identified based on these functions. Cultural codes are abstract graphical symbols that reflect cultural changes and represent behavioral patterns of societies (Uysal and Semerci, 2014). For example, the act of sitting for resting in an urban open space is represented as a cultural code. Fifth, cultural function diagrams were created based on the identified codes to visualize the use of the area. These codes were grouped under the categories of

Resting, Recreation, Entertainment, Sports, Culture and Art, Religion and Education, and Security. Finally, in the sixth stage, a comparative analysis was conducted to evaluate the transformation of Kültürpark as an urban open space throughout the historical process. Konya province, one of the oldest settlements in Anatolia, provides a significant case study for examining the relationship between space and cultural change. Kültürpark, located in the northwest of the historical city center of Konya, has undergone transformations over time, reflecting the socio-cultural evolution of society. Through the use of cultural codes and function diagrams, the transformation process of Kültürpark and its relationship with social change were systematically analyzed.

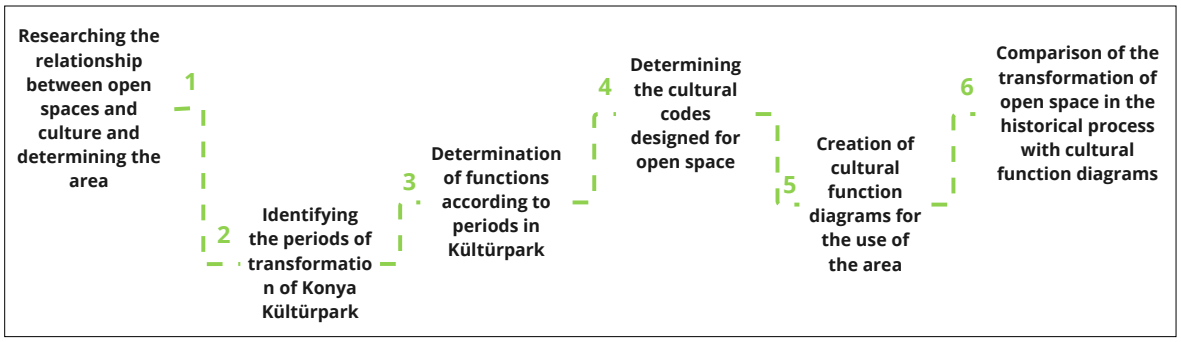


Figure 7. Method of analyzing open space with cultural codes (Author).

Analysis of Konya Kültürpark with Culturel Codes

When Konya Kültürpark is analyzed within the historical process, it is evaluated through three main periods of transformation: pre-Republican, Republican, and post-Republican periods. The cultural values of the society using the area in each period were identified through spatial functions. As illustrated in Figure 8, these functions were interpreted as cultural codes representing user behavior and socio-cultural patterns.

The identified cultural codes were grouped under five main categories: resting, entertainment, sports–culture and arts, religion and education, and security. Resting includes functions such as food and beverage areas, seating on benches, sitting in green areas, water elements, and accommodation-related uses. Entertainment is represented by music and fun activities, children's playgrounds, and zoo functions. The sports–culture and arts category includes activities such as tennis, walking, exhibitions, and theater. Religion and education cover functions such as places of worship, educational spaces, and tombs and lodges. Security includes basic service-related function safety elements. These cultural codes vary across different historical periods, reflecting changes in social structure, user needs, and spatial organization. The analysis demonstrates that the transformation of Kültürpark can be understood not only through physical changes but also through shifts in cultural values and patterns of use.

CULTURAL CODES			
OUT OF AREA		**SPORTS, CULTURE AND ARTS**	
ENTRY		Sport	
RESTING		Tennis	
Food- Drink		Walking	
Sitting		Exhibition	
Sitting in a green area		Theater-Show	
Water components		**RELIGION AND EDUCATION**	
Sleep		Prayer	
FUN		Study	
Music-Fun		Tombs and Lodges	
Children's Playground		**SECURITY**	
Zoo			

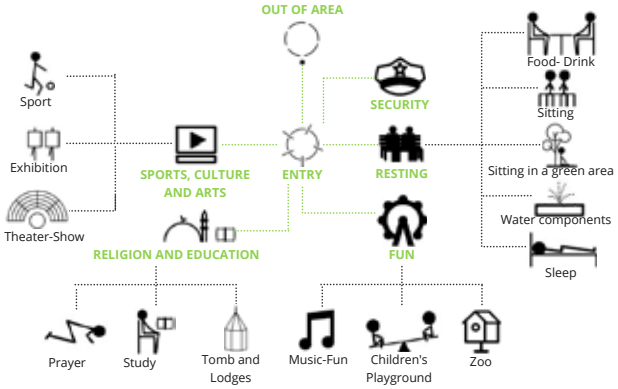


Figure 8. Cultural Codes and Cultural Function Diagrams (Author, based on Uysal and Semerci, 2014).

The cultural function diagram of the pre-Republican period is presented in Figure 9. During this period, the area was used exclusively by statesmen and dervishes, indicating a limited and controlled accessibility. This restricted use reflects a socio-cultural structure in which spatial functions were defined by specific social groups. The area was predominantly characterized by religious and educational functions, along with limited cultural and resting activities. Religious functions are represented by structures such as Tacülvezir Tomb, Süd Tomb, Basarabey Masjid, Sazbey Masjid, Ali Gav Lodge-Foundation, Gömeç Hatun Lodge-Foundation and which served as places of worship. Educational functions were provided by institutions such as Alaaddin Darüssifa, Darüssifa Madrasah, and Karatay Madrasah. In addition, the presence of resting such as Pelit Trees, Gülbahçe, Sultan Cem Garden, Dervish Lodge-garden and water elements indicates supporting functions within the spatial organization. Although there was no distinct cultural code of entertainment during the pre-Republican period, the performance of sema can be considered a cultural and spiritual activity rather than a form of entertainment. This highlights the dominance of religious and educational functions in shaping the cultural structure of the area during this period.

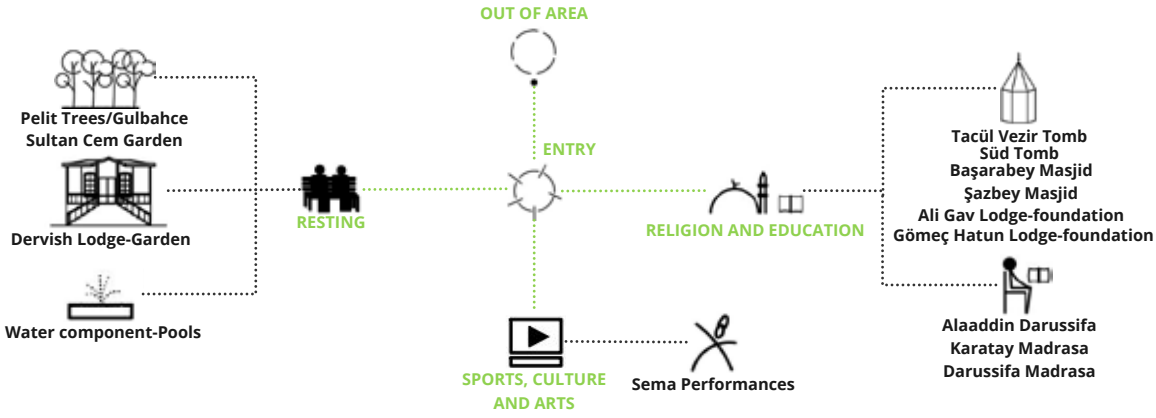


Figure 9. Cultural Function Diagram of the Pre-Republican Period (Author).

The cultural function diagram of the Republican period is presented in Figure 10. During this period, the area was opened to the use of the entire public, marking a transition toward a publicly accessible urban open space. As the boundaries of the green area known as

Kültürpark began to take shape, the area became accessible from multiple entry points. A significant transformation occurred in the functional structure of the area. The Dede Mansion and its garden, which were actively used for resting in the previous period, were transformed into an entertainment function as a fair casino. The addition of a funfair, children's playgrounds, and a bird zoo increased the number of entertainment spaces actively used by the public. At the same time, new functions related to sports, culture, and arts were introduced, including exhibition areas, promenade concert spaces, and tennis courts. Compared to the previous period, it was determined that entertainment and sports functions increased significantly in the historical city center. In terms of resting functions, landscape components, the Municipality Hotel, and water elements were present. Within the religion and education category, structures such as Tacülvezir Tomb, Süt Tomb, Basarabey Mosque, and Sazibey (Ak) Mosque continued to exist, while the Gömeç Hatun Lodge-Foundation no longer appeared in this period. The Ali Gav Lodge-Foundation was transformed functionally into the Mahmudiye Madrasah and continued to serve within the education category. Alaaddin Darüssifa and Darüssifa Madrasah were not present in this period, while Karatay Madrasah was repurposed as a museum. In addition, Atatürk Vocational High School for Girls emerged as a new educational structure. Within the security category, the Courthouse building was identified.

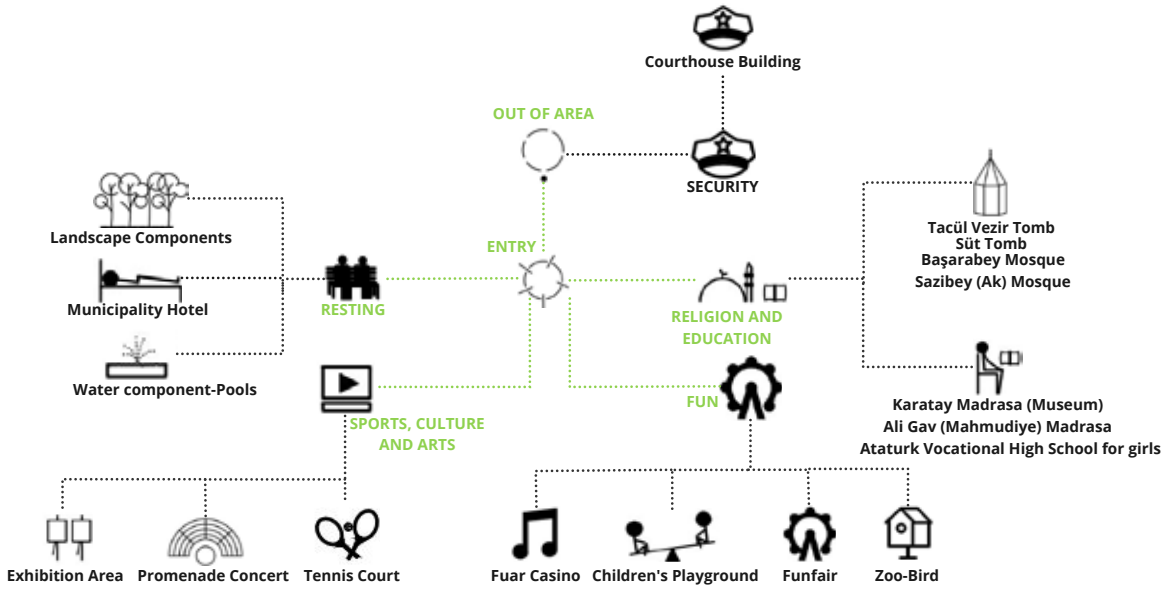


Figure 10. Cultural Function Diagram of the Republican Period (Author).

The cultural function diagram of the post-Republican period is presented in Figure 11. During this period, the area remains open to public use and is accessible from multiple entry points. The current use of Kültürpark is reflected in the cultural function diagram, indicating a well-defined and actively used urban open space. When evaluated within the historical process, it is observed that fun functions have decreased compared to the Republican period, while the overall structure shows a partial return to the functional characteristics of the pre-Republican period, particularly in terms of religion and education. At the same time, the area maintains a diverse range of functions including sports, culture, arts, entertainment, and social use. Within the resting category, the area that previously functioned as Dede Garden in the pre-Republican period and as a fair casino during the Republican period has been transformed into a café centered around the Dede Mansion and its garden, serving as a resting space. In addition, multiple cafés have been introduced

across the area. Landscape elements supporting passive use, such as seating areas within green spaces, have been developed, and the area around the Tacülvezir Tomb has been reorganized as the Gülbahçe Monument area. In terms of sports functions, tennis courts have been removed, and instead, walking and cycling paths have been introduced. The area also includes exhibition spaces and an amphitheater, strengthening its cultural and artistic functions. Within the religion and education category, the Municipality Hotel area from the Republican period has been transformed with the construction of Hacıveyiszade Mosque. Sazibey (Ak) Mosque and Tacülvezir Tomb continue to function in this period, while a library has been added as a new educational facility. In the security category, a police station is present, and within the entertainment category, children's playgrounds continue to serve the public. As indicated in Figure 11, the areas marked in red fall outside the boundaries of Kültürpark but remain actively used today. These include, within the religion and education category, Ali Gav (Mahmudiye) Madrasah, Konya Atatürk Anatolian High School, Ferhuniye Basarabey Mosque, and Süt Tomb; and within the sports, culture, and arts category, Konya City Square, the Payitaht Museum, historical Konya houses (used as museums or cafés), and Karatay Madrasah (museum).

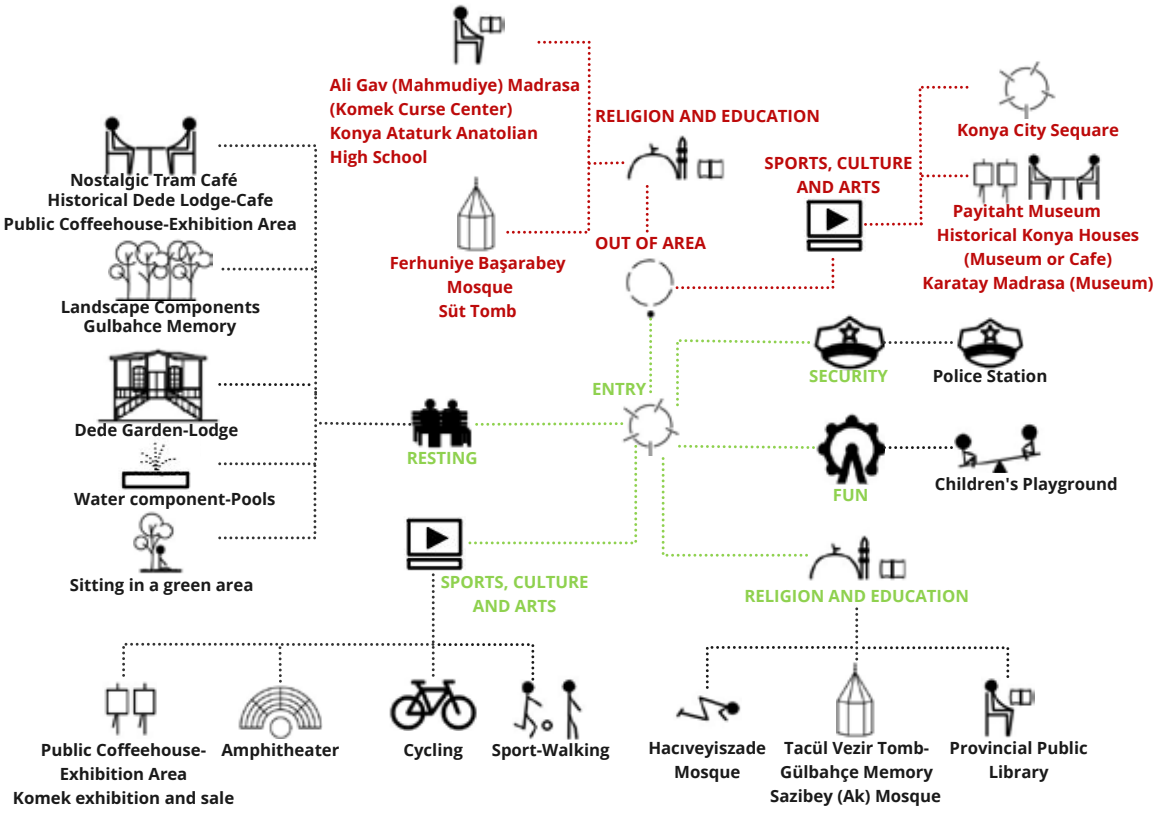


Figure 11. Cultural Function Diagram of the post-Republican Period. The red text refers to areas located outside the boundaries of Kültürpark. (Author).

Konya Kültürpark was analyzed within the historical process, and cultural codes were identified. As shown in Figure 12, the transformation of Kültürpark was comparatively analyzed through cultural codes across three main periods: pre-Republican, Republican, and post-Republican periods. The analysis reveals that the functions within the area have either changed or transformed over time. In the pre-Republican period, the area was used exclusively by statesmen and dervishes, whereas in the following periods, the opening of

the area to the public led to a diversification of users. While similar cultural codes related to entertainment can be observed in the pre-Republican and post-Republican periods, the Republican period stands out with the transformation of Dede Mansion and its garden into a fairground functioning as an entertainment space. During this period, entertainment-related cultural codes became more dominant, and the area was widely used by the public, particularly during weekends and summer months. In terms of sports, culture, and arts functions, sema performances in the pre-Republican period were replaced by amphitheater-based activities in later periods. Today, the amphitheater hosts concerts and various cultural events. Tennis courts constructed during the Republican period were removed in the post-Republican period, and hard-surfaced areas are now used for activities such as cycling, skating, and skateboarding, reflecting contemporary urban practices. Regarding religion and education functions, the area, which originally included madrasahs, lodges, and spaces for dervish gatherings in the pre-Republican period, lost these functions during the Republican period. However, in the post-Republican period, the educational function was reintroduced through the construction of a library, indicating a partial revival of cultural codes. Overall, the transformation of Kültürpark demonstrates how urban open spaces evolve through the interaction between spatial change and socio-cultural dynamics.

Periods-User/ Function	CULTURAL CODES		
	pre- Republican	Republican	post- Republican
	Dervishes and Statesmen	Public	Public
Resting	Dervish Lodge-Garden	Landscape Components	Historical Dede Lodge-Cafe
	Pelit Trees/Gulbahce	Water component-Pools	Landscape Components/Gulbahce Memory
	Sultan Cem Garden	Courthouse Building	Konya City Square
	Pool	X	Water component-Pools
	X	X	Sitting in a green area
	X	Municipality Hotel	Hacıveyiszade Mosque
	X	X	Nostalgic Tram Café
Fun	X	Fuar Casino	X
	X	Children's Playground	X
	X	Funfair	Children's Playground
	X	Zoo	X
Sports, Culture and Arts	Sema Performances	Tennis Court	Public Coffeehouse-Exhibition Area
	X	Promanat Concert	Amphitheater
	X	Exhibition Area	Sport-Walking-Cycling
	X	X	Historical Konya Houses (Museum or Cafe)
	X	X	Komek exhibition and sale
Religion and Education	Tacül Vezir Tomb, Süd Tomb	Tacül Vezir Tomb, Süd Tomb	Tacül Vezir Tomb-Gülbahçe Memory, Süd Tomb
	Başarabey Masjid	Başarabey Mosque	Ferhuniye Başarabey Mosque
	Sazbey Masjid	Sazibey (Ak) Mosque	Sazibey (Ak) Mosque
	Alaaddin Darussifa, Darussifa Madrasa	X	X
	Ali Gav Lodge- Foundation	Ali Gav (Mahmudiye) Madrasa	Ali Gav (Mahmudiye) Madrasa (Komek Curse Center)
	Karatay Madrasa	Karatay Madrasa (Museum)	Karatay Madrasa (Museum)
	Gömeç Hatun Lodge- Foundation	X	Payitaht Museum
	X	X	Hacıveyiszade Mosque
	X	Ataturk Vocational High School for girls	Konya Ataturk Anatolian High School
	X	X	Provincial Public Library
Security	X	Courthouse Building	X
	X	X	Police Station

Figure 12. Cultural Codes in the Historical Process (Author).

Conclusion

This study examined the transformation of Konya Kültürpark through cultural codes in order to analyze the socio-cultural structure of the area within a historical framework. By evaluating the spatial and functional changes across the pre-Republican, Republican, and post-Republican periods, the study demonstrated that urban open spaces provide a significant basis for interpreting socio-cultural dynamics. The findings reveal that Kültürpark has undergone a clear transformation from a restricted and functionally limited space to a publicly accessible and multi-functional urban open space. While the pre-Republican period was characterized by religious and educational functions used by a limited group, the Republican period introduced new recreational and entertainment functions, reflecting broader public engagement. In the post-Republican period, the area evolved into a complex urban open space where historical elements coexist with contemporary uses. Despite functional changes, certain cultural elements such as the Dede Mansion, its garden, the pool, and Tacülvezir Tomb, Sazıbey (Ak) Mosque have been preserved, maintaining the continuity of cultural identity. The comparative analysis of cultural codes indicates that while some functions disappeared or transformed, others were sustained or reinterpreted over time. In particular, the similarities between the pre-Republican and post-Republican periods suggest a partial re-emergence of certain cultural patterns, while the Republican period stands out as a phase of significant functional diversification.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates that the use of cultural codes and graphical representations provides an effective tool for analyzing the relationship between spatial transformation and socio-cultural change. This approach enables the interpretation of urban open spaces not only as physical entities but also as dynamic socio-cultural systems.

In this context, the study contributes to the literature by offering a novel perspective on the analysis of urban open spaces through cultural codes. Furthermore, understanding the transformation of user activities in such spaces is essential for developing sustainable and livable urban environments. The findings of this study provide a basis for future planning and design decisions by highlighting the importance of integrating historical continuity with contemporary urban needs.

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Developing a Sustainability Framework for Enhancing

Public Art Projects in Nigeria toward Urban Regeneration

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Abstract

This study examines the role of public art towards urban regeneration, cultural preservation, and socio-economic development, addressing critical challenges in the Nigerian public art sector. It adopts a qualitative research design based on literature review, and Eisenhardt's theory-building approach, drawing on secondary data to generate insights from case-based analysis. Two contemporary Nigerian public art initiatives were examined using within-case and cross-case thematic analysis. The study integrates placemaking, cultural economics, social capital, place attachment, and regulatory theories to develop a sustainability framework for enhancing public art practice and administration in Nigeria. The study's findings indicate that sustainable public art interventions for urban regeneration depend on adequate funding, participatory governance, community engagement, supportive policy environments, and culturally grounded artistic practices. The study provides insights into how future public art projects in Nigerian urban spaces can foster social cohesion, create employment opportunities, and stimulate economic growth. It offers valuable implications for artists, urban planners, community organizations, policymakers, and public art stakeholders.

Keywords: *Public Art, Urban Regeneration, Sustainability Theories, Socio-economic Development, Nigeria*

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Introduction

Public art is distinct from art displayed in traditional gallery or museum settings, as it is designed to engage with and enhance the surrounding environment, making it an integral part of the urban landscape (Milne and Pojani, 2022). It encompasses artworks in any medium intentionally created and executed to be located in the public domain, typically in external spaces accessible to everyone (Paley, 2023). It refers to artistic works or installations created in any media for and displayed in public spaces beyond the confines of the conventional gallery setup, making them easily reachable to a wide range of people. It is typically accessible and often located in parks, plazas, streets, bridges, government buildings, and other public areas. Public art takes various forms, being both two and three-dimensional. Public art comes in different forms, encompassing multiple artistic expressions, including murals, sculptures, street lighting, digital art, street furnishings, architectural elements integrated into building structures, landform artworks, temporary installations, such as festival decorations, and more (Matthews and Gadaloff, 2022). Placing artworks in public spaces allows them to reach a wider audience than art galleries or museums, and the context in which these artworks are displayed can influence audience expectations and reactions.

Public art and humanity have been present throughout recorded history (Milne and Pojani, 2022). Public art, shaped by its societal context, exhibits historical traditions and diverse manifestations across various periods and cultures (Hao, 2024). The origins of public art can be traced from prehistoric cave paintings to the Egyptian pyramids and the architectural sculptures of ancient Greek and Roman cities, later evolving during the Middle Ages and Renaissance into monumental artworks and architectural embellishments that often reflected the authority of ruling elites and religious institutions (Kecheng and Hussain, 2023). There seem to be some doubts regarding the origin of modern public art. According to Gao (2022), the origin of modern urban public art traces back to World War II (1939-1945), with modern cities and urban civilization having the potential to aid in healing people's spiritual trauma. However, Liu (2022) asserted that modern public art emerged in the mid-1960s due to the significant shifts occurring amid a diverse landscape of artistic genres such as minimalism and conceptual art. The development of urban environments has laid a robust groundwork for the rise of contemporary public art (Liu, 2022). In broad terms, public art can be classified into five categories, including commemorative, expressive, functional, community-based, and technology-driven artworks (Jasmi, Hussain, and Omar, 2018).

Public art serves vital functions, including reflecting and expressing the identity of a city, celebrating significant individuals and locations, narrating the stories and histories of a place, fostering a sense of pride and belonging within the community, and enhancing the appeal of a locality (Yang, Jian, and Siu, 2023). Others include commemorating local events and histories, addressing community needs, enhancing aesthetic value, promoting a sense of community, and providing educational value to the community (Yang, Jian, and Siu, 2023). Public art projects are often collaborations between artists, urban planners, local authorities, and community members, and they can be funded through public or private sources because public art scenes are an activity centre with numerous benefits, and meaningful connections and attachments could be formed during use.

This study recognizes the government's ongoing efforts to facilitate regional development by harnessing the country's rich resources for poverty alleviation and economic growth in Nigeria (Anam et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, it is imperative to consider that all geopolitical regions in Nigeria have a rich cultural heritage that can be harnessed for urban revitalization by promoting public art initiatives in different communities. Public art in Nigeria celebrates the country's rich cultural heritage and encompasses diverse traditional and contemporary forms that contribute to the country's cultural, social, and economic development. However, the government has yet to maximize public art gains as of the time of this study. In developing countries like Nigeria, there is a relative lack of awareness regarding the role of public art in enhancing urban life, in contrast to developed countries. There is also a need to address how public art projects can be improved for urban revitalization and economic growth in Nigeria. This study aims to fill this gap in the literature. If properly harnessed, public art has the potential to transform the aesthetics and functionality of urban places in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions:

1. How do public art projects enhance urban revitalization, community engagement, and cultural preservation?
2. What challenges do public art initiatives face in Nigeria?
3. How can operational strategies in public art contribute to the sustainable creation, administration, and management of public art in Nigerian cities?

Literature Review

Urban Regeneration Through Public Art

Urban regeneration or revitalization involves the comprehensive improvement and renewal of urban areas to address decay and transform cities into vibrant, sustainable, and economically viable environments (Chinedu, 2024). Urban revitalization through public art is a multifaceted approach that combines artistic expression, community engagement, and economic development (Petroniene and Juzeleniene, 2022). Public art enriches cities and public spaces through aesthetic, economic, social, and cultural values (Hao, 2024). Urban revitalization through public art can have significant economic benefits and improve residents' well-being and quality of life (Mathews and Gadaloff, 2022). Revitalized urban spaces become more appealing to businesses, investors, and developers, increasing economic activity.

Cheung et al. (2021) categorized and analyzed the impacts of public art, identifying eight distinct categories, including placemaking, well-being, society, economy, culture, sustainability, wisdom, and innovation. According to Yang, Jian, and Siu (2023), the role of public art extends far beyond its physical presence as it serves as a celebration of distinctive cultures, a reflection of local histories, and a means of enhancing community facilities. It can stimulate profound transformations in the psychological and physical environment, serving as a bridge, blurring the boundaries between cultural aesthetics and ecological functionality, whether in actuality or perception (Paley, 2023). Public art serves various purposes in urban spaces, including decorative, functional, and more, from beautifying public spaces to reflecting local culture and history, stimulating dialogue, and promoting social interaction (Liu, 2021).

Public art can contribute to urban regeneration by nurturing a sense of identity (place and civic), addressing community needs, tackling social exclusion, providing educational value, promoting social change, and fostering economic development (Palermo, 2014). Public art

significantly breathes new life into neglected or underutilized areas, enhancing aesthetics, cultural vibrancy, and social cohesion (Paley, 2023). Integrating public art into urban revitalization projects becomes crucial as cities undergo efforts to address social, economic, and environmental issues (Palermo, 2014). Using public art in urban revitalization efforts makes it feasible to strengthen cultural amenities and local identity while attracting fresh investments and financing capable of revitalizing the surrounding urban environment where the artwork is situated (Palermo, 2014).

Wanjiku (2024) examined public art projects developed within large-scale urban revitalisation initiatives across cities in Europe, America, Asia, and Australia. The study explored how public art interventions contribute to placemaking, tourism development, and community engagement within urban redevelopment contexts. Findings by Boonserm and Chandransu (2025) also reveal that public art possesses significant potential to address societal challenges, promote social healing, and support cultural preservation alongside economic development. These findings provide a useful framework for effectively harnessing the transformative potential of public art interventions in Nigeria. Public art possesses significant capacity to stimulate urban regeneration, particularly in culturally vibrant yet economically challenged developing countries like Nigeria.

Public Art Initiatives in Nigeria

Public art in Nigeria reflects the country's diverse cultural traditions, historical narratives, and contemporary urban realities (Oladumiye and Tolulope, 2015). Traditional artistic expressions such as Yoruba sculptural traditions, Benin bronze works, Hausa architectural ornamentation, and Igbo mural practices have historically functioned as community-centred artistic interventions embedded within public life. Contemporary Nigerian public art has further expanded into murals, commemorative sculptures, installation art, environmental art, and mixed-media urban interventions integrated into city landscapes. Public art projects are now visible in virtually all major cities in Nigeria, including Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Benin City, Enugu, Ibadan, Kano, Abeokuta, Kaduna, and Calabar, where they contribute to cultural identity, tourism promotion, urban aesthetics, and civic engagement.

Public art projects in Nigeria range from large-scale sculptures and murals to interactive installations that engage with the urban environment and the community, demonstrating the increasing relevance of art in urban regeneration. For instance, the Aro Meta sculpture at Eko Atlantic City in Lagos (Figure 1), functions not only as a monumental artwork but also as a visual identity marker that contributes to tourism, place attachment, and urban image construction. Similarly, Mace of Power sculpture at the National Assembly in Abuja represents Nigeria's cultural diversity and political history, attracting locals and tourists. This study recognizes different public art typologies used in urban and art-historical scholarship. These include: monumental and commemorative sculptures, murals and street art, interactive and participatory public art, environmental and landscape art, functional public art integrated into architecture and urban infrastructure, and temporary installations and festival-based interventions.



Figure 1. Aro meta statue at Eko Atlantic city, Lagos. Source: Chuks Nwanne, The Guardian Newspaper, 12 January, 2019. https://guardian.ng/saturday-magazine/travel-a-tourism/aro-meta-statue-turns-eko-atlantic-city-to-tourists-attraction/.



Figure 2. The sculpture at the National Assembly, Abuja. Photographed in 2001 by: Trager, Lillian (1947-2006). Archived in: University of Wisconsin – Parkside Library, African Studies Collection. https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/AB5AGTIOXY3AY8O.

Potentials and Challenges of Public Art for Urban Regeneration in Nigeria

Public art possesses significant potential for enhancing urban regeneration in Nigeria. Public art can strengthen cultural tourism, improve environmental aesthetics, encourage local entrepreneurship, promote social inclusion, and increase the symbolic value of urban spaces. In densely populated urban centres such as Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Kano, and Enugu, public art can function as a placemaking strategy capable of transforming underutilized or socially fragmented spaces into culturally vibrant environments. The Nigerian creative economy also offers substantial opportunities for integrating public art into broader urban development strategies. According to Solanki, Speer and Huang (2014), public art projects have profoundly impacted participating youths and the wider community by enhancing the visual vibrancy of public spaces, empowering local youth, fostering community pride, and increasing young people's confidence and engagement in their surroundings. Given this, public art initiatives can generate employment opportunities for artists, urban planners, designers, curators, architects, cultural managers, and artisans.

Despite its transformative potential, public art development in Nigeria faces several interconnected challenges. One of the most significant challenges is inadequate and inconsistent funding (Ayodele and Adenle, 2022). Most public art projects depend heavily on private sponsorship, individual patronage, or short-term government intervention. There is presently no comprehensive national public art policy in Nigeria that establishes dedicated financial frameworks for commissioning, maintaining, and preserving public artworks. Institutional and bureaucratic limitations also constrain public art sustainability. Delays in project approvals, fragmented responsibilities among government agencies, and weak policy implementation often hinder long-term planning. In several Nigerian cities, urban beautification projects are executed without integrating professional artists, cultural historians, or local communities into the planning process.

Maintenance culture constitutes another major challenge. Numerous public sculptures and mural projects across Nigerian urban centres suffer from neglect, vandalism, environmental deterioration, and poor conservation practices (Ukim, 2019). Public art maintenance is rarely integrated into municipal budgeting systems, resulting in the gradual deterioration of artistic installations. Community engagement also remains inconsistent. Some public art projects are imposed through top-down administrative processes without adequate consultation with local residents. Consequently, certain artworks fail to reflect community identities or address local socio-cultural realities.

Methods

This study adopted a qualitative multiple-case study research design employing Eisenhardt's theory-building approach, drawing from secondary qualitative data for theory generation as outlined by Palomino, Brown, and Rich (2014), supported by literature review to develop a sustainability framework for public art projects toward urban regeneration in Nigeria. The methodological approach was informed by Eisenhardt's theory-building framework from case studies, which facilitates the development of conceptual propositions through systematic comparison of multiple empirical cases (Ridder, 2017; Eisenhardt, 2021). The study therefore combines conceptual inquiry with empirical qualitative analysis by examining documented public art initiatives and interpreting their implications for sustainable urban regeneration.

Secondary qualitative data were collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, books, government reports, policy documents, newspaper archives, and documented public art project reports published between 2014 and 2025. Sources were purposively selected based on the following criteria: relevance to public art and urban regeneration; focus on public art practices in Nigeria or comparable urban contexts; availability of empirical evidence relating to community participation, policy implementation, sustainability, or urban transformation; and scholarly credibility through publication in recognized academic or professional outlets. Searches were conducted using combinations of keywords such as "public art," "urban regeneration," "placemaking," "street art," "street murals," "public sculpture," "creative city," and "urban culture."

Two Nigerian public art initiatives were purposively selected for comparative case analysis, namely the House of Bezalel public art projects in Lagos State (Ayodele and Adenle, 2022), and mural art interventions in Anambra State, particularly at Bridge-Head Onitsha, Nibo, and Aroma Flyover, Awka (Okafor, 2024). These cases were selected because they provide contemporary examples of public art interventions within Nigerian urban environments and demonstrate different scales, artistic forms, implementation strategies, and opera-

tional approaches to public art practice. The selected cases jointly provided a comparative empirical basis for examining how public art projects are conceived, implemented, managed, and integrated into urban regeneration processes in Nigeria.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis through within-case and cross-case analytical procedures in line with Eisenhardt's theory-building framework (Javaid and Hyder, 2018). First, each case was analyzed independently to identify themes relating to sustainability, funding, policy implementation, community engagement, urban revitalization, and cultural identity. Secondly, cross-case analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns, similarities, and contextual differences across the selected initiatives. The analytical process was guided by placemaking, social capital, cultural economics, place attachment, and regulatory theories. These theoretical lenses provided interpretive frameworks for understanding how public art contributes to urban transformation, social cohesion, cultural preservation, and sustainable city development. To enhance analytical credibility and conceptual robustness, the study triangulated evidence from scholarly literature, policy documents, observational insights, and documented case materials. Findings from the comparative analysis informed the development of a proposed sustainability framework for public art projects in Nigeria toward urban regeneration.

Findings

Within-Case Analysis

Case Study 1: House of Bezalel Public Art Practice in Lagos State

Ayodele and Adenle (2022) examined the operational structure and artistic activities of the House of Bezalel, an indigenous group of millennial artists responsible for the production and installation of more than forty monumental public artworks across Lagos metropolis. The case demonstrates how coordinated artistic practice can contribute to urban beautification, place identity, and cultural representation within rapidly expanding urban environments. The projects executed by the group reveal the growing relevance of public art in reshaping urban landscapes, especially in commercially and socially strategic locations within Lagos. The study identified several operational strengths associated with the initiative. First, the group adopted a structured production model that enabled large-scale execution of public artworks within complex urban spaces. Second, the projects contributed to visual enhancement and placemaking by transforming ordinary urban spaces into culturally symbolic landmarks. Third, the initiative promoted indigenous artistic expression through artworks that reflected local cultural narratives and urban experiences.

Despite these achievements, the case also revealed several structural and institutional challenges affecting the sustainability of public art in Nigeria. One major challenge is inadequate funding and overreliance on inconsistent sponsorship arrangements. The absence of institutionalized public art funding mechanisms creates uncertainty in project continuity and maintenance. The study also identified iconoclasm and politically or religiously motivated destruction of artworks as recurring threats to sustainability. In addition, the commissioning of non-professional practitioners and the production of culturally disconnected artworks weaken the quality and public relevance of some public art projects.

Another important issue emerging from the case is the limited integration of local communities into the planning and implementation processes of public art projects. The House of Bezalel case demonstrates that professionally coordinated public art initiatives can signifi-

cantly contribute to urban regeneration in Nigeria. However, sustainable impact depends on stronger institutional support, inclusive stakeholder participation, policy frameworks, and long-term maintenance systems.

Case Study 2: Mural Art Interventions in Anambra State

Okafor (2024) investigated selected mural art interventions located at Bridge-Head Onitsha, Nibo, and Aroma Flyover in Awka, focusing on their contributions to urban revitalization and nation-building in Anambra State. The study presents mural art as an accessible form of public art capable of transforming neglected urban corridors into spaces of cultural communication, visual engagement, and community interaction. The findings revealed that the murals contributed significantly to improving environmental aesthetics and promoting public expression within urban spaces. The artworks visually transformed previously underutilized or visually degraded locations into culturally vibrant environments that attracted public attention and encouraged social interaction. The murals also reinforced cultural identity by incorporating locally recognizable symbols, narratives, and themes connected to everyday community experiences. The case further demonstrates the social function of mural art as a medium for civic engagement and public communication. Through visual storytelling and symbolic representation, the murals created opportunities for dialogue concerning cultural values, collective memory, and urban identity.

Nevertheless, several limitations constrained the long-term sustainability of the mural interventions. The study identified political interference, weak institutional backing, property ownership disputes, inadequate funding, and poor maintenance culture as major challenges. In some cases, the absence of clearly defined legal and administrative frameworks created uncertainty regarding responsibility for protection and conservation. Community participation was also found to be inconsistent, as residents were not always systematically involved in decision-making processes relating to project planning and implementation. The Anambra case therefore illustrates the potential of mural art as a low-cost but highly visible urban revitalization strategy in Nigeria. However, the effectiveness and sustainability of such initiatives depend largely on institutional coordination, participatory governance, maintenance planning, and policy support.

Cross-Case Analysis

The comparative analysis of the House of Bezalel projects in Lagos and the mural interventions in Anambra State reveals several converging themes regarding the role of public art in urban regeneration, while also highlighting important contextual and operational differences. A major point of convergence across both cases is the recognition of public art as an instrument for transforming urban environments and strengthening cultural identity. Both initiatives demonstrate that public art contributes to environmental aesthetics, public engagement, and symbolic representation within urban spaces. In both Lagos and Anambra State, public art transformed underutilized or visually neglected spaces into culturally meaningful environments capable of attracting public attention and encouraging social interaction.

Another important similarity concerns the challenges affecting sustainability. Both cases identified inadequate funding, weak institutional support, and the absence of comprehensive public art policies as major constraints limiting the continuity and effectiveness of public art initiatives in Nigeria. Both cases reveal the importance of stakeholder partici-

pation in achieving sustainable public art outcomes. However, although community engagement was identified as essential in both studies, participatory involvement remained relatively limited in practice. This weakens opportunities for developing strong social capital, community ownership, and collective responsibility toward public artworks. Both cases also suggest that public art development in Nigeria remains largely dependent on fragmented sponsorship arrangements and temporary interventions rather than long-term institutional frameworks. This reinforces the need for structured governance systems capable of supporting commissioning, maintenance, legal protection, and stakeholder coordination.

Despite these similarities, significant differences emerged between the two cases. The Lagos-based House of Bezalel initiative operated through a more structured and professionally coordinated model involving large-scale monumental installations and stronger interaction with formal urban development processes. The projects demonstrated greater alignment with cultural economics theory because of their stronger potential for tourism development, city branding, and economic value creation. In contrast, the Anambra mural interventions reflected a more community-visible and socially interactive approach to public art. The monumental installations in Lagos reflected long-term spatial visibility and stronger integration into formal urban infrastructure, whereas the mural projects in Anambra were comparatively more vulnerable to environmental deterioration, political interference, and property-related disputes.

These findings reveal that sustainable public art development in Nigeria requires the integration of professional artistic coordination, participatory community engagement, institutional policy support, and governance structures. It further indicates that public art initiatives are more likely to contribute meaningfully to urban regeneration when they are culturally grounded, socially inclusive, economically supported, and institutionally protected. Together, these findings underscore the need for a holistic framework that aligns artistic practice with governance, community participation, and sustainable urban development objectives.

Developing Hypotheses

From the case analysis, several propositions emerge. First, influential public art in Nigerian cities requires sustainable operational models and frameworks that address funding and implementation challenges. Second, community engagement is crucial for public art's successful creation, management, and impact. Third, addressing specific challenges, such as iconoclasm, political restrictions, and property rights, is essential for sustainability and the positive impact of public art projects. Fourth, stakeholder involvement particularly that of local and professional artists and local residents, enhances the impact of public art on nation-building and community development.

Comparing with Existing Literature

In agreement with the findings based on the case studies on the need for an operational model or sustainable framework for public art projects in Nigeria, Hunting (2005) identified the need for more mature public art initiatives by adopting research-based objectives, standards, and sound public administration principles. These include developing documents such as public art policy or public art framework, which contain guidelines for funding, implementing, and maintaining public art projects. Many countries that have successful public art programmes have adopted this initiative. Radišic (2007) investigated public art

policy and legal and financial policy instruments considering the United States of America, France, and the United Kingdom. Gesare (2024) observed that the public art process can be lengthy and complex from conceptualization to installation, but with effective project management and a collaborative, transparent approach, it is achievable, offering significant rewards for both artists and the community.

Securing funding for public art can be challenging but it is crucial for any public art programme (Project for Public Spaces, 2019). Public funding plays a vital role in creating and maintaining public art to ensure that the aesthetic, educational, and community purposes it is meant for are adequately met (Wanjiku, 2024). Beyond donations from individuals and corporations, financial support can be obtained through various methods, categorized into four main areas: public/private sector collaborations, percent and non-percent-for-art programmes, developer contributions, and local funding sources (Project for Public Spaces, 2019).

The view that effective community engagement is essential for a public art project to succeed and meet its objectives is supported by many studies (Cheung et al., 2021). Petroniene and Juzeleniene (2022) worked on tackling the challenges of community engagement through public art (focusing on mural art) in three socially disconnected cities, including Heerlen (the Netherlands), Waterford (Ireland), and Kaunas (Lithuania). The study's findings revealed that through community engagement workshops, mural art fosters social interaction and supports sustainable community and urban development (Petroniene and Juzeleniene, 2022).

It is essential to address the issue of iconoclasm, political restrictions, and property rights in public art in Nigeria. Scott (2009) suggested prioritizing awareness (as many public artworks may be vandalized due to a lack of knowledge) and focusing on security enhancements. There is a need to clarify the stance on acts of public art destruction and ensure consistent communication to potential perpetrators that any interference without the consent of the owner or guardian is a criminal act (Scott, 2009). This is because, regardless of the motives behind vandalizing public artwork, such acts undermine the core responsibility to safeguard cultural artifacts for future generations. According to Smith (2016), while property owners generally have the right to destroy their property, when public art is deeply connected to a community's culture, the community's right to preserve it should prevail. However, while communities can use legal measures to protect public art, preservation has limits, given that if a landmark no longer reflects or unifies the community, it might be best to let it go to make room for new creations (Smith, 2016).

Wang and Ma (2017), through empirical and analytical research efforts, offered insights into enhancing stakeholder involvement in public art administration by examining the policy-making patterns for public art-driven urban planning in Hefei, China. As public art evolves, artists must continually reassess the significance of their audience, including aesthetic and moral values, and foster open dialogue between communities (Yang, Jian, and Siu, 2023). By valuing and understanding their audience's experiences and interpretations, public artists can more effectively convey the essence of their work and ensure that public art fully realizes its environmental, economic, and social potential (Yang, Jian, and Siu, 2023).

Theoretical Framework for Public Art Interventions in Nigeria

Theories serve as interpretive tools that can elucidate various dimensions of an issue, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding (Collins and Stockon, 2018). Theoretical explanations of public art interventions in Nigeria can be better understood through the integration of cultural economics, social capital, place attachment, placemaking, and regulatory theories. These theoretical perspectives provide multidimensional insights into how public art contributes to urban regeneration, cultural sustainability, economic development, and social interaction within contemporary Nigerian cities. Grounding these theories within specific Nigerian public art initiatives further strengthens their practical relevance and analytical applicability.

Cultural Economics Theory

The field of cultural economics, also known as the economics of art and culture, examines the interaction between arts and the economy and applies economic principles to analyze the dynamics of the arts and cultural sectors (Frey, 2019). Cultural economics offers a valuable framework for understanding the economic dimensions of artistic and cultural activities. Cultural economics explores the economic aspects of cultural goods and activities, emphasizing the interplay between cultural production, consumption, and value creation (Bille, 2024). Cultural economics theory recognizes culture as a driver of economic growth and innovation. The idea of 'culture-driven urban revitalization' is increasingly becoming the emerging strategy for reinvigorating and stimulating local economic growth in cities, giving rise to the vision of the creative/cultural city (Leng, 2016). Integrating public art into urban development strategies based on the principles of cultural economics theory can facilitate job creation in the creative sector, support cultural tourism, and generate revenue for local businesses. By enhancing the aesthetic appeal and cultural vibrancy of urban areas, public art can spur economic growth and improve the quality of life for residents. Public art can beautify cities, enhance quality of life, and add value to communities and their assets (Cheung et al., 2021). Since rapid urbanization and cultural diversity intersect in Nigeria, leveraging cultural economics theory can provide insights into how public art can contribute to urban revitalization and economic development. Most cities in Nigeria are hubs of cultural diversity and artistic expression, offering fertile ground for applying cultural economics theory to public art initiatives. By leveraging cultural assets, cities in Nigeria can capitalize on their unique heritage and cultural diversity to stimulate economic development and compete in the global marketplace, providing opportunities for inclusive growth, social cohesion, and cultural exchange.

The activities of the House of Bezalel group, which has produced numerous monumental sculptures and murals across Lagos metropolis, demonstrate how public art contributes to urban branding and the visual identity of the city, providing a strong example of this theoretical perspective. Public artworks installed in locations such as Ojuelegba, Falomo Underbridge, and major transport corridors function as visual landmarks that enhance the attractiveness of urban spaces and contribute to Lagos' image as a creative and culturally vibrant city. Similarly, the "Lagos at 50" public sculpture initiatives and artistic installations integrated into Eko Atlantic and other urban renewal projects reveal how governments and private developers increasingly deploy public art as part of broader economic and tourism-oriented urban development strategies (The Punch Nigeria, 2017). The integration of art into commercial and transportation spaces also stimulates employment opportunities for artists, designers, curators, and creative entrepreneurs, thereby reinforcing the economic

dimensions of public art practice in Nigeria. Within this framework, public art becomes both a cultural resource and an economic instrument capable of enhancing the competitiveness and symbolic capital of Nigerian cities.

Social Capital Theory

The fundamental idea behind social capital is that interactions, relationships, and connections within a social or network structure are valuable assets contingent upon the concreteness and quality of these relations (Ali et al., 2023). The social capital theory posits that social networks, relationships, and norms of reciprocity within a community contribute to its combined efficacy and well-being (Cvetanovic, Despotovic, and Filipovic, 2015; Çaliskan and Ezilmez, 2021; Singapur, 2022). It encompasses bonding social capital (within-group cohesion) and bridging social capital (inter-group connections), facilitating cooperation, resource sharing, and collective action (Kopren and Westlund, 2021). The social capital theory highlights the role of trust, social cohesion, and civic participation in fostering resilient, inclusive communities (Çaliskan and Ezilmez, 2021; Singapur, 2022). Drawing on social capital theory, public art installations create opportunities for community members to engage in shared cultural experiences, building social cohesion and trust.

Utilizing social capital through participatory arts is a multifaceted undertaking, influenced by factors including participant responses and the extent to which individuals perceive local community assets and networks as representative of their needs, with bonding and bridging outcomes contingent upon these considerations (Daykin et al., 2021). This theory is relevant because public art projects frequently encourage social interactions and community engagement, building networks and enhancing social cohesion (Chinedu, 2024). Public art projects create gathering spaces where residents and visitors can interact, fostering a sense of belonging and community pride. Social capital theory suggests that vibrant social networks and civic engagement are essential drivers of economic development (Singapur, 2022). Integrating public art into urban development strategies can have positive economic impacts by attracting visitors, stimulating local businesses, and increasing property values. This, in turn, encourages entrepreneurship, cultural tourism, and investment in local amenities, thereby contributing to economic growth and prosperity. Public art initiatives foster social capital by involving collaboration between artists, community members, local governments, and stakeholders while enhancing social cohesion through shared experiences and a sense of belonging (Gesare, 2024). Applying social capital theory to public art projects in Nigeria can help address urbanization challenges, including inadequate infrastructure and social fragmentation, by strengthening social networks, fostering trust, and promoting civic engagement. Initiatives such as community-based public art projects and public art festivals can provide platforms for residents to collaborate, share stories, and celebrate cultural diversity, building social capital and revitalizing urban spaces.

Mural art interventions in Anambra State provide practical illustrations of this theory. Okafor's (2024) study of murals at Bridge-Head Onitsha, Nibo, and Aroma Flyover Awka demonstrates how public murals create opportunities for social interaction, collective memory, and public communication. The murals incorporate locally recognizable cultural symbols and narratives that encourage residents to identify with their environment while fostering community pride and belonging. The social function of mural art is particularly significant in densely populated urban areas where public spaces often experience fragmentation and declining social interaction. Through visual storytelling and symbolic representation,

these murals stimulate public dialogue concerning identity, culture, and urban experience. In this sense, public art functions as a medium for strengthening interpersonal relationships and reinforcing shared social values. Mural and graffiti initiatives in under-bridge spaces and public corridors in major Nigerian cities like Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Benin City, Enugu, Ibadan, Kano, Abeokuta, Kaduna, and Calabar encourage participation among artists, residents, youth groups, and local organizations, while also fostering social capital formation. These interactions contribute to the development of informal cultural networks and communal urban engagement. Thus, social capital theory explains how public art interventions can strengthen community relationships and support inclusive urban development in Nigerian cities.

Place Attachment Theory

Space is a place like public art scenes where users conduct activities based on different needs (Zabawa-Krzypkowska and Gron, 2020). Public space can either function as a system with defined urban roles or as a shared area shaped by its users, serving as a site for both power consolidation and the emergence of political identities (Tunali, 2021). Thus, the attributes of public art are essential for forming the bond between the users and the space. Place attachment has been defined as a bond between an individual or group and a place, which can vary in terms of spatial level, degree of specificity, and social or physical features of the place (Alirhayim, 2023). Place attachment theory posits that individuals develop emotional bonds with specific physical environments based on their experiences, memories, and interactions within those spaces (Purwanto and Harani, 2020; Inalhan, Yang, and Weber, 2021). This theory is crucial for understanding the role of public art in urban development, as it highlights how public art can transform physical spaces into essential elements of a community's identity (Gesare, 2024). It provides a lens to understand how individuals' emotional connections with their environments influence a sense of belonging, identity, community cohesion, and well-being (Jones & Walker, 2023). The theory suggests that people form strong connections to places with personal and communal significance, influencing their behavior and attitudes towards those areas (Chinedu, 2024).

Attachment to place has been identified as a critical component that imparts meaning and identity to a place (Rutha and Abbas, 2021). Attachment is created as individuals interact with public art projects' social, economic and physical environment. Place attachment is a variable that expresses the meanings people assign to a specific place through their experiences with it. Place attachment theory is particularly relevant because public art projects often enhance urban spaces' symbolic and emotional value, fostering a deeper connection between residents and their environment (Chinedu, 2024). Public art engages people through creativity and beauty in urban spaces, challenging the dominant social order by fostering a more inclusive and dynamic public experience (Tunali, 2021). Public art can strengthen residents' attachment to their neighborhoods by creating visually appealing and meaningful landmarks, encouraging them to actively preserve and improve their surroundings (Chinedu, 2024). Drawing on place attachment theory to promote public art initiatives in Nigeria can create emotionally resonant spaces that evoke positive feelings and memories among residents. Public art projects can strengthen social ties, encourage dialogue, and revitalize neglected neighborhoods, enhancing urban livability and well-being.

The mural projects in major Nigerian cities like Lagos, Akwa, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Benin City, Enugu, Ibadan, Kano, Abeokuta, Kaduna, and Calabar, strongly illustrate this theoretical perspective. The incorporation of indigenous imagery, historical references, and cultur-

ally familiar symbols within the murals enhances emotional attachment between residents and their urban surroundings. By visually representing local experiences and identities, the murals reinforce feelings of pride, ownership, and cultural continuity among community members. Likewise, monumental public sculptures and memorial installations in Lagos contribute to place attachment by functioning as recognizable urban symbols connected to civic memory and collective identity. Sculptures commemorating political leaders, cultural figures, and historical events help residents establish emotional relationships with urban locations while reinforcing the historical consciousness of the city. Through the lens of place attachment theory, public art becomes an important mechanism for preserving cultural memory and strengthening people's emotional connections to urban spaces.

Placemaking Theory

Placemaking, the enhancement of neglected urban areas, has emerged as a versatile and dynamic approach to engage communities on various subjects, representing a relatively new intervention in urban development (Razi and Ziminski, 2022). According to Mohammed and Saad (2022), placemaking is an overarching concept, a hands-on approach, and a cumulative process that encourages users to reimagine and reinvent their public spaces, strengthening the bond between them and the places they share (place attachment). Public art is a global place-making tool for stimulating urban revitalization and enhancing social capital (Matthews and Gadaloff, 2022). Placemaking theory emphasizes the creation of inclusive, vibrant, and culturally rich public spaces that reflect the identity and aspirations of the community (Huh, 2024). Placemaking transforms underutilized spaces into lively, functional areas that promote social interaction, economic activity, and a sense of belonging. Placemaking theory recognizes the importance of community participation, stakeholder collaboration, and integrating art and culture into urban design (Cheung et al., 2021). Public art plays a crucial role in placemaking by activating public spaces, fostering emotional connections with the built environment, driving urban regeneration, and boosting social capital (Mathews and Gadaloff, 2022). By applying placemaking theory to public art initiatives, Nigeria can harness the transformative power of creativity and community engagement to revitalize urban areas and drive economic development. However, success hinges on sustained investment, collaborative governance, and meaningful participation from diverse stakeholders.

Contemporary Nigerian public art interventions provide numerous examples of placemaking practices. In Lagos, the Falomo Underbridge mural projects illustrate how public art can revitalize infrastructural spaces while improving public perception of urban environments (Osadare, 2017). Similarly, the mural interventions examined in Anambra State transformed visually monotonous urban corridors into culturally expressive environments that encourage public interaction and urban engagement. These projects demonstrate that public art can function as a low-cost but highly effective placemaking strategy capable of improving environmental aesthetics and increasing the symbolic value of urban spaces. The placemaking potential of public art is particularly relevant within Nigerian cities experiencing rapid urbanization, infrastructural pressure, and declining public space quality. Through creative interventions, artists and urban stakeholders are able to reimagine public environments in ways that promote cultural visibility, accessibility, and social inclusion.

Regulatory Theory

Regulatory theory explains why regulation arises, identifies the critical actors involved in its development, and outlines the typical patterns of interaction among these regulatory participants (Morgan and Yeung, 2007). According to Morgan and Yeung (2007), there are three basic categories of regulatory theories, including public interest, private interest, and institutionalist. Public interest theories suggest that legislators and other regulators are motivated by a desire to pursue common goals to enhance the community's general welfare. Private interest theories assume that regulation arises from the actions of individuals or groups driven by self-interest, and any promotion of the public interest is merely coincidental. Institutionalist theories emphasize the interdependence of state and non-state actors in pursuing both public benefit and private gain within regulatory regimes. Based on this, it becomes clear that people's interests in public art initiatives differ, and these interests drive their emotions toward compliance with the regulatory framework.

Applying this theory provides a comprehensive understanding of the regulatory landscape of public art initiatives by examining how public interest (community goals), private interest, and institutionalist dynamics influence them. According to Drahos and Krygier (2017), a significant issue for regulatory theory involves the causal role of emotions, mainly whether emotions are dependent on beliefs or contribute to forming those beliefs. However, whether implicit or explicit, the use of regulatory tools and strategies by regulators to influence the behavior of those being regulated is typically based on the assumption of rationality rather than emotions (Drahos and Krygier, 2017). Therefore, responsive regulation theory suggests that regulators should first understand the context and motivations of those they regulate and then tailor their response accordingly (Drahos and Krygier, 2017). Based on this theory, safeguarding interest demands contributing to a robust regulatory network where law, civic virtue, and transparent, accountable defenders of public interests work together (Drahos and Krygier, 2017). In connection with this, stakeholders, including local or professional artists, urban planners, local residents, commercial entities, or any individual (s) advocating for a robust regulatory framework for public art in Nigeria, must ensure it prioritizes public interest over self-interest. Drawing from regulatory theory reveals that in Nigeria, there is a need to develop regulatory frameworks that offer incentives for private investment in public art, such as tax benefits or grants, to balance the interests of private stakeholders with public goals and ensure that projects benefit both the community and the private sector.

Advocating for a Public Art Sustainability Framework in Nigeria

Based on the findings from the literature review, case studies, and relevant theoretical perspectives, this study proposes the adoption of a Public Art Sustainability Framework in Nigeria. The framework is designed to enhance the effectiveness, relevance, and long-term viability of public art in urban environments by integrating social capital, cultural economics, place attachment, placemaking, and regulatory theories, anchoring on five interconnected pillars, including building social networks and community cohesion, unlocking the economic value of cultural assets, deepening emotional connections to place, designing interactive and inclusive public spaces, and ensuring robust policy and institutional support. It aims to position public art not only as an aesthetic intervention but also as a catalyst for community strengthening, cultural expression, economic development, and sustainable urban transformation. The proposed framework as presented in Figure 3.

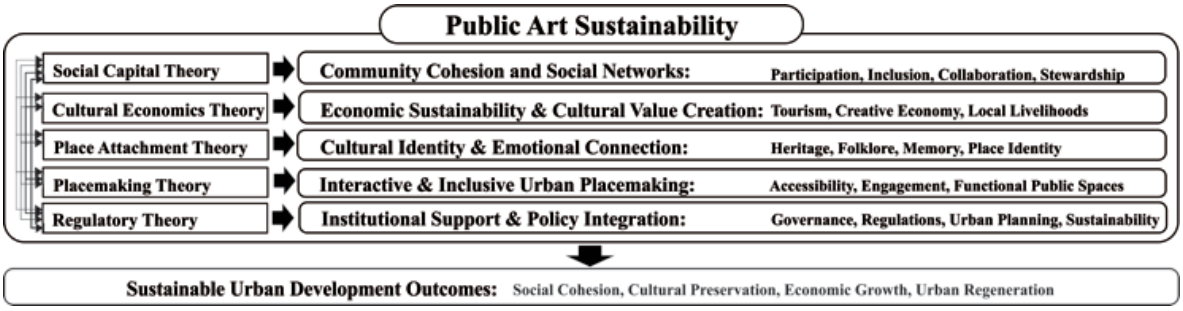


Figure 3. Proposed Public Art Sustainability Framework.

The practicality and applicability of the proposed framework are examined in the following discussion. This assessment focuses on how effectively the framework can be implemented within relevant contexts. It also considers the conditions necessary for its successful adoption and sustainability.

From the perspective of social capital theory, the framework emphasizes the strengthening of community relationships, trust, and networks. For public art initiatives in Nigeria to be sustainable, local communities must be actively engaged in their conception, design, and implementation, thereby fostering ownership and shared responsibility. Public art can serve as a connective platform linking artists, residents, businesses, and non-governmental organizations, thereby encouraging collaboration and communal stewardship of public spaces. This can be achieved through inclusive participatory processes such as community forums, and design workshops where stakeholders jointly contribute ideas, resources, and cultural insights. Particular attention must be given to inclusivity by ensuring that marginalized groups, including women, youth, and ethnic minorities, are meaningfully represented in decision-making processes. Through such participatory and inclusive practices, public art becomes a shared social enterprise that strengthens civic trust, enhances social cohesion, and reinforces community bonds within Nigerian cities.

Drawing on cultural economics theory, public art is positioned not only as a cultural expression but also as an economic resource with significant developmental potential. Public art can stimulate local economies by attracting cultural tourism, enhancing place attractiveness, increasing property values, and supporting local enterprises and creative industries. To maximise these benefits, innovative and sustainable funding models are required, including public–private partnerships in which corporate organizations support installations in exchange for social value recognition, as well as crowdfunding mechanisms that broaden public participation in financing art projects. Public art initiatives should prioritize the involvement of local artisans, craftsmen, and artists, thereby strengthening creative livelihoods. When strategically implemented, such projects can contribute to the regeneration of neglected urban areas, transforming them into vibrant cultural and economic hubs.

Place attachment theory underscores the emotional and psychological bonds individuals develop with their environments. Within this framework, public art becomes a medium for strengthening identity, memory, and belonging when it reflects the lived experiences, histories, and cultural narratives of communities. In the Nigerian context, public art should be grounded in indigenous traditions, folklore, and histories, thereby fostering cultural pride and a stronger sense of place identity. Installations that reflect community stories, such

as murals created with local youth participation or sculptures inspired by neighborhood heritage, can deepen emotional engagement with public spaces. Such artworks enhance residents' attachment to their environment, reinforcing both individual and communal belonging.

Placemaking theory highlights the importance of designing public spaces that encourage interaction, inclusivity, and active use. In Nigerian urban environments, public art can function as a transformative tool for converting underutilized or neglected spaces into vibrant communal destinations. Rather than serving solely decorative purposes, public art should be integrated into the functional design of public spaces to encourage engagement and social interaction. Examples include sculptures that double as seating, murals that invite community participation, or interactive installations that stimulate play and dialogue. When thoughtfully integrated into parks, squares, streetscapes, and civic spaces, public art contributes to creating safe, welcoming, and socially dynamic environments.

Regulatory theory emphasizes the significance of strong institutional and policy frameworks in sustaining public art practice, implying that in Nigeria public art could be formally integrated into urban planning instruments such as state physical development plans and city master plans. This requires the establishment of clear regulatory guidelines mandating the inclusion of public art in major infrastructure and urban renewal projects, as well as frameworks that incentivise private sector investment in cultural infrastructure. This approach can further be strengthened by introducing mandatory public art quotas in major infrastructure and housing developments, alongside public–private partnership incentives that encourage developers (such as those involved in projects like Eko Atlantic-style waterfront regeneration schemes) to fund and maintain culturally relevant artworks as part of approved development permits.

The effective advancement of public art in Nigeria requires an integrated and multi-theoretical approach, as captured in the proposed Public Art Sustainability Framework. The proposed framework has a strong practical feasibility and adaptability in Nigeria provided that sustained institutional commitment, inclusive governance, and diversified funding mechanisms are effectively established to overcome existing implementation constraints and ensure long-term sustainability. Its adoption will support an inclusive development by integrating social, cultural, economic, and institutional dimensions towards enabling public art initiatives to simultaneously promote economic development, strengthen social cohesion, reinforce cultural identity, and enhance the livability of urban spaces in a coordinated manner. Public art that is community-driven, culturally grounded, economically sustainable, and institutionally supported will not only enhance the aesthetic quality of Nigerian cities but also contribute meaningfully to their long-term social and urban sustainability.

Practical Implications

Policymakers in Nigeria should reposition public art within existing urban development and infrastructure financing frameworks rather than treating it as a marginal cultural consideration in urban development. Given persistent fiscal constraints, competing sectoral priorities, and dependence on oil-linked revenue allocations, dedicated public art funding should be embedded within state and municipal capital budgets through a statutory earmark tied to urban renewal, transport infrastructure, and environmental beautification

projects. At the federal and state levels, this can be operationalized through an expanded culture or creative economy intervention window within agencies such as the Ministry of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy, with implementation aligned to the Public Procurement Act and oversight from procurement authorities to ensure transparency in commissioning processes. To reduce vulnerability to annual budget volatility, legally structured Art Endowment Trust Funds should be established at state level, governed by independent boards comprising government, private sector, and professional bodies, with clear provisions allowing for corporate social responsibility (CSR) contributions, diaspora philanthropy, and percentage-for-art deductions from qualifying public construction projects.

Public-private partnership models should move beyond ad-hoc sponsorships to binding concession-style agreements integrated into infrastructure delivery contracts. In practical terms, a percentage-for-art-in-public-works policy can be mandated for major developments such as bridges, airports, transport terminals, and housing estates executed through federal or state tenders, ensuring that a fixed proportion of capital expenditure is reserved for public art components. Corporate participation should be incentivized through targeted tax relief on verified cultural investments under existing tax legislation, while state investment promotion agencies can bundle public art into urban branding packages designed to attract tourism, hospitality investment, and real estate value uplift. However, enforcement must account for Nigeria's bureaucratic fragmentation and weak inter-agency coordination by assigning a single lead implementation unit at state level to avoid duplication, delays, and contractor capture.

Sustainability of public art in Nigeria also depends on institutional clarity and maintenance governance, which are currently weak points in public infrastructure management. Structured maintenance systems are essential to preserve the durability and relevance of public art within evolving urban landscapes. Dedicated Public Art Units should be established within state ministries of works, environment, or culture, with legal mandates covering commissioning, maintenance scheduling, deaccessioning protocols, and vandalism response. Maintenance obligations should be contractually embedded into initial commissioning agreements, with lifecycle costing included in project approval under Bureau of Public Procurement guidelines to prevent abandonment after installation.

Dedicated public art agencies or commissions should be established to oversee commissioning processes, funding allocation, project implementation, and long-term maintenance. Such institutions would ensure alignment with urban development goals while safeguarding the artistic, cultural, and functional integrity of installations. Community participation mechanisms should be formalized through ward-based cultural committees linked to local government structures, ensuring that consultation is not symbolic but tied to approval milestones and siting decisions. Continuous monitoring should be institutionalized through simple but enforceable performance indicators, such as usage, condition rating, and community satisfaction surveys, reported annually to state assemblies to improve accountability.

Policy effectiveness will depend on aligning public art governance with Nigeria's realities of institutional overlap, informal urban economies, and uneven enforcement capacity. Regulatory frameworks should prioritize clarity over complexity by consolidating approval

authority, reducing multi-layered permitting bottlenecks, and integrating public art planning into urban master plans at the design stage rather than retrofitting. Capacity building for local artists, planners, and municipal officials should be linked to existing tertiary institutions and professional bodies to ensure technical continuity. In this way, public art becomes not a discretionary aesthetic intervention, but a regulated, finance-linked, and maintenance-conscious component of Nigeria's urban development system with measurable cultural and economic returns.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited by its reliance primarily on secondary sources. The study provides a predominantly theoretical and observatory understanding of public art sustainability without extensive empirical evidence derived directly from key stakeholders, such as artists, policymakers, urban planners, private developers, and community residents involved in public art initiatives within Nigerian cities. Future research should incorporate ethnographic methods and field-based investigations to provide deeper empirical insights into public art practices and experiences within Nigerian cities.

Conclusion

The study found that public art possesses significant potential to support urban revitalization in Nigeria through its contributions to cultural identity, social cohesion, and economic development. Despite these benefits, the sustainability of public art initiatives in Nigeria remains constrained by institutional weaknesses, inadequate funding structures, and limited policy integration within urban development systems. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated governance frameworks, sustainable financing mechanisms, and stronger integration of public art into spatial planning and urban policy. Drawing on social capital, cultural economics, place attachment, placemaking, and regulatory theories, the study establishes that sustainable public art practice depends on participatory engagement, cultural relevance, inclusive spatial design, and effective institutional support. The proposed Public Art Sustainability Framework therefore provides an integrated approach that combines social, cultural, economic, spatial, and institutional dimensions to position public art as a strategic instrument for sustainable urban development in Nigeria. Its implementation can contribute to more inclusive, culturally vibrant, and economically productive urban environments. The study further highlights the need for collaborative partnerships among governments, artists, urban planners, private developers, cultural institutions, and community groups in advancing sustainable public art practice in Nigeria.

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Towards Rural Landscape Planning

the Importance of Heritage Preservation in Oases in Mediterranean Countries – Case Studies: Siwa Oasis (Egypt), Ghardania Oasis (Algeria), Gafsa Oasis (Tunisia) & Figuig Oasis (Morocco)

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Abstract

As for this paper, it intends to evaluate the status of conservation of Mediterranean oases such as Siwa of Egypt, Ghardaia of Algeria, Gafsa of Tunisia, and evaluate Figuig of Morocco. The purpose is to outline the measures and recommendations that can be included in practice in order to reconsider heritage protection in Figuig with references to other oases. Hence, in this study, it analyses the main problems and solutions concerning heritage management based on the analysis of the literature and comparison of different cases. Thus, the results highlight the importance of sustaining the involvement of the local communities, the proper farming techniques, the promotion of eco-tourism, and the effective use of modern technologies for the preservation of the cultural and geographical identity of the oasis. Therefore, the aim of this research is to establish the measures on which the sustainability and preservation of the Figuig oasis could be addressed and handed down to the next generations.

Keywords: *Heritage Preservation, Mediterranean Oases, Siwa Oasis, Ghardaia Oasis, Gafsa Oasis, Figuig Oasis, Sustainable Agriculture, Cultural Heritage, Water Management, Conservation Strategies*

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Introduction

An oasis is a fertile tract of land that occurs in a desert wherever a perennial supply of fresh water is available. Oases vary in size, ranging from about 1 hectare (2.5 acres) around small springs to vast areas of naturally watered or irrigated land (Hadagha et al. 2018).

Oases are also unique cultural, historical and ecological landscapes and therefore the preservation of the heritage in oases is considered to be of great importance. Indeed, the human histories of some of the harshest desert margins, those featuring desert oasis, now appear as major foci of early human development - as centers of people, centers of culture and even centers of trade over thousands of years. Oases represent distinctive cultural, historical, and ecological environments, making the protection of their heritage a significant priority. As unique repositories of cultural, historical, and ecological values, oases require careful preservation of their heritage. The rich cultural, historical, and ecological characteristics of oases highlight the importance of safeguarding their heritage. Oases are exceptional landscapes where cultural, historical, and ecological elements coexist, emphasizing the need for heritage conservation. Because oases embody unique cultural, historical, and ecological assets, preserving their heritage is of paramount importance. The heritage found in oases deserves special protection due to its distinctive cultural, historical, and ecological significance. Oases serve as valuable cultural, historical, and ecological landscapes, underscoring the necessity of preserving their heritage for future generations. Recognized for their unique cultural, historical, and ecological features, oases require sustained efforts to conserve their heritage. Conservation of oasis heritage is crucial, as these landscapes possess exceptional cultural, historical, and ecological value. Oases constitute irreplaceable cultural, historical, and ecological landscapes, making heritage preservation an essential responsibility (Bretzke et al. 2025).

Oases in the Mediterranean Basin have contributed towards shaping the socio-economic and cultural landscape of all societies. It is both important to preserve them and necessary to sustain and nourish that ancient landscape that still provokes wonder, awe and humility (Lassoued and Rejeb, 2016).

It is known that Siwa Oasis in Egypt where cycles of history stretch back to Alexander the Great and the culture therein is unique Berber culture. The Ghardaia Oasis in Algeria is known for its distinctive M'zab architecture, and its unspoiled, centuries-old, traditional style of communal living, using its closely-spaced buildings to actively cool itself and thereby lower temperatures to a bearable degree within its walls. The Gafsa Oasis in Tunisia is one example. Its ancient irrigation systems and sustainable agricultural practices have allowed local communities to survive for centuries. But in the modern era, they are to some extent a dying oasis. Their sustainability and cultural integrity are being tested by rapid urbanization, climate change, water scarcity, economic pressures and large-scale Hindu tourism in India. Thereby, these solutions would have to be supportive in a variety of ways such as sustainable agriculture; community participation; ecological tourism; in addition to policies taking part in the identification by the state and international agenda (Santaro, 2023).

The Figuig Oasis in Morocco acts as a telling case study to explore this reality of the past and look into the future from this lens-at once concerned with the current state of heritage preservation and with the hope of change along the way. Figuig is an eastern town in Morocco and is a historic town with a deep culture. As with most examples of built heri-

tage from the Saharan Inscriptions, Figuig faces a range of challenges including poor water management, the disappearance of traditional knowledge and livelihoods, and lack of income- generating opportunities (Salgot et al. 2014).

In this article, we investigate conservation efforts in different Mediterranean oases (Siwa, Ghardaia and Gafsa), and contrast strategies implemented in Figuig Oasis

Aims of the Study

During this study, the main objective is to assess the conservation efforts in the Mediterranean oasis, compare these efforts to those in the Moroccan Figuig oasis, and propose strategies to promote Figuig's preservation, using successful examples from other areas of the world.. This study comes at a time of increasing interest in preserving the cultural and natural heritage of the oases, as these oases represent a rich store of history, culture and environmental diversity.

The study includes a comprehensive analysis of the efforts made in Mediterranean oasis such as the Siwa Oasis in Egypt, the Ghardaia Oasis in Algeria, and the Gafsa Oasis in Tunisia, and identifies the common factors and challenges facing these efforts. By comparing these efforts with the current situation in Figuig Oasis, the study seeks to understand the gaps and challenges specific to Figuig Oasis and provide recommendations based on best practices from other oasis (Figure 1). These recommendations include enhancing local community participation in heritage conservation efforts, adopting sustainable agricultural practices, developing ecotourism initiatives that boost the local economy and support heritage conservation, obtaining funding and support from international organizations, and using modern technology to improve water resources management, agricultural practices and conservation.

Oasis Name	Country	Specific Location	Landscape Characteristics
Siwa Oasis	Egypt	Western Desert, near the Libyan border, about 300 km southwest of the Mediterranean coast	Characterized by salt lakes, natural springs, extensive date palm and olive groves, sand dunes, and the surrounding Great Sand Sea. The landscape combines fertile agricultural land with arid desert scenery.
Ghardaia Oasis	Algeria	M'zab Valley, northern Sahara Desert, central Algeria	Features a desert valley landscape with palm groves, traditional ksour (fortified settlements), rocky terrain, and a hot arid climate. The oasis is integrated with a distinctive urban and agricultural landscape.
Gafsa Oasis	Tunisia	Gafsa Governorate, southwestern Tunisia	Composed of a multi-layered agricultural landscape with date palms, fruit trees, vegetables, and cereals. The oasis is surrounded by semi-arid and desert environments and benefits from traditional irrigation systems.
Figuig Oasis	Morocco	Oriental Region, eastern Morocco, near the Algerian border	Consists of palm groves, terraced gardens, traditional ksour, and a network of springs and khettara irrigation systems. The oasis lies between the High Atlas and Saharan Atlas regions within a pre-Saharan desert landscape.

Figure 1. Characteristics of the four oases.

Historic sites, and develop comprehensive heritage preservation plans that include clear goals, timelines, and specific responsibilities to ensure the effectiveness of heritage preservation efforts. Through these strategies, Figuig Oasis can maintain its cultural and ecological balance and achieve sustainability for future generations.

Methodology

A literature review was conducted to examine the relationship between urban growth and the environment, focusing in particular on oasis habitats in the Mediterranean region. Additionally, all relevant governmental documents, reports and web links were also reviewed. This study reviews existing scientific literature on conservation of heritage in oasis, focusing on key aspects such as historical importance, conservation of architecture, sustainable practices and community participation.

The methodology includes a literature review and a comparative analysis. The study begins with a comprehensive literature review, analyzing scientific articles, academic journals, government reports and NGO publications that provide an in-depth look at heritage conservation efforts in oases such as Siwa, Ghardaia and Gafsa. The former method would serve to understand the historical and cultural context of each oasis, to observe applied conservation strategies and plans, and to reflect on the facing challenges. This strategy gives us qualitative data that we can directly return to in order to better understand the local context and pinpoint areas for work that are as of yet insufficient. These collected data are going to be the basis for the comparative analysis implemented to determine successful strategies in heritage preservation in there oases of Siwa, Ghardaia and Gafsa, and to examine them relative to the situation in Figuig Oasis. This analysis allows the strengths and weaknesses of each of these efforts to be identified, enabling specific recommendations to strengthen heritage conservation efforts in the Figuig Oasis.

Results

Long-term land-cover and habitat monitoring is necessary to assess changes in landscape ecological features in order to: (a) comprehend the drivers of the temporal changes; (b) plan for future trends; and (c) develop appropriate conservation policies (Fisher and Lindenmayer 2007; Bunce et al. 2008; Nagendra et al.2004).

On the other hand, Oases are recognized to offer a variety of ecological services, including socioeconomic advantages, resilience to soil erosion and degradation, decreased danger of flooding, and delaying the effects of climate change (Dahri and Abida 2020; Haj-Amor et al.2020). These oases are not only important for local populations but also for several avian species (Hamza et al.2022). Due to their mild microclimatic conditions, many Palearctic birds winter in these kinds of agroecosystems (Hamza and Hanane 2021).
As a result of our literature review and local government resources research, the findings we obtained regarding the oasis in this article were described as follows:

Siwa Oasis -Egypt

Siwa Oasis -Egypt lies on the edge of the Great Sand Sea only 300km southwest of the Mediterranean and Marsa Matrouh (L. Rovero and others, 2009), and around 70km east of the Libyan border. Siwa is famous for its dates, along with olives and oranges. Siwa averages 18m below sea level and has always had more than its share of excess ground water, and the salinity of the ground and the size of the lakes have increased over centuries of agriculture and irrigation run-off. Siwa has been inhabited from earliest times, Figure 2. There are tombs and other remains dating from the Late Dynastic period in Siwa. A large number of monuments from the Greco-Roman era (Hatem T, 2008), which began with the

reign of Alexander who was recorded visiting the place, indicate a population boom in the oasis at that time. Today most of the population lives in the town of Siwa, a few other villages are scattered in other parts of the depression. The oasis enjoys a unique environment that combines lush cultivated areas, natural vegetation, and stark desert landscapes. There are several salt lakes in Siwa, and Siwa is also rich in its flowing springs of sweet sparkling water (Asham et al. 2023; Hassan 1978).



Figure 2. A traditional settlement in the west desert in Siwa, Egypt.

The need to preserve vernacular architecture has grown in recent years. Human demands have evolved as a result of development, since people now choose to employ new technology that can improve their lives in every way. Modern construction techniques and architectural technology have a significant impact on architectural design, particularly in isolated desert vernacular towns where cultural legacy must be conserved. When exploring Siwa, we discovered:

- Urban morphology

Siwa continues to preserve a compact, narrow, and erratic layout that limits vehicle traffic while promoting a comfortable pedestrian environment (Mohamed A. Hanafi and Ahmed Y. Rashed, 2004, Figure 3).



Figure 3. Urban morphology and texture in Siwa, Egypt.

- Landscape

Siwa Oasis is characterized by beautiful natural landscapes, including:
Scenic salt lakes, Great Sand Sea and agricultural landscape with date and olive trees (Mervat ElShafie, 2010) (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Landscape in Siwa, Egypt.

- Built Up Heritage

Alexander the Great's temple and tombs from the early pharaonic periods provide historical evidence for a very early beginning. In Siwa, there is a significant abundance of traditional dwellings (Eltawil H, 1989, Figure 5).



Figure 5. Alexander the Great's temple.

- Vernacular Architecture

The built environment can be divided into three categories: new concrete structures imported from the valley, old traditional houses that are mostly falling apart, and neotraditional attempts that replicate traditional elements sometimes using entirely different materials, like steel (Marwa Dabaieh, 2011, Figure 6).

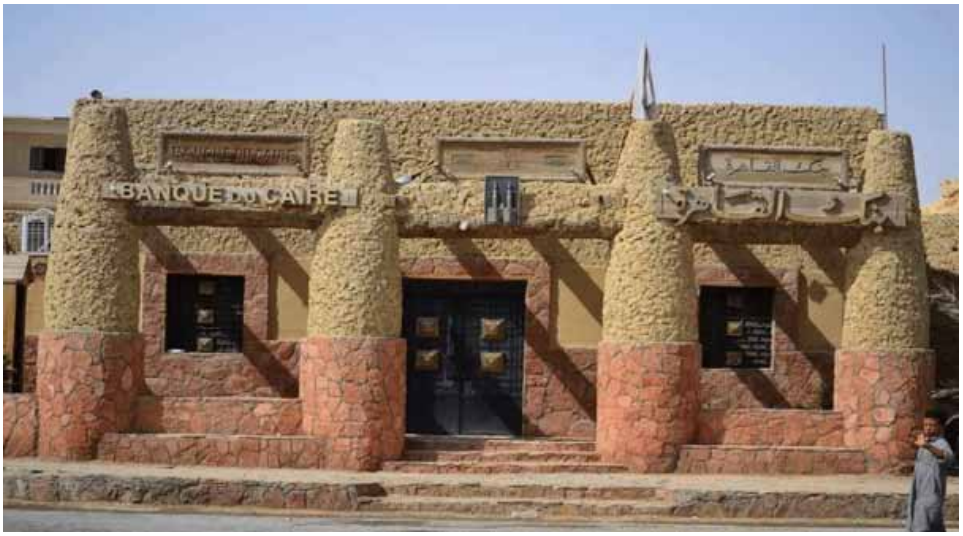


Figure 6. The local bank in Siwa, Egypt.

Preservation Plans in Siwa, Egypt

It is clear that Siwa Oasis is rich with vital cultural heritage landscape that is why it requires preservation which reflects an image of urban desert communities and oases ecosystem including the remnants of features witness to its style. Therefore, it should preserve the site with stock rare and valuable physical characteristics, and to raise residents through a comprehensive system for aspects of physical, economic, social and others. There are some preservation plans in Siwa oasis in different fields:

Initiatives for Culture Conservation: These range from documentation of the rich and diverse tradition of Siwan music, dance and handicrafts. These old traditions are kept up because NGOs (both local and international) have worked tirelessly to promote cultural festivals and workshops.

Architectural Conservation: Restoration projects to protect ancient Tali Fortress built of kershef (a mixture of salt and mud) and other historical sites. These projects tend to be partnerships between the Egyptian state, UNESCO and heritage organizations. Development of Sustainable Tourism: In order to minimize the impact of tourism on local environments and cultures, eco-friendly tourism development initiatives have been undertaken. Such measures include eco-lodges and guided tours reinforcing an ethos of sensitivity towards the shared natural and cultural heritage of Siwa.

Ghardaia Oasis, Algeria

General informations about Ghardaia Oasis, Algeria

Ghardaia is located in the south of Algeria, which is well known by its hot arid climate, its ksurs (dense old buildings), its river, and its detached houses surrounded by Palme trees. The climate of Ghardaia is characterized by a very hot dry summer, the mean summer temperature in July is 36.8°C and the maximum absolute temperature is 46°C.

Historical and Cultural Significance

It was founded by the Mozabites, an Ibadi sect of the Berber Muslims. It is a major center of date production and the manufacture of rugs and cloths. Divided into three walled sectors, it is a fortified town. At the center is the historical M'zabite area, with a pyramid-style mosque and an arcaded square.

The oasis is known for its rich cultural heritage, including unique traditions, customs, and a communal way of life centered around the Ibadi religious community.

- Architecture and Urban Planning

One of Ghardaia's most distinctive aspects is its architecture (M'zab Architecture). Traditional building techniques are used to construct the structures, which are made of locally obtained materials including stone, mud, and palm trunks. In Ghardaia, there are a variety of natural building materials such as (sandstone and black stone suitable for construction, and on the one hand, IJESC, white stone suitable for paving, and limestone suitable for ceilings and arches hidden in it, and it is used to whiten walls, when necessary, gypsum and lime are used as cement) (figure 7).



Figure 7. The architecture in Ghardaia oasis in Algeria.

Preservation Plans in Ghardaia, Algeria

Several methods have been adopted to preserve the cultural and architectural heritage of the Ghardaia Oasis in Algeria. The Heritage and Urban Planning Law is 90-29 dated December 1, 1990. Certainly, its innovation is the Land Use Plan (P.O.S.) and the Master Plan (P.D.A.U.) that replaced the (P.U.D.). This law aims to issue general rules to regulate urban real estate production, prepare and transform the urban environment, and balance between preserving the environment and historical centers with cultural heritage, in accordance with the national policy for urban and urban planning (P.O.S.) sets out in detail land use and building rights. It refers to neighborhoods, streets, monuments, and sites that need to be preserved, renovated, and restored.

In addition, the effort to integrate housing on sloping land gave rise to a variety of architecture. Designed for egalitarian community living, the architecture of housing in the oasis gives more respect to the family privacy. Each house has an underground room and two upper levels, with a space in the center, transparent with a sky window. For the period of summer, Mozabits move around to their homes located in the palm grove oases, watered by devised irrigation elements or sharing water systems (Riphenburg, 2006). Traditional Mozabit houses offer climatic arrangement suited to their climate. It is important to keep the example. There is a possibility to adapt them according to the “modern comfort” and construct' modern buildings' that are inspired from the traditional houses (Ravereau, 2007).

The Ghardaia oasis has been classified as protected area. The protected zone concerns the entire valley with a total area of 54 km2. Following this classification, a permanent plan of safeguard and development of the safeguarded sector (P.P.S.M.V.S.S) has been launched. The Office of Protection and Promotion of the oasis (OPVM) committed an ambitious program of restoration concerning historic monuments; such as religious and defensive buildings as well as water infrastructures.

Gafsa Oasis, Tunisia

General information about Gafsa Oasis, Tunisia

The historical oasis of Gafsa is one of the best expressions of the agriculture adaptation to arid climate in Tunisia. Covering more than 700 hectares, it has permitted to afford to the needs of the local communities. Based on the complex multi layered systems, this oasis is today threatened by the evolution of the production objectives: exportation and monoculture (figure 8).



Figure 8. Gafsa Oases, Tunisia.

Based on the multilayered systems, the historical oasis is a land of cereals, vegetables, fruits and date palms production. These intensive production lands represent 10% of the regional production or 9 million of Tunisian dinars. In addition, it is about 2500 and 5000 persons who are working permanently and seasonally in this oasis, insuring an income for the local communities.

Thanks to the different layers, many varieties can be cultivated in this oasis. The species and varietal biodiversity are high with some threatened local endemic varieties of trees notably of apricot trees. There are 98 varieties of date palms, 10 fruit trees species and 15 species of vegetables (the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report on the Gafsa Oasis in Tunisia).

Besides, the oasis is a habitat for spontaneous wild plants, animals, fishes or amphibians from the region. It is also considered a settlement for some migratory species such as Hoopoe birds. Due to the vegetation it allows reducing erosion risks in this windy region (Kadri and Van Ranst 2002; Kouki and Bouchaouach, 2008).

Oasis agriculture is part of the local communities' culture: traditional wool-making methods, traditional olive oil extraction, are just some examples of a rich traditional knowledge. Gafsa weaves are famous among Tunisia for their beauty and quality. Moreover, Gafsa culture has a traditional cuisine specialty linked to the product grown in the oasis. Furthermore, traditional knowledge and cultural functions have helped to preserve the traditional water management.

Preservation Plans in Gafsa Oasis, Tunisia

The current situation that the oasis sector is experiencing calls for support for multi-layered agricultural systems, such as the Gafsa Oasis, which relies on this system, as studies have proven its resilience and ability to withstand climate change, unlike modern oases that rely only on the Deglet Nour palm tree.

Smart irrigation practices must also be adopted to provide the palm trees and various crops grown in the oasis with the amount of water they need at each stage of their life cycle.

During the Regional Forum for Environmental Justice in Gafsa 2021, the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights stressed the importance of enforcing laws and legislation related to the oasis sector, especially the abandonment law. He also called for tightening control over unplanned construction on agricultural lands and taking measures to combat urban sprawl at the expense of oasis areas.

In addition, the cultivation of date varieties that consume less water will be encouraged, while preserving the soil, which is an essential element of the oasis, and ending all practices that lead to its degradation, such as industrial pollution and toxic gases emitted by institutions specialized in the field of extraction. Industries such as the Gafsa Phosphate Company and the Chemical Group (the Regional Forum for Environmental Justice in Gafsa 2021).

It is also recommended to adopt the ancient oasis model that is capable of adapting to climate change. Environmental defenders also called for activating the provisions of the National Charter for the Protection and Development of Oases in Tunisia. This national declaration aims to recognize the oasis system and take into account all its environmental, social, economic and cultural dimensions.

In the face of these challenges, Tunisia must adopt and implement a vision for sustainable development in order to preserve the wealth of the oases and search for real alternatives to support farmers in facing the challenges posed by agricultural activity in the oases and adapting to climate change, as recommended by the Tunisian Forum for the Advancement of Development (Noureddine Nasr, an agricultural engineer and researcher specializing in rural geography)(the agricultural crisis in Gafsa 2021).

Figuig Oasis, Morocco

General information about Figuig Oasis, Morocco

Figuig is an oasis located in the far east of Morocco in the Oriental region. It is located in the immediate vicinity of the Algerian border, approximately 400km south of the Mediterranean. Due to its location on the borders of the Eastern High Atlas and the Saharan Atlas, Figuig is part of the pre-Saharan continental oases (Figure 9). Currently, the oasis is made up of an urban core of seven ksour (Figure 10).

Ksour: plural of ksar, fortified village, the term designates… built in earth (Laâbidate, Elmaïz, Hammam Foukani, Hammam Thatanie, Loudaghir, Ouled Slimane and Zenaga) (Figure 10) and more recent districts (in the center the administrative district, in the north and east of new residential areas). In 2008, the city had 12,613 inhabitants.

The oasis is located on two levels, separated by the jorf (travertine escarpment similar to a cliff, approximately 30m high). The upper part, the plateau, brings together six ksour; the lower part, the plain, is occupied by Ksar Zenaga and the majority of palm plantations.

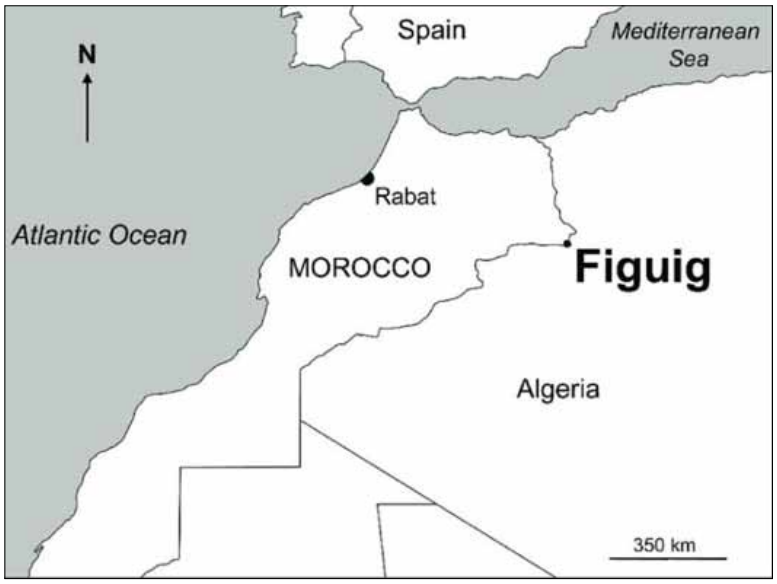


Figure 9. The location of Figuig oasis, Morocco.

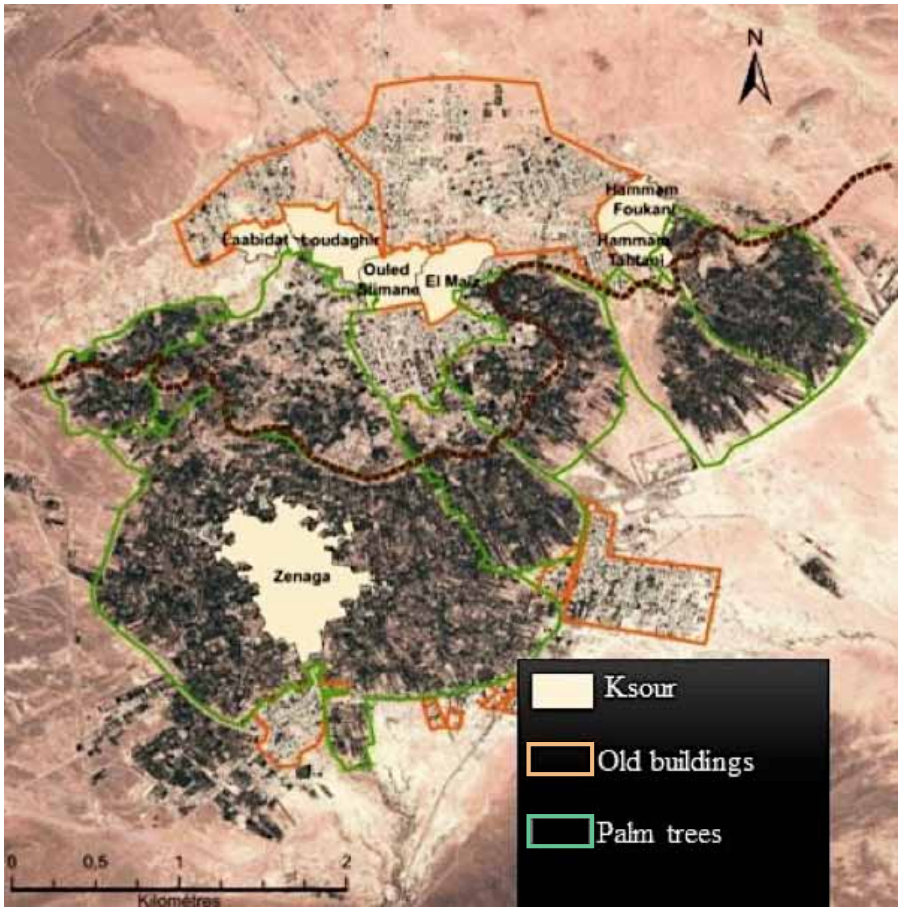


Figure 10. Organization of human settlements in the Figuig oasis(from Gillot and Vallat 2019).

Among the features of this oasis, we find:

- Historical and Architectural Significance

Figuig Oasis has been continuously inhabited since at least the 10th century. Its strategic location on the trans-Saharan trade routes facilitated the exchange of goods such as dates, salt, and gold, contributing to its prosperity and cultural richness. The ancient kasbahs (fortified villages) and mud-brick houses reflect the oasis's long-standing architectural heritage (figure 11).

In view of the importance of the architectural heritage of the Figuig Oasis, which is steeped in history and has unique engineering value, the site and palaces of the oasis were listed among the monuments, and they were also included on the UNESCO Certification List in May 2011.

In a similar statement, researcher Professor Mustafa Lali explains that the palace in the Figuig Oasis is considered an urban unit that includes several adjacent houses built according to a precise architectural and engineering design that responds to the requirements of living in the region.

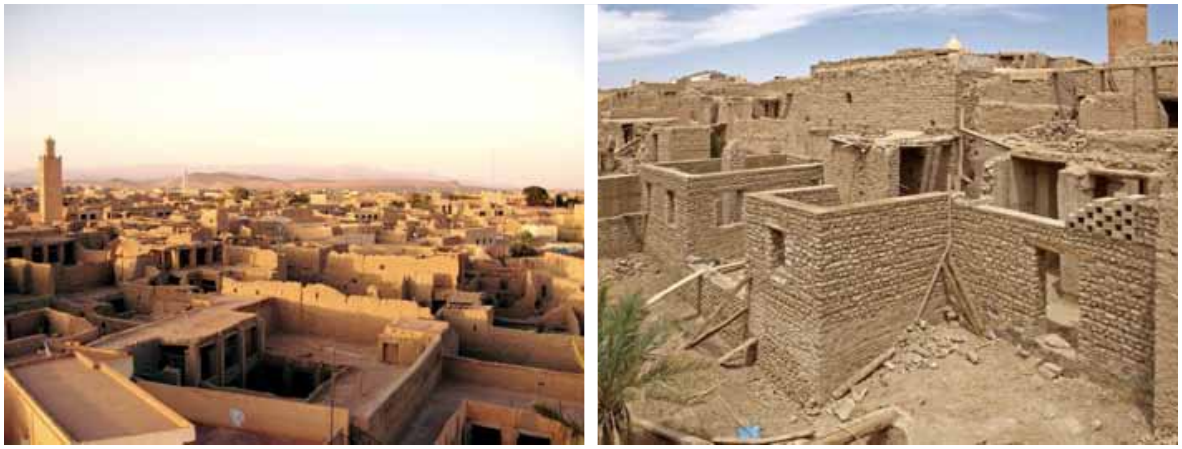


Figure 11. The ancient castles and mud-brick houses in Figuig oasis, Morocco.

- Agricultural Practices and Irrigation System

Agricultural activities predominate in Figuig Oasis, occupying an estimated 650 hectares. In order to make optimal use of the field, agriculture is practiced in a layered form of three levels, where palm trees are at the highest level and represent 80% of the number of fruit trees planted, and their number is estimated at about 120 thousand palm trees, of which 110 thousand palm trees produce various types of dates. The finest dates are “Aziza” dates. As for other fruit trees, they come in the middle level, while land crops occupy the lowest level. The intensive agriculture practiced in the oasis is linked to livestock raising, but the returns of this agriculture generally tend toward decline, especially with the increase in population migration towards major cities or abroad, which explains the deterioration and decrease in the size of exploited lands (FAO; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations).

The survival and continuity of the Figuig oasis is linked to the presence of groundwater. The fresh water provided by the thirty (30) springs that currently feed the population of Figuig and its palm oasis with a flow of about 175 liters per second (in the year 2000), noting that the majority of these springs are located on the plateau, while the agricultural lands extend in the southern plain where the Zanaka Palace is located, which includes about 40% of the oasis's population, and exploits nearly half of the general flow of existing spring water.

Figuig is renowned for its sophisticated irrigation system known as "khettara" (Figure 12). This ancient technology channels underground water through a network of tunnels to irrigate crops, enabling sustainable agriculture in the harsh desert environment. The oasis is particularly famous for its high-quality date palms (Figure 13), which produce a variety of dates that are a staple of the local economy (GIAHS; Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems).



Figure 12. Khettara irrigation system in Figuig oasis, Morocco.



Figure 13. Date palms in Figuig oasis, Morocco.

Preservation plans in Figuig oasis, Morocco

Figuig is a pre-saharian oasis which has been undergoing for several years the negative effects of its frontier position. The political instability and the socio-economic problems bound to the closure of the frontiers between Morocco and Algeria have limited the possibility of commercial and touristic activities, while favoring the flux of clandestine goods that strongly compete with both local products and legally imported ones.

Although the region has a high potential due to natural resources, richness of landscape sand biodiversity; although the strategic position could favor relations of vicinity with both Mediterranean and Saharan territories, Figuig has been unable in recent times to play any relevant role in the national economy.

The city is characterized by a specific spatial arrangement made of an interwoven constellation of seven separate Ksurs (neighborhoods), each linked to one or several palm-groves. This spatial and cultural structure is now disappearing due to the abandonment of the historical centers and to the construction of new dispersed settlements around them. Most important, the ungoverned expansion of settlements is causing a great amount of urban management problems, mainly consisting in the lack of infrastructural links and in the uneven distribution of public services and welfare provisions.

Given such a problematic background, Africa'70 elaborated a rehabilitation project on the historical heritage of the oasis in conjunction with several local associations, pursuing the amelioration of the living conditions of Figuig's inhabitants through a number of initiatives addressing the poor conditions of its built environment.

The role of ASF-Italia: the final objective of ASF's work is to trace a methodological path on how to elaborate the strategic plans that are necessary for a sustainable governance of Figuig's territory. The first on-field investigation was conducted in October 2005, aimed to shed light on the recent evolution of Figuig's urban fabric. Relief maps were drawn on each Ksur, highlighting the numerous factors that contribute to their specificity and the most evident problems in the state of conservation of the buildings and the urban fabrics, together with problems generated by the casual introduction of inappropriate building techniques (Architettura Senza Frontiere Italian Network,2003).

Although there were several proposals and plans to preserve the Figuig Oasis, they were not implemented, which caused economic deterioration in the oasis as well as in architectural, cultural and agricultural terms.

Discussion and Recommendations

Based on the above discovery, it is indicated that the strategies for the preservation of heritage in Siwa Oasis is marked by documentation and marketing of Siwan traditions, the rehabilitation of the historical structure Shali mud castles and promoting environmentally sustainable eco-tourism. In Ghardaia Oasis steps are being taken to conserve bio-diversity, Mozabite culture and architecture in addition to the restoration the traditional water systems. Regarding the axes of modernization of Gafsa Oasis; the use of modern irrigation methods in combination with the traditional ones; encouragement of organic farming and the promotion of heritage tourism as the main axes.

The cases of Siwa and Ghardaia reveal that specific approaches based on the locals' engagement to achieve sustainable protection of cultural heritage sites are effective. It also suggested that for Figuig Oasis it would be beneficial to use methods similar to that of educational programs and workshops focusing on the need to preserve the heritage and on how local communities can be used to promote and support the said cause. Second, is its ability to adopt a dual approach in the application of new technological methods of farming as well as the traditional practices in the farming of Gafsa. Similarly, Figuig Oasis must adapt these measures to enhance productivity of its agricultural sector through a suc-

cessful combination of the modern and sustainable farming practices that include use of efficient irrigation techniques without forgetting the traditional ways of farming.
The Figuig oasis presents itself as a coherent, material and cultural whole, where there is complementarity between the architecture and spatial organization of the area, the palm grove and its irrigation system and all social and cultural practices. This configuration is accentuated by its landlocked situation, generated by the closure of the Algerian border.

The elements to be protected are therefore as follows:

- Occasional monumental buildings: remarkable buildings such as mosques, cemeteries, the synagogue, the Saint Anne church, marabouts and squares.
- The architecture of the ksour and its urban organization: Ephemeral constructions, given that they are in perpetual reconstruction, but which represent the trace and the physical imprint of social organization and cultural practices. Thus, we cannot conceive of the preservation of architectural form and urban organization without the preservation of social practices.
- The palm grove as a tiered garden, with a diversity of crops and varieties of palm trees, and its irrigation system: foggaras, basins, interchanges and canals with their know-how and social practices constitute a closely intertwined set of tangible and intangible heritage to preserve their coherence.

Conclusion

In addition to its organizational structures and social, cultural and religious practices, the Figuig Oasis community has developed a distinctive earthen architecture that materializes their intangible heritage. Consequently, Figuig is an oasis that has preserved exceptional traces of its past that have become tangible heritage assets today.

A number of important architectural and archaeological sites can be found in Egypt, including walled cities, ramparts, watchtowers, mosques, shrines, irrigation canals, without forgetting the rock inscriptions mentioned above. But this heritage is also agricultural and environmental, as evidenced by the water sources, which were the origin of the palaces, the terraced gardens associated with palm trees and its irrigation system. By applying the proposed strategies, the Figuig Oasis can maintain its cultural and environmental balance and achieve sustainability for future generations. This ensures the continuation of the rich cultural and natural heritage of this unique oasis.

The conservation of oasis ecosystems in the Mediterranean region requires a comprehensive and integrated management approach. First, water resources should be protected through sustainable groundwater use, efficient irrigation systems, and pollution control measures. In addition, biodiversity must be preserved by protecting native species and controlling invasive organisms. Sustainable agricultural practices should be promoted to maintain soil fertility and reduce environmental degradation. Efforts to combat desertification and restore degraded lands are also essential for the long-term stability of oasis ecosystems. Furthermore, local communities should be actively involved in conservation initiatives, as their traditional knowledge and participation contribute significantly to sustainable resource management. Finally, continuous monitoring, scientific research, and effective environmental policies are necessary to enhance the resilience of oasis ecosystems against climate change and other human-induced pressures.

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Governance, Smart Urbanism & Urban Resilience in the Western Balkans: Comparative Insights from Prishtina, Tirana, and Podgorica

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Abstract

The imperative for urban resilience is intensifying globally, yet its application in the transitional context of the Western Balkans remains underexplored. Cities in this region, such as Prishtina, Tirana, and Podgorica, navigate post-conflict recovery, rapid urbanization, socio-economic pressures, and escalating climate threats. While smart technologies and sustainable urban development paradigms offer promising pathways to resilience, their effectiveness is contingent upon robust governance and supportive institutional frameworks, which are often fragmented in these environments. A comprehensive approach is therefore essential for sustainable urban development in the region. This study aims to critically analyze the factors shaping urban resilience in the Western Balkans. It evaluates the effectiveness of smart technologies, the role of sustainable housing policies, and the impact of governance models on the adaptive capacity of cities, with a specific focus on Prishtina, Tirana, and Podgorica in comparison to other global cities. A convergent mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative analysis involved statistical modelling of resilience indicators across eight cities, including a regression analysis to identify key predictors. Qualitative analysis included thematic coding of 30 policy documents and 25 semi-structured interviews with urban planners and policymakers to uncover governance challenges and policy implementation gaps. The findings reveal that Western Balkan cities score significantly lower on resilience metrics compared to their Western European counterparts. Qualitative data link low resilience to post-conflict legacies, informal settlements, and fragmented governance structures.

Keywords: *Urban Resilience, Smart Cities, Western Balkans, Governance, Post-Conflict Urbanism, Prishtina*

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Introduction

Background: The Global Imperative for Urban Resilience

With urban areas now housing over half of the world's population – a figure projected to reach 68% by 2050 (UN-Habitat, 2023 – cities are centres of socio-economic opportunity and vulnerability. Urban resilience, defined as the capacity of urban systems to absorb, and adapt to shocks (Meerow et al., 2016), is no longer a peripheral concern but a strategic necessity.

However, the application of these concepts is not uniform. The Western Balkans, a region characterized by a unique convergence of post-socialist transition, post-conflict recovery, and aspirations for European integration, presents a complex context. Cities like Prishtina, Tirana, and Podgorica face a distinct set of challenges, including managing informal urban sprawl, addressing high unemployment, modernizing infrastructure, and navigating fragmented governance structures (Mele & Muka, 2022). These underlying issues are compounded by significant environmental pressures, including seismic risks and increasing climate-related threats, making integrated resilience strategies urgent (Beqaj, 2019).

Research Motivation and Relevance

Much of the existing research in the field is centred on the Global North (Allam & Dhunny, 2019). These dominant models frequently prioritize technical metrics while overlooking the critical roles of governance efficiency, social equity, and institutional capacity (Leichenko, 2021). As Figure 1.2 illustrates, this study is positioned to address this gap by focusing on the under-researched domain of equity and implementation within the developing context of the Western Balkans.

This research offers an empirically grounded, integrative analysis that links smart urbanism, housing resilience, and sustainable development through the lens of real-world governance in this region. The study responds directly to calls for research that moves beyond policy rhetoric to examine the practical barriers and enablers of resilience on the ground (Olazabal et al., 2019). By aligning with global frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the New Urban Agenda, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, this research situates itself at the intersection of academic rigor and policy relevance, aiming to provide actionable insights for one of Europe's most dynamic and vulnerable regions.

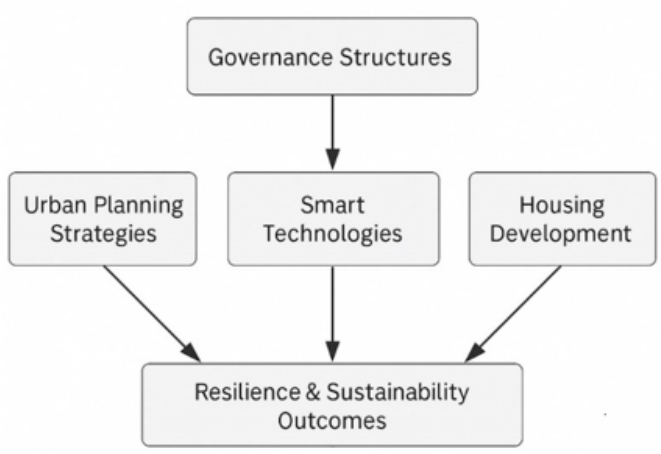


Figure 1. Map of Case Study Cities in the Western Balkans.



Figure 2. Map of Prishtina, Tirana and Podgorica.

Challenge Dimension	Prishtina (Kosovo)	Tirana (Albania)	Podgorica (Montenegro)
Socio-Economic	High youth unemployment; significant informal economy.	Rapid, chaotic urbanization; housing affordability crisis.	Economic dependency on tourism; regional disparities.
Governance	Fragmented municipal authority; post-conflict institutional building.	Issues with land tenure and legalization of informal settlements (Mele & Muka, 2022).	Challenges in inter-municipal coordination and policy enforcement.
Environmental	Air pollution; inadequate waste management; urban heat island effect.	Loss of green space to construction; vulnerability to flooding and earthquakes.	Coastal development pressures; water resource management issues.
Infrastructural	Aging public infrastructure; energy supply deficits.	Overburdened transportation networks; inadequate public services in peri-urban areas.	Need for modernization of transport and energy infrastructure.

Figure 3. Key Urban Challenges in the Western Balkans.

Research Objectives

The overarching goal of this study is to analyze how integrated urban planning strategies and sustainable housing policies can collectively enhance city-wide resilience in the Western Balkans. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Evaluate the role and effectiveness of smart technologies in fostering adaptive urban systems within the context of Western Balkan cities.
- Assess the relationship between green infrastructure, sustainable housing policies, and urban resilience outcomes in Prishtina, Tirana, and Podgorica.
- Investigate the governance models and institutional factors that enable or constrain the implementation of effective resilience and sustainability policies.
- Examine how key socio-economic indicators, particularly unemployment and social equity, shape community-level resilience.

Contribution to Literature

This research offers significant contribution to the field of urban studies. First, it provides an empirically grounded analysis of urban resilience in the under-researched context of the Western Balkans, quantifying the relationships between technology, governance, and resilience metrics. Second, it introduces *Resilience Maturity Model* (Figure 5), which conceptualizes the evolution of urban resilience practices across four distinct levels: from reactive and fragmented to anticipatory and optimized. This model serves as both a diagnostic and a planning tool, enabling municipalities to benchmark their current capabilities and identify strategic pathways toward more integrated resilience governance (Beqaj, 2019). Finally, by operationalizing governance quality and social equity as central analytical components, this study expands existing theoretical models and provides critical, evidence-based insights for policymakers.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations

Urban Resilience: From Engineering to Socio-Ecological Systems

The concept of urban resilience has evolved constantly. Early definitions focused on a system's ability to "bounce back" to a state of equilibrium following a disturbance (Holling, 1973). This engineering-based perspective, however, has been criticized for its failure to account for adaptation and transformation (Davoudi, 2012). The definition proposed by Meerow et al. (2016 – which conceptualizes resilience through the multidimensional capacities of absorption, adaptation, and transformation – is widely accepted. This model acknowledges that a resilient city does not merely survive shocks but evolves in response to them.

Frameworks for measuring resilience have often followed a techno-centric, indicator-based approach. Sharifi (2019), for instance, offers a comprehensive composite index method that captures infrastructure redundancy, governance responsiveness, and socio-economic flexibility, providing a degree of quantitative clarity. Similarly, the Rockefeller Foundation's City Resilience Index (Arup, 2014) provides a detailed framework across four dimensions: Health & Wellbeing, Economy & Society, Infrastructure & Environment, and Leadership & Strategy. However, critiques warn that an over-reliance on technical metrics can obscure deep-seated issues of social justice and power (Leichenko, 2011; Pelling, 2012). Scholars argue that resilience is not a neutral outcome; rather, its benefits are often distributed unevenly (Cutter et al., 2008). In the context of the Western Balkans, where post-conflict legacies and ethnic divisions persist, understanding "resilience for whom?" is a critical policy imperative (Beven, 2018). The capacity for adaptive governance – the ability of institutions to learn and reorganize in response to change – is therefore paramount, especially in these transitional political landscapes (Folke et al., 2005).

Conceptual Framework

The study framework posits that governance structures are the central mediating force that shapes the interaction between urban planning strategies, the deployment of smart technologies, and sustainable housing development. The quality and effectiveness of these interactions determine a city's resilience and sustainability outcomes.



Figure 4. Conceptual Framework of the Study: Image of the conceptual framework from the document, showing Governance influencing Urban Planning, Smart Tech & Housing, leading to Resilience/Sustainability.

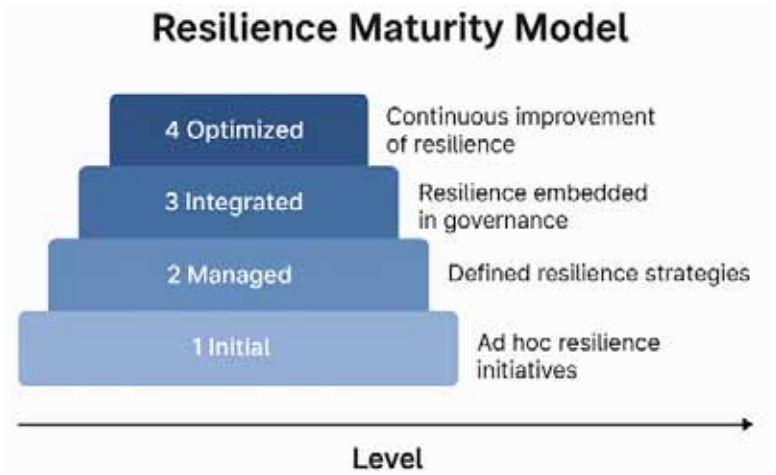


Figure 5. Resilience Maturity Model: Image of the Resilience Maturity Model from the document, showing the four stages: Reactive, Formative, Integrated, Anticipatory.

Sustainable Housing: Beyond Green Buildings to Social Equity

The sustainable housing discourse has traditionally centred on the ecological performance of buildings, epitomized by green building standards like LEED and BREEAM (Doan et al., 2017; Zuo & Zhao, 2014). These frameworks have been instrumental in promoting energy efficiency, sustainable materials, and reduced environmental footprints. However, the concept of sustainability is inherently multi-dimensional, resting on the three pillars of ecological integrity, social inclusivity, and economic viability.

Recent scholarship argues for an integrated "smart sustainability" paradigm, which combines high-performance environmental design with IoT-based systems for resource management and enhanced livability (Bibri & Krogstie, 2019). Yet, the social dimension – encompassing affordability, accessibility, and community cohesion – remains a critical challenge (Bramley et al., 2009; Dempsey et al., 2011). This is particularly acute in Western Balkan cities like Tirana and Prishtina, where decades of informal and often illegal con-

struction have created vast urban areas with precarious land tenure and inadequate access to basic services (Pojani, 2015; Gencer, 2013). Applying standardized green building codes in such contexts is fraught with difficulty, highlighting the need for policies that prioritize the upgrading of informal settlements and ensure housing affordability (UN-Habitat, 2015).

Smart Cities: A Critical Perspective on a Contested Concept

The "smart city" concept promises to optimize everything from traffic flow and energy consumption to public safety through the deployment of digital technologies (Caragliu et al., 2011). Proponents argue that data-driven governance can lead to more efficient, sustainable, and responsive cities (Yigitcanlar et al., 2019). However, this techno-utopian narrative is challenged by a wave of critical scholarship.

Critics warn that the smart city model, often driven by corporate interests, risks exacerbating urban inequalities, creating a "digital divide," and enabling unprecedented levels of surveillance (Greenfield, 2013; Kitchin, 2014). The focus on efficiency can sideline democratic participation and accountability (Hollands, 2020). Allam and Dhunny (2019) caution that without explicit safeguards, smart technologies can deepen existing social fractures. In response, scholars have proposed alternative models, such as the "lean" or "frugal" smart city, which prioritizes low-cost, context-appropriate technologies (Batty et al., 2012), and a post-anthropocentric model where technology serves ecological regeneration and social justice, not just economic efficiency (Yigitcanlar et al., 2019). For the Western Balkans, where public investments are limited, adopting a frugal and citizen-centric approach to smart urbanism is essential to avoid the pitfalls of top-down, technology-first models (Van Deursen and Van Dijk, 2014).

Comparative Frameworks and Critical Themes

To operationalize the concept of resilience, various frameworks have been developed, each with distinct strengths and limitations (see Figure 6).

Framework	Core Dimensions	Strengths	Limitations
Meerow et al. (2016)	Absorptive, Adaptive, Transformative	Multi-scalar, interdisciplinary	Lacks explicit equity metrics
Sharifi (2019)	Composite Indicator Index	Quantitative clarity, measurability	Can be context-insensitive
UN-Habitat (2023)	Governance, Infrastructure, Equity	Global applicability, policy-focused	Limited guidance for informal urbanism
Leichenko (2011)	Power, Politics, Social Systems	Justice-focused, critical perspective	Harder to operationalize and measure
Arup (2014)	Leadership, Health, Economy, Infrastructure	Comprehensive, practical for cities	Resource-intensive, corporate-driven

Figure 6. Comparative Summary of Urban Resilience Frameworks.

A synthesis of the literature reveals several critical cross-cutting themes:

1. *The Primacy of Governance:* There is a growing consensus that governance models matter more than the technical content of policies (Folke et al., 2005). Effective resilience is underpinned by collaborative and adaptive governance structures that facilitate learning and coordination across sectors and scales (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Folke et al., 2005).
2. *The Challenge of "Green Gentrification":* While green infrastructure is vital for resilience, its implementation can lead to "climate gentrification," where rising amenities and property values displace low-income residents (Jabareen, 2013; Anguelovski et al., 2016). Ensuring the equitable distribution of green spaces is a critical challenge for urban planners (Wolch et al., 2014).
3. *The Power of Community Engagement:* Meaningful community engagement is fundamental to the legitimacy and success of resilience initiatives. Moving beyond tokenistic participation towards genuine co-production of knowledge and solutions leads to more robust and equitable outcomes (Arnstein, 1969; Healey, 2020; Mitlin, 2008). As Olazabal et al. (2019) note, plans developed without community input often fail at the implementation stage.

Identified Gaps and Future Research Directions

Despite a rich and expanding body of literature, this review identifies three major gaps that this study aims to address:

1. *Measurement Inconsistency and Context Insensitivity*: A significant percentage of existing studies lack standardized indicators, making cross-city comparison difficult (Sharifi, 2019). More importantly, many quantitative frameworks are not sensitive to local values, political realities, and specific vulnerabilities (Mustafa et al., 2011).
2. *The Global South and Transitional Context Underrepresentation:* The vast majority of resilience frameworks and empirical studies are based on cities in the Global North (Allam & Dhunny, 2019; Simon, 2016). Regions like the Western Balkans, with their unique post-socialist and post-conflict legacies, remain critically under-researched.
3. *The Policy-Practice Disconnect:* There is a persistent gap between the formulation of resilience plans and their effective implementation on the ground (Olazabal et al., 2019; Watson, 2014). Few studies systematically track the real-world effectiveness of these plans or analyze the institutional barriers that hinder them.

This study responds directly to these gaps. It will develop and apply context-sensitive indicators tailored to the Western Balkan reality, test theoretical models in this under-researched geography, and critically examine the policy-practice disconnect by focusing on governance and implementation challenges. By doing so, it aims to contribute vital, empirically grounded knowledge to both regional policy and international urban theory.

Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework designed to achieve the research objectives. It details the mixed-methods research design, case study selection, data collection procedures, and analytical strategies. The methodology is structured to ensure rigor and validity, adhering to established best practices in urban studies and social science research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Research Design

The study adopts a pragmatic research paradigm, which supports the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods to address complex urban phenomena. Pragmatism was considered appropriate because urban resilience involves both measurable structural indicators and context-dependent governance experiences that cannot be adequately captured through a single methodological approach. To capture the multifaceted nature of urban resilience, this study employs a *convergent parallel mixed-methods design* (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This approach involves the separate collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, followed by the integration (or "triangulation") of the findings during the interpretation phase. This design allows a more comprehensive understanding than either method could achieve alone. The quantitative strand aims to identify statistical patterns and relationships between key variables (e.g., smart tech investment and resilience scores), while the qualitative strand seeks to explore the contextual nuances, lived experiences, and underlying governance dynamics that explain these patterns.

Case Study Selection

A multiple case study approach was adopted to enable cross-city comparison and enhance the external validity of the findings (Yin, 2018). Eight cities were selected based on a purposive sampling strategy guided by the criteria outlined in Figure 7. The selection includes three core cities from the *Western Balkans (Prishtina, Tirana, Podgorica)* to provide an in-depth analysis of the region, alongside five international cities (Rotterdam, Singapore, Barcelona, New York, Cape Town) that serve as comparative benchmarks representing diverse resilience strategies and developmental contexts. This comparative lens allows for the contextualization of findings from the Western Balkans within the broader global discourse on urban resilience.

Selection Criterion	Western Balkan Cities (Prishtina, Tirana, Podgorica)	Comparative Cities (e.g., Rotterdam, Singapore)	Justification for Selection
Geographic & Developmental Context	Post-socialist, transitional economies; post-conflict recovery context (Prishtina).	Established market economies; leaders in specific resilience domains (e.g., flood management, smart urbanism).	Allows for testing the transferability of resilience models from the Global North to a transitional context.
Policy Innovation & Relevance	Actively developing national/municipal resilience and EU integration strategies.	Recognized global leaders with well-documented and evaluated sustainability initiatives.	Provides a spectrum of policy maturity, from emerging (Balkans) to advanced (Comparative).
Socio-Economic Diversity	High unemployment, significant informal sectors, rapid and often unplanned urbanization.	Diverse economic bases, lower unemployment, formalized urban planning systems.	Enables analysis of how socio-economic factors mediate the effectiveness of resilience policies.
Data Accessibility	Availability of data from national statistical offices (e.g., KAS, INSTAT) and international bodies (World Bank).	Extensive and reliable longitudinal data available from public databases.	Ensures a robust quantitative analysis is feasible across all selected cases.

Figure 7. Case Study Selection Matrix.

Data Collection

Data were collected between September 2023 and May 2024 using multiple sources for both the quantitative and qualitative components.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data were gathered from established international and national databases to construct a comparative dataset of urban indicators. The primary sources and metrics are detailed in Figure 8.

Data Type	Source	Key Metrics / Indicators
Resilience & Infrastructure	World Bank Urban Database; UN-Habitat City Prosperity Index; City-specific resilience plans.	Composite Resilience Score (0-100); Green Space per Capita (%); Road Density (km/sq km); Access to basic services (%).
Economic Indicators	National Statistical Offices (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, INSTAT Albania, etc.); World Bank; Eurostat.	GDP per capita (PPP); Unemployment Rate (%); GINI Coefficient; Economic Diversification Index.
Smart Technology	OECD Databases; City Budgets; ITU (International Telecommunication Union) Data.	Smart Tech Investment (USD per capita); Internet Penetration Rate (%); ICT Development Index.
Environmental Quality	European Environment Agency (EEA); IPCC Climate Data; National environmental reports.	Annual Mean PM2.5 Concentration; CO2 Emissions (tons/capita); Published Flood/Seismic Risk Score (1-10).

Figure 8. Quantitative Data Sources and Key Metrics.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data were collected to provide depth and context, focusing on the governance processes and lived realities behind the quantitative metrics.

Semi-Structured Interviews: A total of 32 *semi-structured interviews* were conducted with key stakeholders across Prishtina (n=7), Tirana (n=7), Podgorica (n=6), and a selection of experts from the comparative cities (n=12). Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling to include:

- Municipal officials (urban planning and environmental departments).
- National-level policymakers.
- Representatives from local and international NGOs.
- Academic experts in urban studies and planning. Interviews were conducted in English or the local language (with professional translation), lasted 60-90 minutes, were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Document Analysis: Over 40 *policy documents* were collected and analyzed. These included national development strategies, municipal urban plans, climate adaptation plans, city resilience strategies (e.g., NYC's OneNYC 2050), and official reports from the selected cities.

Analytical Methods

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using STATA v17. The analysis proceeded in two stages:

- *Descriptive Statistics:* Calculation of means, standard deviations, and frequencies for all key indicators to summarize the data and provide a comparative overview of the case study cities.
- *Inferential Statistics:* An *Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model* was employed to test the relationship between the dependent variable (Composite Resilience Score) and key independent variables (Smart Tech Investment, Green Space, Unemployment Rate, and a dummy variable for the Western Balkan context). The model's robustness was checked for multicollinearity using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF).

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data (interview transcripts and policy documents) were analyzed using *reflexive thematic analysis*, following the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). The software package *NVivo 14* was used to manage the data and facilitate the coding process. The analysis was inductive, allowing themes to emerge directly from the data. The process involved: (1) data familiarization, (2) generating initial codes, (3) constructing initial themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final analysis.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the rigor of the findings, several measures were implemented:

- *Triangulation:* The core strength of the mixed-methods design is the ability to triangulate findings. Quantitative results were compared and contrasted with qualitative insights to build a more robust and nuanced interpretation.
- *Quantitative Reliability:* The internal consistency of the composite resilience index was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a threshold of $\alpha > 0.70$ considered acceptable.
- *Qualitative Credibility:* To ensure the credibility of the qualitative analysis, inter-coder reliability was established. A second researcher independently coded 20% of the transcripts, and Cohen's Kappa was calculated, achieving a score of $\kappa = 0.84$, indicating strong agreement. Peer debriefing was also used to challenge interpretations and reduce researcher bias.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, despite efforts to include diverse cases, the selection is not exhaustive, and findings may not be generalizable to all cities in the Western Balkans or globally. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the data provides a snapshot in time; longitudinal research would be needed to track resilience outcomes over the long term. Finally, data availability and consistency, particularly for specific environmental and investment metrics in the Western Balkan cities, posed a challenge and required careful data cleaning and harmonization.

Results

This chapter presents the empirical findings derived from the mixed-methods research design. The results are organized into two main sections. First, the quantitative findings from the analysis of urban resilience indicators and socio-economic data are presented, providing a comparative overview of the case study cities. Second, the qualitative insights from thematic analysis of policy documents and stakeholder interviews are detailed, offering depth and context to the statistical patterns. The chapter concludes by triangulating these two streams of data to build a synthesized understanding of the factors shaping urban resilience in the Western Balkans.

Quantitative Results

The quantitative analysis reveals disparities in resilience performance between the Western Balkan cities and the international comparative cases.

Descriptive Statistics: A Tale of Two Tiers

The descriptive statistics, summarized in Figure 9, highlight a division. The Western Balkan cities – Prishtina, Tirana, and Podgorica – consistently score lower across key resilience and development metrics compared to their counterparts in Western Europe, Southeast Asia, and North America.

City	Region	Resilience Score (0-100)	Green Space (%)	Smart Tech Investment (USD/capita)	Unemployment Rate (%)
Singapore	Southeast Asia	92.3 (±2.1)	47.6	3,200	2.8
Rotterdam	Western Europe	78.5 (±3.2)	25.1	1,450	4.2
New York	North America	71.2 (±3.9)	19.3	2,100	5.4
Barcelona	Southern Europe	65.4 (±4.7)	11.8	980	9.1
Cape Town	Africa	53.6 (±5.4)	8.5	320	24.3
Tirana	Western Balkans	51.7 (±5.8)	12.4	210	22.1
Podgorica	Western Balkans	50.3 (±5.9)	10.8	150	19.8
Prishtina	Western Balkans	48.2 (±6.1)	9.2	180	28.6

Figure 9. Comparative Descriptive Statistics of Key Urban Indicators.

Key observations include:

- Resilience Scores: The mean resilience score for the three Western Balkan cities is 50.1, representing the average of Prishtina (48.2), Tirana (51.7), and Podgorica (50.3). This score is over 35% lower than the mean score of the Western European and North American cities (74.9). This gap is visualized in Figure 10.

- Investment Gaps: Investment in smart technologies is dramatically lower in the Balkans (averaging 180 per capita) compared to leaders like Singapore (3,200 per capita). This disparity suggests a limited capacity to leverage technology for resilience.
- Socio-Economic Pressures: Extremely high unemployment rates in Prishtina (28.6%), Tirana (22.1%), and Podgorica (19.8%) represent a significant underlying vulnerability, constraining both public and private investment in resilience-building initiatives.

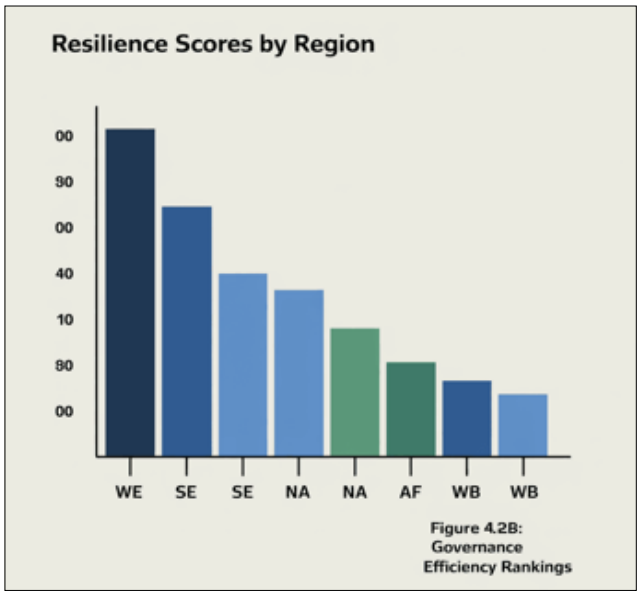


Figure 10. Mean Resilience Scores by Region.



Figure 11. Governance Efficiency and Its Impact.

(a) Governance Efficiency Rankings (Horizontal bar chart as described in the document, with Singapore (4.7) and Rotterdam (4.3) in green at the top, and Prishtina (2.2), Podgorica (2.1), and Tirana (2.0) in red/orange at the bottom. An arrow points to the Balkan cities with the text: "Scores below 2.5 reflect systemic governance challenges.")

(b) Governance vs. Resilience Score (A scatter plot with Governance Score on the X-axis and Resilience Score on the Y-axis. A clear positive correlation is visible. The Balkan cities are clustered in the bottom-left corner, while Singapore and Rotterdam are in the top-right. A trendline is added.)

Figure 11 demonstrates a strong positive relationship between governance efficiency and resilience outcomes. Part (a) ranks the cities based on qualitative assessments of institutional capacity, revealing critically low scores for the Western Balkan cities. Part (b) plots these scores against the quantitative resilience scores, visually confirming that cities with more effective governance achieve higher levels of resilience.

Regression Analysis: Identifying Key Predictors of Resilience

To move beyond correlation and identify the statistical predictors of resilience, an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model was estimated. The results, presented in Figure 12, are highly significant and explain a substantial portion of the variance in resilience scores (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.74$).

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error (SE)	p-value	VIF
(Constant)	65.87	4.12	<0.001	
Smart Tech Investment (USD/capita)	0.38	0.14	0.008	1.9
Green Space per Capita (%)	0.29	0.16	0.032	2.3
Unemployment Rate (%)	-0.62	0.10	<0.001	1.4
Balkan City Dummy (1=Yes)	**-12.40**	**3.20**	**0.001**	**1.7**
Model Fit Statistics	$N = 80$ districts; $R^2 = 0.77$; *Adj.* $R^2 = 0.74$; $F(4, 75) = 25.3$, $p < 0.001$			

Figure 12. OLS Regression Model Predicting Urban Resilience Score.

The model yields three critical findings:

- *Unemployment as a Critical Barrier:* The unemployment rate is the strongest negative predictor ($\beta = -0.62$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that high unemployment severely undermines a city's resilience capacity, likely by eroding the tax base, limiting household investment, and increasing social instability.
- *Positive Impact of Investments:* As expected, both Smart Tech Investment ($\beta = 0.38$, $p = 0.008$) and Green Space ($\beta = 0.29$, $p = 0.032$) are significant positive predictors of resilience.
- *The "Balkan Effect*[1]*:"* Most notably, the Balkan City Dummy variable is highly significant and negative ($\beta = -12.40$, $p = 0.001$). This finding indicates that even after controlling for investment levels, green space, and unemployment, a city being located in the Western Balkans is associated with a 12.4-point drop in its resilience score. This suggests the presence of unobserved, systemic regional factors – such as institutional weaknesses, post-conflict legacies, and informal governance – that significantly impede resilience.

Qualitative Insights: Explaining the "Balkan Effect"

The qualitative analysis of interviews and policy documents provides contextual data explaining the quantitative findings, particularly the "Balkan Effect." Three dominant themes emerged.

Theme	Description	Illustrative Quote (Anonymized)
Post-Conflict & Transitional Legacies	The prioritization of immediate post-conflict reconstruction and economic survival over long-term strategic planning has resulted in path dependencies that are difficult to overcome.	*"For years, the goal was just to build. Rebuild houses, build roads. Nobody was thinking about floods in 20 years or smart grids. We are still paying the price for that short-term focus."* (Urban Planner, Prishtina)
Fragmented Governance & Institutional Voids	A persistent lack of coordination between national and municipal levels, overlapping agency responsibilities, and a weak rule of law undermine the implementation of even well-designed policies.	*"We have a beautiful climate strategy on paper, a requirement for EU accession. But who enforces it? The municipality points to the ministry, the ministry points back. In the end, nothing happens."* (NGO Representative, Podgorica)
The Challenge of Urban Informality	The vast scale of informal settlements, particularly in Tirana and the peripheries of Prishtina, creates immense resilience deficits, as these areas often lack basic infrastructure, are built in high-risk zones, and are disconnected from formal planning processes.	*"How can you implement a green building code when 30% of your city was built without any permit at all? Our first challenge isn't sustainability, it's legality and basic services."* (Municipal Official, Tirana)

Figure 13. Key Qualitative Themes from Stakeholder Interviews in the Western Balkans.

Triangulation and Synthesis

The integration of quantitative and qualitative results provides a robust and compelling narrative. The statistical significance of the "Balkan City Dummy" in the regression model is explained by the powerful qualitative themes of fragmented governance, post-conflict legacies, and pervasive informality. While the quantitative data show that the Balkan cities underperform, the qualitative data explain why.

The analysis reveals that in the Western Balkans, the returns on technical investments (in smart tech and green space) are suppressed by a challenging socio-economic and institutional environment. The strong negative coefficient for unemployment (β = -0.62) is not just a statistic; it reflects the lived reality of constrained municipal budgets and households unable to invest in adaptive measures, a point repeatedly emphasized by interviewees. Therefore, the findings strongly suggest that institutional reform and socio-economic stabilization are prerequisites for technical resilience solutions to be effective in this context.

Discussion and Recommendations

This chapter synthesizes the quantitative and qualitative findings presented earlier, positioning them within the broader theoretical discourse outlined in the literature review. It interprets the results, paying special attention to the unexpected and significant findings

related to the Western Balkan context. The chapter culminates in a series of evidence-based policy recommendations, acknowledges the study's limitations, and proposes directions for future research.

Summary and Interpretation of Key Findings

This study set out to analyze the interplay of smart technologies, sustainable housing, and governance in shaping urban resilience in the Western Balkans. The results present a clear picture. Quantitatively, cities in the Western Balkans (Prishtina, Tirana, Podgorica) demonstrate significantly lower resilience scores compared to their global counterparts. While the regression analysis confirmed that investments in smart technology (β = 0.38) and green space (β = 0.29) are positive drivers of resilience, their impact was overshadowed by two critical factors: the severe negative effect of high unemployment (β = -0.62) and a persistent, negative "Balkan Effect" (β = -12.4), which remained significant even after controlling for other variables.

These statistical findings are brought into sharp focus by the qualitative data. The "Balkan Effect" is a reflection of the deep-seated, systemic challenges identified by stakeholders:

1. Post-conflict and transitional legacies that have prioritized short-term needs over long-term strategic planning;
2. Fragmented governance structures that create policy-implementation gaps; and
3. The pervasive issue of urban informality, which creates vast zones of infrastructural and social vulnerability.

Situating the Findings within Theoretical Debates

The Technology-Resilience Nexus: A Contextual Re-evaluation

The findings support the proposition that smart technologies can enhance urban resilience (Yigitcanlar et al., 2019). However, this study critically refines this argument by demonstrating that technology is not a panacea. The relatively modest coefficient for smart tech investment, combined with the powerful negative influence of the regional dummy variable, suggests that the *return on technological investment is context-dependent and heavily mediated by institutional capacity*. In the Western Balkans, the potential of smart solutions is being suppressed by a weak institutional foundation. This aligns with critical smart city scholarship that warns against techno-utopianism and emphasizes the importance of governance and context (Greenfield, 2013; Hollands, 2020).

The Primacy of Socio-Economic and Institutional Factors

The findings of this study suggest a dominance of socio-economic factors as such as such as unemployment, economic precarity, informal urbanization, and unequal access to infrastructure and institutional factors including fragmented governance, weak inter-agency coordination, and limited enforcement capacity over purely technical ones. This aligns with the fact that resilient cities require resilient economies and populations. These findings are consistent with justice-focused resilience frameworks (Leichenko, 2011; Cutter et al., 2008), which argue that underlying social vulnerabilities are the primary determinants of a city's adaptive capacity.

Furthermore, the significance of the "Balkan Effect" provides empirical weight to the argument that governance matters more than policy content (Folke et al., 2005). The qualitative themes reveal a systemic challenge where fragmented governance hinders effective planning, which in turn exacerbates vulnerabilities and further strains institutional capacity.

This cycle explains why simply importing best-practice policies or technologies from the Global North is unlikely to succeed without addressing these foundational governance deficits.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The findings from this research lead to a series of targeted recommendations for local, national, and international actors seeking to bolster urban resilience in the Western Balkans. The overarching message is the need to shift from isolated, project-based interventions to a more integrated, systemic approach that prioritizes institutional reform (Beqaj, 2019).

Stakeholder Level	Recommendation Category	Specific Actions
Municipal Governments (Prishtina, Tirana, Podgorica)	**Strengthen Governance & Coordination**	- Establish permanent, cross-departmental Resilience Working Groups to break down silos between planning, environment, and emergency services. - Develop and utilize open-data platforms to share information and increase transparency in planning decisions.
	Adopt Frugal & Inclusive Innovation	- Prioritize low-cost, high-impact smart solutions (e.g., SMS-based flood alert systems, sensor networks for air quality monitoring) over expensive mega-projects. - Mandate the integration of green infrastructure and climate-adaptive design into all informal settlement upgrading projects.
National Governments (Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro)	**Drive Institutional & Legal Reform**	- Create clear and enforceable legal frameworks for land management to address the root causes of urban informality. - Establish a National Urban Resilience Fund to co-finance municipal projects, with funding tied to the adoption of integrated planning standards.
	Build Human & Technical Capacity	- Invest in training and professional development for municipal planners on topics of climate science, data analysis, and adaptive governance. - Streamline national processes for accessing and distributing international climate and development funds (e.g., EU IPA III, Green Climate Fund).
International Partners (EU, World Bank, UN Agencies)	**Re-orient Funding & Technical Assistance**	- Shift the focus of financial support from purely infrastructure projects to programs that build long-term institutional capacity and governance reform. - Make technical assistance more context-specific, providing embedded experts who can help navigate local political and administrative realities.
	Foster Regional Collaboration	- Support a Western Balkans network of "Resilience Learning Labs" where cities can share data, experiences, and best practices relevant to their shared context. - Fund cross-border projects focused on shared climate risks, such as transboundary water basin management.

Figure 14. Strategic Recommendations for Enhancing Urban Resilience in the Western Balkans.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights, its limitations must be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data provides a snapshot in time; a longitudinal study would be required to track the evolution of resilience and the impact of policies over several years. Second, while the case study selection was purposive and aimed for diversity, the findings may not be generalizable to all cities in the region. Finally, the quantification of complex concepts like "governance efficiency" and "resilience" into single scores, while necessary for regression analysis, inevitably involves a degree of simplification. The qualitative data serves to mitigate this, but the limitation remains.

Directions for Future Research

This study opens up several avenues for future inquiry:

- *Longitudinal Analysis:* Tracking the case study cities over the next 5-10 years to assess whether policy interventions based on current recommendations lead to measurable improvements in resilience scores.
- *Community-Level Resilience:* In-depth ethnographic research within informal settlements to understand the coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies developed by residents in the absence of formal state support.
- *Climate Gentrification:* As green investments increase, research will be needed to monitor whether these interventions are creating new forms of inequality or displacing vulnerable populations in Western Balkan cities.

Conclusion

This study analyses urban resilience in the complex and dynamic context of the Western Balkans. The findings demonstrate that while smart technologies and sustainable infrastructure are valuable components of resilience-building, their effectiveness is fundamentally constrained by deeper socio-economic and institutional realities. The path to creating adaptive and thriving cities in Prishtina, Tirana, and Podgorica is not primarily a technical challenge, but a governance one .Our mixed-methods approach revealed a significant resilience gap between Western Balkan cities and their global counterparts. This gap is statistically explained not only by disparities in investment but more powerfully by high unemployment and a persistent, negative "Balkan Effect" – a proxy for the systemic challenges of post-conflict legacies, fragmented governance, and pervasive urban informality. The qualitative data confirmed that these institutional weaknesses create a "vicious cycle," undermining policy implementation and suppressing the potential returns on technological and environmental investments. The central contribution of this research is the empirical validation that, in transitional contexts, *institutional capacity and socio-economic stability are prerequisites for, not byproducts of, technological resilience strategies.* Our findings challenge the universal applicability of techno-centric resilience models often promoted in the Global North, underscoring the primacy of context. For the Western Balkans, and likely for other post-conflict or transitional regions, a "governance-first" approach is essential. Ultimately, building resilient cities in this region requires a courageous shift in policy focus. It demands moving beyond isolated projects towards systemic reforms that tackle the root causes of vulnerability: strengthening the rule of law, fostering coordinated and transparent governance, addressing the challenge of informality, and promoting equitable economic development. Only by building a foundation of institutional integrity and social equity can the full potential of smart and sustainable innovations be unlocked to forge a future that is not only resilient but also just and prosperous for all citizens.

Endnotes

1 In this study, the term "Balkan Effect" refers to the combined influence of regional structural constraints associated with post-conflict institutional legacies, governance fragmentation, informality, and transitional economic conditions that are not fully captured through conventional urban resilience indicators.

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Creative Urban Care for Older Adults in Thailand: Drama Therapy and an Innovative Expressive Arts Framework for Better Urban Ageing

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Abstract

This article examines drama therapy with older adults across three institutional contexts in Thailand: Chulalongkorn Hospital, Thai Red Cross Society; Kwong Siew Foundation Hospital; and Sawangkanives Housing, Thai Red Cross Society. Drawing on a practice-based qualitative study involving 60 older adults, facilitator observations, semi-structured interviews, reflective writings, and institutional descriptions, the article explores how drama therapy was adapted across medical, chronic-care, and senior residential settings. The findings suggest that drama therapy supported memory sharing, emotional expression, social connection, belonging, and quality of life among participants. The article argues that drama therapy should be understood not merely as entertainment or supplementary activity, but as a form of creative urban care that contributes to quality of life, cultural participation, and healthy ageing. It concludes by proposing a modular expressive arts framework for urban ageing that integrates drama, music, visual art, movement, mindful drawing, storytelling, and community-based creative leadership. The concept of creative urban care is offered as an innovative expressive arts framework that contributes to urban culture research and ageing studies.

Keywords: *Drama Therapy, Expressive Arts Therapy, Older Adults, Urban Ageing, Community Well-Being, Quality of Life*

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Introduction

Population ageing is reshaping the social and cultural life of cities. International age-friendly city scholarship argues that urban ageing should not be treated only as a question of medical care or physical accessibility, but also as a matter of participation, social inclusion, local belonging, and the ability of older people to remain visible within everyday urban life (Buffel and Phillipson 2016; World Health Organization 2007). In Thailand, where older adults increasingly move between hospitals, residential communities, family homes, temples, markets, parks, and public health facilities, elder care must therefore be understood as both a health issue and an urban-cultural issue.

In many care institutions, older adults are approached through the language of risk and decline: falls, frailty, memory loss, loneliness, depression, dependency, medication, and chronic illness. These concerns are real and should not be dismissed. However, if ageing is framed only through medical and functional limitation, older adults may gradually be seen as passive recipients of care rather than as people with histories, imagination, humour, cultural memory, and social capacity. This article proposes that creative arts practices can help shift this perception. Evidence from participatory arts and creative arts interventions suggests that arts-based activity can support well-being, social connection, mood, meaning, and engagement among older adults, although outcomes vary by setting, facilitation, and study design (Noice et al. 2014; Dunphy et al. 2019).

The central practice discussed in this article is drama therapy with older adults in three institutional contexts in Thailand: Chulalongkorn Hospital, Thai Red Cross Society; Kwong Siew Foundation Hospital; and Sawangkanives Housing, Thai Red Cross Society. These settings represent different forms of urban elder care. Chulalongkorn Hospital reflects a comprehensive medical and geriatric care context. Kwong Siew Foundation Hospital reflects a smaller chronic-care context, where many older adults live with long-term illness or higher dependency. Sawangkanives Housing reflects a senior residential community, where older adults are not primarily patients but residents with varied levels of independence, social involvement, and care needs.

The activities discussed in this article were conducted with support from the MA Expressive Arts Therapy Programme, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University. Students and facilitators participated in workshop preparation, small-group facilitation, translation, observation, interviewing, and reflective writing. Their experiences offer insight into how drama therapy works not only as a therapeutic method but also as a form of cultural practice within ageing institutions.

The article asks three main questions. First, how can drama therapy be adapted across different urban elder-care settings? Second, what forms of expression, memory, vitality, and belonging emerged through the activities? Third, how might drama therapy become part of a broader expressive arts model for improving quality of life among older adults in urban contexts? The article argues that drama therapy can function as creative urban care: an arts-based practice that transforms urban care institutions into spaces of memory, expression, relationship, and shared meaning. This approach does not replace clinical care; rather, it adds an emotional, social, and cultural dimension to urban ageing. The innovative contribution of this article lies in the development of the concept of creative urban care, an expressive arts framework that brings together quality of life, cultural participation, and relational well-being within urban ageing contexts.

Conceptual Framework: From Drama Therapy to Creative Urban Care

Drama therapy uses role, enactment, embodiment, imagination, play, projection, storytelling, and performance to support emotional and relational processes. For older adults, drama therapy offers a bridge between memory and present experience. A participant may recall a childhood event, family ritual, school memory, work experience, moment of loss, or moment of joy. Through drama, the memory is not only spoken; it is embodied, shared, and witnessed.

This is especially important in later life, when ageing may involve retirement, bereavement, relocation, illness, or increasing dependency. These transitions can narrow the roles available to an older person in daily institutional life. Keisari's drama therapy model argues that role expansion is a central contribution of drama therapy in ageing, because dramatic play can re-open emotional, social, and imaginative roles that are still meaningful to the older person (Keisari 2021). The older adult may temporarily become a child, student, teacher, bride, singer, market seller, parent, traveller, performer, or community leader. Such role work can reconnect participants with aspects of identity that remain alive but may not be visible in everyday care routines.

Drama therapy also has a close relationship with life review. Life review interventions allow older adults to revisit meaningful turning points and integrate personal meaning; meta-analytic work has shown that reminiscence interventions can support psychosocial outcomes among older adults, although effects depend on intervention type and participant context (Pinquart and Forstmeier 2012). Keisari and Palgi (2017) extend this idea by integrating life review with drama therapy, bringing life crossroads onto the stage so that older adults can explore turning points through voice, role, gesture, movement, and witnessing. Harel, Dovrat and Keisari (2021) further suggest that drama therapy can deepen life-story work by linking personal memory with collective witnessing, unfinished emotional material, self-integration, and imagination of the future.

This article extends that discussion by locating drama therapy within urban culture and institutional life. In an ageing city, care institutions are not only medical or residential facilities; they are also social and cultural environments. A hospital activity room, a chronic-care ward, or a senior housing hall can become a temporary cultural space when older adults gather to move, speak, remember, laugh, perform, and listen to one another. In this sense, drama therapy becomes more than a clinical intervention; it becomes a practice of community-making.

The term creative urban care is used here to describe this broader function. It refers to creative practices that support quality of life in urban settings by strengthening emotional expression, social participation, cultural identity, and everyday meaning. Creative urban care may include drama therapy, music therapy, art therapy, movement, dance, mindful drawing, puppetry, storytelling, creative writing, ritual-making, and intergenerational arts. The core idea is that better urban ageing requires not only buildings and services, but also cultural environments in which older adults continue to be seen, heard, and valued.

Methodology

This article uses a practice-based qualitative approach to examine the adaptation of drama therapy across three institutional settings for older adults in Thailand: Chulalongkorn Hospital, Thai Red Cross Society; Kwong Siew Foundation Hospital; and Sawangkanives Hous-

ing, Thai Red Cross Society. The project was conducted in September 2025 and involved a total of 60 older adult participants, with 20 participants at each site. The activities were supported by the MA Expressive Arts Therapy Programme, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University. Ethical approval for the project was granted by the Institutional Review Board of Chulalongkorn University (COA No. 286/68).

The study drew on multiple sources of qualitative data, including institutional descriptions, facilitator observations, student reflective writings, semi-structured interviews with selected older adult participants, and informal feedback from participants and staff members. The purpose was not to evaluate clinical effectiveness through measurable treatment outcomes, but rather to explore the meanings, processes, experiences, and institutional adaptations that emerged through drama therapy practice in different care environments. The drama therapy workshops generally followed a flexible structure consisting of warm-up activities, movement or rhythm-based exercises, memory prompts, small-group sharing, role selection, collaborative story development, rehearsal, short performances, and reflective discussion. These components were adapted according to participants' physical capacities, emotional readiness, cognitive abilities, institutional contexts, and group dynamics. Such flexibility was considered essential when working across medical, chronic-care, and residential settings with diverse levels of functioning and support needs.

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes across sites and data sources. The analysis focused on six areas: institutional adaptation, memory and identity, embodied vitality, group belonging, low-resource creativity, and ethical facilitation. Rather than seeking objective measurement, the analysis aimed to develop an interpretive understanding of how drama therapy functioned within different urban elder-care contexts and how participants engaged with creative processes.
All participant information was treated confidentially, and personal examples are presented without identifying details. This is particularly important because older adults' narratives may involve emotionally significant memories, personal relationships, experiences of loss, and other sensitive life events. Within this study, participants' stories were approached not merely as data but as expressions of lived experience, identity, and personal dignity.

The study also recognizes the facilitators and students as reflective practitioners whose observations formed part of the data corpus. Their accounts were not treated as neutral measurements but as situated reflections on what they observed, experienced, learned, and questioned during the workshops. This reflexive dimension is consistent with practice-based and arts-based research traditions, where understanding emerges through engagement with creative processes and the relational contexts in which they occur.

Three Institutional Contexts of Urban Ageing

The three sites differed in their institutional functions, participant characteristics, and forms of drama therapy adaptation. However, each provided opportunities to explore how creative arts practices could support quality of life, social participation, and meaningful engagement among older adults. A comparative overview of the three settings is presented below.

Site	Institutional Context	Participants	Main Activities	Key Functions of Drama Therapy
Chulalongkorn Hospital, Thai Red Cross Society	Medical and geriatric care setting	20	Memory sharing, role-play, group performance, reflection	Supported emotional expression, memory stimulation, social interaction, and person-centred care
Kwong Siew Foundation Hospital	Chronic-care and high-dependency setting	20	Music, rhythm activities, storytelling, adapted role-play, reminiscence work	Encouraged participation, reduced isolation, stimulated memory, and fostered emotional engagement
Sawangkanives Housing, Thai Red Cross Society	Senior residential community	20	Collaborative storytelling, dramatic enactment, group performance, reflection	Strengthened community participation, social connection, leadership, and active ageing
Total	Three urban elder-care settings	60	Drama therapy adapted to local needs and capacities	Demonstrated the role of creative urban care in supporting quality of life, belonging, and cultural participation

Figure 1. Comparison of Drama Therapy Across Three Urban Elder-Care Settings.

Chulalongkorn Hospital, Thai Red Cross Society: Drama Therapy within Holistic Medical Care
Chulalongkorn Hospital represents a highly developed medical and geriatric care context. Older adults who come into this setting may experience complex and overlapping concerns involving physical health, cognition, emotion, medication, mobility, family support, and social participation. In such a context, care is often multidisciplinary, involving medical professionals, nurses, rehabilitation staff, psychologists, social workers, and other specialists.

Drama therapy in this context can support the human dimension of medical care. Hospitals are essential for diagnosis and treatment, but hospital culture can sometimes make older adults feel defined by illness. Drama therapy invites a different kind of encounter. Participants are not approached first as patients with symptoms, but as people with life stories, memories, talents, humour, and emotional worlds.

In the Chulalongkorn Hospital context, drama therapy can support emotional expression, memory stimulation, social interaction, and a sense of personhood. When an older adult shares a memory and sees it enacted by others, that person receives recognition beyond the clinical chart. This form of recognition is important in holistic geriatric care because quality of life is not limited to biological function; it also includes meaning, relationship, and dignity. An example of the workshop activities conducted within the hospital setting is shown in Figure 2.

Kwong Siew Foundation Hospital: Drama Therapy in Chronic and High-Dependency Care
Kwong Siew Foundation Hospital represents a smaller chronic-care hospital where many older adults may live with long-term illness, frailty, limited mobility, or dependency. In this context, participation must be understood with sensitivity. Not every participant can stand, speak clearly, remember easily, or perform actively. A small gesture, smile, gaze, rhythm, or vocal response may be meaningful.



Figure 2. Drama therapy workshop at Chulalongkorn Hospital, Thai Red Cross Society. Older adult participants engaged in memory sharing, small-group storytelling, dramatic enactment, and reflective discussion. The activities illustrate how drama therapy can support emotional expression, social interaction, and person-centred care within a holistic medical setting.

Drama therapy in chronic-care contexts therefore requires gentleness and flexibility. It may include music, rhythm, hand movement, simple props, visual prompts, familiar songs, brief role play, or collective storytelling. The purpose is not theatrical perfection. It is to awaken attention, invite presence, stimulate emotional response, and reduce the feeling of isolation that can occur in long-term care. Music-based intervention studies in dementia and older adult care similarly suggest that rhythm and familiar sound can support mood, anxiety, behavioral symptoms, memory, and quality of life, while still requiring careful attention to evidence quality and individual differences (Ueda et al. 2013; Moreno-Morales et al. 2020).

One example from the workshops involved an older man who revisited memories of school life, freedom, flooding, work, and gratitude. Through the activity, he was able to perform parts of his childhood experience, reflect on his relationship with education, and remember a kind woman who helped him learn to read Thai. The value of this moment was not that it produced a polished performance. Its value lay in the fact that the participant could revisit his past with energy, humour, and reflection, while others listened and participated.
In chronic-care settings, drama therapy can reintroduce a sense of aliveness into institutional routine. Many older adults in such settings may spend long hours waiting, resting, receiving medication, or being physically assisted. Creative activities offer a different rhythm. They invite the person to respond, imagine, choose, and connect. Even brief moments of participation can challenge the assumption that frail older adults have little to contribute. The adapted workshop activities implemented at Kwong Siew Foundation Hospital are illustrated in Figure 3.

Sawangkanives Housing, Thai Red Cross Society: Drama Therapy as Community Activation
Sawangkanives Housing, Thai Red Cross Society, differs from the two hospital settings because it is a senior residential community. Older adults there are not primarily defined as patients. They are residents, neighbors, potential friends, and members of a shared living environment. Some live there continuously, while others may move between Sawangkanives and other family or personal residences. The site therefore raises questions not only about care, but also about community life, participation, leadership, and active ageing.



Figure 3. Drama therapy workshop at Kwong Siew Foundation Hospital. Activities were adapted to accommodate varying levels of mobility, frailty, and dependency through the use of storytelling, rhythm, reminiscence, and simplified role-play. The image demonstrates how creative urban care can promote participation, emotional engagement, and social connection in chronic-care environments.

Drama therapy in this context can function as community activation. The aim is not only to support emotional expression, but also to encourage residents to meet, listen, collaborate, and imagine themselves as part of a living social environment. This aligns with evidence that group-based social and educational activities can reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people more consistently than purely individual support models (Cattan et al. 2005).

In the Sawangkanives workshops, facilitators observed themes often associated with youth: freedom, creativity, imagination, daring, openness to new experience, and a can-do attitude. This is significant. Urban ageing is often represented through problems: dependency, loneliness, cost of care, safety, or decline. Yet in a supportive creative environment, older adults may express playfulness, confidence, curiosity, and leadership potential. Drama therapy can therefore help change the cultural image of ageing.

Sawangkanives also suggests a sustainable model for future creative urban care. Rather than relying only on outside facilitators, senior housing communities could gradually develop resident-led arts clubs or peer-facilitated creative groups. Drama, music, mindful drawing, storytelling, and movement could become part of everyday community life. In this sense, creative arts practice becomes not only an intervention, but a cultural infrastructure for better ageing. The community-oriented nature of the drama therapy activities at Sawangkanives Housing is illustrated in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Drama therapy activities at Sawangkanives Housing, Thai Red Cross Society. Participants collaborated in storytelling, dramatic enactment, and group reflection within a senior residential community. The image illustrates the role of creative arts practice in fostering belonging, community participation, and active ageing.

The Drama Therapy Process

Across the three sites, the drama therapy process followed a flexible structure. The first stage was preparation and warm-up. Older adults may feel unsure when invited to "act," especially if they associate drama with formal theatre or public performance. Warm-ups using gentle movement, rhythm, mirroring, voice, or humour helped reduce anxiety and create a safe atmosphere.

The second stage involved memory sharing. Participants were invited to recall meaningful moments from childhood, school, family, work, marriage, friendship, travel, or community life. These prompts allowed participants to reconnect with parts of their lives that might not usually be discussed in care settings. Memories were not treated as fixed stories, but as living material that could be explored through body, voice, and imagination.

The third stage was small-group development. Participants selected one or more memories and worked together to transform them into short scenes. Facilitators supported the group by clarifying the story, assigning roles, encouraging quieter members, and ensuring that the story owner felt respected. Props were simple and symbolic. A scarf could become a wedding veil. A chair could become a classroom object. A gesture could represent a younger self. The simplicity of the materials made the process accessible and low-cost.
The fourth stage was performance. Short performances allowed participants to witness one another's memories. Playback theatre scholarship describes this kind of staged witnessing as a process through which personal stories can be transformed and reflected by a group, creating recognition, belonging, and narrative re-framing (Kowalsky et al. 2019; Keisari et al. 2018). In the present workshops, performance was not treated as an aesthetic product but as an act of social recognition.

The final stage was reflection and closure. Participants were invited to share feelings, insights, bodily sensations, or memories that emerged. Closure helped bring participants back to the present and supported emotional integration. This is especially important in work with older adults because memories may carry joy, regret, grief, longing, pride, or unfinished emotional meaning.

The process varied across institutions. At Chulalongkorn Hospital, the work needed to align with a medical environment and respect participants' health needs. At Kwong Siew Foundation Hospital, the work needed to be simpler, slower, and more responsive to physical limitations. At Sawangkanives Housing, the work could place greater emphasis on community interaction, social leadership, and continuing participation.

Findings and Discussion

Reawakening Vitality in Later Life

One of the strongest themes was the reawakening of vitality. Facilitators observed that many participants became more animated as the sessions progressed. Some who initially appeared hesitant became expressive during rehearsal and performance. Others showed humour, curiosity, and physical energy. Several reflections described participants as reconnecting with youthful feelings. This does not mean that drama therapy denies ageing or romanticizes old age. Rather, it reveals that later life contains many layers. An older adult may live with frailty and still carry playfulness. A participant may need assistance and still have a strong sense of humour. A resident may be socially withdrawn but become lively when a familiar memory is invited into the room. Participatory arts research similarly cautions that benefits are often process-based and context-sensitive, but it also identifies participation, social contact, cognitive challenge, and emotional engagement as recurring benefits of arts work with older adults (Noice et al. 2014). This finding is important for urban culture because cities often design elder care around risk management. While safety is necessary, older adults also need opportunities for joy, experimentation, and social recognition. A city that cares well for ageing citizens must make room not only for wheelchairs, ramps, medicines, and clinics, but also for laughter, rhythm, memory, movement, storytelling, and imagination.

Memory as Shared Cultural Practice

A second theme was the transformation of memory into shared cultural practice. Older adults did not only tell stories; they offered memories that became group material. Childhood scenes, school stories, wedding images, and moments of gratitude were transformed into short performances. This gave participants a chance to see their memories reflected by others. When memory is performed, it becomes more than private recall. It becomes a small cultural event. Other participants witness, respond, and sometimes enter the story by playing supportive roles. This can reduce isolation because the story owner is no longer alone with the memory. The group carries it together, even briefly. Randomized research on life-review playback theatre has also found that participation can support mental health among community-dwelling older adults, suggesting that the combination of life review, enactment, and group witnessing deserves further attention in ageing care (Keisari et al. 2022). This process is especially meaningful in urban elder-care settings, where residents or patients may live near one another without necessarily knowing one another's personal histories. Drama therapy can create a bridge between strangers. A person who was previ-

ously seen only as "another patient" becomes someone who once skipped school, sold noodles, wore a wedding veil, loved a teacher, cared for a family, or dreamed of a different life. Such recognition strengthens community.

Belonging, Friendship, and Group Cohesion

A third theme was belonging. Small-group work encouraged listening, negotiation, role division, and mutual support. Participants had to decide whose story to perform, who would play each role, how the story should unfold, and how to present it to others. These tasks created social interaction in a natural way. This is important because loneliness and social isolation are major concerns for older adults. Group creative activities can help create bonds that are different from ordinary conversation. When people create something together, they often experience shared ownership. The performance becomes "our scene," not only "my story." This shared creation can strengthen a sense of belonging. In Sawangkanives Housing, this has particular importance. A senior housing community is not automatically a community in the deeper sense. People may live in the same compound without feeling emotionally connected. Creative arts modules can help transform co-residence into relationship. Drama therapy can become a catalyst for friendship, peer support, and community identity.

Low-Resource Creativity and Urban Accessibility

A fourth theme was low-resource creativity. Drama therapy does not require expensive equipment. It can use body, voice, space, ordinary objects, and memory. This makes it practical for urban care institutions with limited budgets. A small room, a circle of chairs, a few scarves, simple musical instruments, or everyday materials can be enough. This matters for policy and practice. If creative ageing programmes require high budgets, specialist venues, or professional stages, they will remain limited. But if creative arts modules are designed to be simple, safe, and adaptable, they can be introduced into hospitals, community centres, senior residences, local health stations, temples, and neighborhood clubs. The value of drama therapy lies not in theatrical polish, but in participation. The question is not whether older adults perform beautifully by professional standards. The question is whether they can participate meaningfully, express themselves safely, connect with others, and experience renewed dignity.

Ethical Facilitation and Safety

The workshops also revealed challenges. Drama therapy with older adults requires careful facilitation. Group work can generate tension if one person dominates the story or changes another participant's memory. Facilitators must protect the emotional ownership of personal narratives. Creative freedom should not override respect for the person whose story is being shared. Physical safety is another concern. Some participants may become energized and attempt movements beyond their safe capacity. Facilitators need to balance encouragement with protection. Drama therapy should invite vitality without pushing older adults into risk.

Time management and closure are also important. Older adults need enough time to enter the creative process, but also enough time to return to the present. Closure may include reflection, appreciation, grounding, breathing, or a simple closing ritual. Without closure, participants may leave emotionally activated or physically tired. These challenges do not

weaken the value of drama therapy. They demonstrate that effective arts-based practice requires training, sensitivity, and ethical awareness. Good facilitation is the difference between a meaningful creative process and a poorly managed activity.

Creative Arts Modules for Better Urban Ageing

The findings suggest that creative urban care operates through several interconnected processes, including the reawakening of vitality, the sharing of personal and cultural memory, the development of belonging and social connection, the accessibility of low-resource creative practices, and the importance of ethical facilitation. These themes emerged consistently across the three institutional settings despite differences in care context and participant needs. While drama therapy was the primary modality examined in this project, the findings point toward a broader range of expressive arts practices that may support quality of life, cultural participation, emotional expression, and healthy ageing among older adults. This broader perspective is consistent with creative ageing research, which highlights the potential of arts participation to foster social engagement, emotional well-being, cognitive stimulation, and meaning-making in later life, while recognizing that outcomes remain context-dependent (Dunphy et al. 2019; Noice et al. 2014). The below table illustrates how the principal themes identified in the study informed the development of the proposed creative urban care modules. The following modules are therefore presented as a practice-oriented framework derived from the study findings and informed by the wider creative ageing and expressive arts literature.

Key Finding	Implications for Creative Urban Care	Related Modules
Reawakening vitality	Opportunities for play, expression, movement, and engagement remain important in later life	Drama, Movement, Music
Memory as shared cultural practice	Personal memories can become collective cultural resources	Drama, Storytelling, Puppetry
Belonging and group cohesion	Creative activities can strengthen social connection and community participation	Drama, Music, Intergenerational Exchange
Low-resource creativity	Effective programmes can be implemented using simple and accessible materials	Visual Art, Storytelling, Mindful Drawing
Ethical facilitation and safety	Activities must be adapted to physical, emotional, and cognitive needs	All modules

Figure 5. Table of the Relationship Between Key Findings and Proposed Creative Urban Care Modules.

Module 1: Drama and Life-Review Theatre

This module uses memory prompts, role play, symbolic objects, and short performance. The approach emerged directly from the present project, where participants transformed personal memories into shared dramatic enactments across all three sites. It is suitable for older adults who can participate verbally or physically, but it can also be adapted for those with limited mobility. The aim is to support identity, meaning-making, humour, and social recognition. Possible activities include childhood scenes, school memories, family rituals, market stories, festival memories, wedding stories, work-life episodes, and imagined future scenes. The module is particularly useful for senior residences and community centres, where it can strengthen peer relationships.

Module 2: Music and Rhythm for Social Connection
Music can support mood, memory, movement, and group synchronisation. Rhythm-based warm-up activities and musical elements were used throughout the workshops to support engagement, attention, and group cohesion. Older adults may respond strongly to familiar songs, rhythms, percussion, humming, or call-and-response singing. Rhythm activities can be adapted for seated participants and those with limited movement. In urban ageing contexts, music can connect personal memory with collective culture. Songs from earlier decades, local festivals, religious traditions, or community histories can help participants reconnect with place and identity.

Module 3: Visual Art and Symbolic Expression
Although visual art was not a primary focus of the present project, expressive arts therapy literature suggests that visual image-making may provide an additional pathway for emotional expression, reflection, and communication among older adults. Drawing, collage, color work, clay, and memory-object creation may be particularly valuable for participants who are less comfortable with performance-based approaches. In senior housing communities, visual art modules can lead to shared exhibitions, wall displays, memory maps, or community art corners. These outputs help make older adults' inner worlds visible in the physical environment.

Module 4: Movement, Body Awareness, and Gentle Embodiment
Movement modules can include seated movement, mirroring, gesture, stretching, breath awareness, balance games, or symbolic movement. The importance of embodied vitality observed during the drama therapy workshops suggests the potential value of movement-based approaches as a complementary module. The purpose is not exercise alone, but body connection, emotional awareness, and confidence. Movement can help older adults experience the body not only as a site of pain or limitation, but also as a source of expression. It should be adapted carefully, with attention to medical conditions, fatigue, and mobility aids.

Module 5: Mindful Drawing and Emotional Grounding
Mindful drawing combines slow visual expression with breathing, attention, and emotional regulation. While not directly examined within the present project, mindful visual practices may provide a complementary approach for supporting emotional grounding, present-moment awareness, and gentle self-expression in hospital and residential care settings. It can be useful for older adults who need calming activities, especially in hospital or residential settings. Simple lines, shapes, colors, or repeated patterns can help participants focus on the present moment. This module can also connect with Thai cultural values of gratitude, calmness, and respect for life experience. It does not require artistic skill. Its value lies in slowing down, noticing the body, and allowing feelings to appear gently through marks on paper.

Module 6: Storytelling, Puppetry, and Object Theatre
Storytelling emerged as a central process across all three sites. Participants frequently drew upon personal memories, significant life events, relationships, and experiences when creating dramatic scenes and sharing stories with others. Through this process, personal narratives became shared experiences that fostered reflection, recognition, and social

connection. Building on these findings, puppetry and object theatre may offer additional expressive pathways for older adults who are less comfortable with direct performance. Everyday objects, photographs, fabrics, or symbolic items can serve as prompts for reminiscence and storytelling while providing a degree of emotional distance that may enhance feelings of safety and comfort within the creative process.

Module 7: Intergenerational Creative Exchange
Urban ageing should not isolate older adults from younger generations. Intergenerational modules can bring students, children, caregivers, and older adults together through arts activities. Older adults can share stories, songs, skills, crafts, or memories of neighborhood change. Younger participants can help document, perform, draw, or digitally present these stories. Such activities strengthen cultural continuity and challenge stereotypes.

Module 8: Community Performance and Creative Leadership
The final module focuses on sustainability. Older adults who enjoy creative activities can be supported to become peer leaders. They may help lead singing circles, story groups, drawing clubs, gentle movement sessions, or memory theatre activities. Community performance does not need to be formal. It may take the form of a small sharing day, seasonal festival, family event, or exhibition. This module is particularly relevant to Sawangkanives Housing and similar senior residences because it moves the model from activities provided for older adults to creative culture developed with older adults.

A Proposed Model: Creative Urban Care for Ageing Communities

Based on the three-site experience, this article proposes a creative urban care model with four levels. The first level is individual expression. Older adults need opportunities to express memories, feelings, hopes, fears, humour, and identity. Creative arts modules allow expression through multiple channels: body, voice, image, rhythm, role, story, and object.

The second level is relational connection. Creative activities should not only produce individual satisfaction; they should build relationships. Group work, paired sharing, ensemble rhythm, shared performance, and collaborative art can help older adults experience belonging.

The third level is institutional transformation. When creative arts become part of hospital or housing culture, the institution changes. It becomes warmer, more participatory, and more human. Staff may also begin to see residents or patients differently, recognizing their histories and capacities rather than only their needs.
The fourth level is urban cultural participation. Older adults should remain part of the cultural life of the city. Their memories, songs, gestures, stories, and creative expressions are part of urban heritage. Creative ageing programmes can connect elder care with local museums, universities, community arts centres, schools, parks, and public cultural events. This model suggests that better urban ageing requires more than health services. It requires a cultural ecology of care. Expressive arts modules can help create that ecology by linking well-being with creativity, place, community, and participation.

Implications for JUCR and Urban Culture Research

This article contributes to urban culture research in three ways. First, it introduces creative urban care as an innovative expressive arts framework for understanding how quality of

life, cultural participation, and social connection can be supported within ageing communities. In doing so, it reframes elder care as a cultural issue rather than solely a medical or demographic concern. Ageing affects how communities remember, relate, organise space, transmit culture, and define quality of life.

Second, it positions creative arts practice as a practical strategy for liveable urban communities. Drama therapy and expressive arts modules can be adapted for hospitals, senior residences, community centres, and public health settings, helping to make care environments more participatory, relational, and emotionally meaningful.
Third, the article expands the concept of cultural continuity. Older adults carry memories of neighborhoods, rituals, education, family life, migration, work, festivals, music, and social change. When they are invited to share and perform these memories, they contribute to the cultural memory of the city. Creative arts activities therefore support both personal well-being and urban cultural heritage.

For Bangkok and other ageing cities, the challenge is not only to build age-friendly infrastructure, but also to cultivate age-friendly culture. Ramps, clinics, transport, and housing are necessary, but they are not enough. Older adults also need spaces where they can laugh, remember, perform, sing, draw, lead, teach, and belong.

Conclusion

This article examined drama therapy with older adults across three institutional settings in Thailand: Chulalongkorn Hospital, Thai Red Cross Society; Kwong Siew Foundation Hospital; and Sawangkanives Housing, Thai Red Cross Society. The project, supported by the MA Expressive Arts Therapy Programme, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University, showed how drama therapy can be adapted to medical, chronic-care, and senior residential contexts. Across the three sites, drama therapy created opportunities for memory, role exploration, embodied expression, social connection, and renewed vitality. In the hospital, it supported holistic care by restoring attention to personhood. In chronic care, it offered gentle activation for older adults with limited mobility or dependency. In senior housing, it functioned as community activation, helping residents step out of routine and recognise their creative capacity.

The article argues that drama therapy should be understood as part of a wider model of creative urban care. For ageing cities, creative arts modules can support quality of life by integrating drama, music, visual art, movement, mindful drawing, storytelling, object theatre, and intergenerational exchange. Such modules are flexible, low-resource, culturally responsive, and adaptable to different institutional settings. Better urban ageing is not achieved only by extending life or managing illness. It is also achieved by supporting quality of life, social participation, cultural engagement, and meaningful human connection. In this sense, creative urban care complements rather than replaces medical and residential care. While hospitals, medications, rehabilitation services, and supportive housing remain essential, older adults also benefit from opportunities to remember, create, perform, share stories, build relationships, and contribute to community life. The concept of creative urban care proposed in this article offers an innovative way of understanding how expressive arts practices can support these dimensions of well-being. For ageing cities, the challenge is therefore not only to provide care, but also to cultivate cultural environments in which older adults remain visible, valued, and actively engaged in urban life.

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Journal Policies

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About JUCR

The Journal of Urban Culture Research is an international, online, double-blind, peer-reviewed journal published biannually in June & December by the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts of Thailand's Chulalongkorn University in conjunction with the Urban Research Plaza of Osaka City University, Japan. JUCR offers its readers two categories of content. One is a window into the latest international conferences and reviews of related sources – books etc. along with guest articles, special features and case studies. Secondly, its main core is a range of peer-reviewed articles from researchers in the international community. No fees are charged.

The Aims of JUCR

This journal on urban culture aims at establishing a broad interdisciplinary platform for studies of cultural creativity and the arts that brings together researchers and cultural practitioners to identify and share innovative and creative experiences in establishing sustainable and vibrant, livable communities while fostering cultural continuity. The journal embraces broad cultural discussions regarding communities of any size as it recognizes the urban community's rural roots. JUCR encourages researchers and the full range of artists in visual art, design, music, the creative arts, performance studies, dance, cultural studies, ethnomusicology, and related disciplines such as creative arts therapies and urban planning. Articles related to either the academic or wide vernacular interpretation of urban culture and the arts as a tool promoting community and individual well-being, health, and diversity are welcome.

JUCR has the objective of stimulating research on both the theory and practice of fine and applied arts in response to social challenges and environmental issues as well as calling for solutions across the creative realms. Moreover, JUCR supports advocacy processes, improvements in practices, and encourages supportive public policy-making related to cultural resources. JUCR intends to offer readers relevant theoretical discussions and act as a catalyst for expanding the knowledge-base of creative expression related to urban culture.

Review Process

1. JUCR promotes and encourages the exchange of knowledge in the field of fine and applied arts among scholars worldwide. Contributions may be research articles, reports of empirical studies, reviews of films, concerts, dances, and art exhibitions. Academic papers and book reviews are also acceptable. Articles are typically only considered for publication in JUCR with the mutual understanding that they have not been published in English elsewhere and are not currently under consideration by any other English language journal(s). Occasionally, noteworthy articles worthy of a broader audience that JUCR provides, will be reprinted. Main articles are assessed and peer reviewed by specialists in their relevant fields. Furthermore to be accepted for publication, they must also receive the approval of the editorial board.

2. To further encourage and be supportive of the large diverse pool of authors whose English is their second language, JUCR employs a 3-stage review process. The first is a double-

blind review comprised of 2-3 international reviewers experienced with non-native English writers. This is then followed by a non-blind review. Thirdly, a participative peer review will, if needed, be conducted to support the selection process.

3. All articles published in the journal will have been fully peer-reviewed by two, and in some cases, three reviewers. Submissions that are out of the scope of the journal or are of an unacceptably low standard of presentation will not be reviewed. Submitted articles will generally be reviewed by two experts with the aim of reaching an initial decision within a two-month time frame.

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10. The views expressed in articles published are the sole responsibility of the authors and not necessarily shared by the JUCR editors or Chulalongkorn University.

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- Worthy contributions in the urban culture arena are welcome from researchers and practitioners at all stages in their careers. A suggested theme is announced prior to each issue.
- Manuscripts should generally not exceed 7,000 words including the abstract and references. Tables, figures, and illustrative material are accepted only when necessary for support.
- Manuscripts need to use our template for submission. Please download from our website's submission guidelines page. Details are described in the top half of the first page with sample text following. Documents not using the template will be returned for reformatting.
- All manuscripts are required to include a title, abstract, keywords, author's byline information, an introduction and conclusion section along with a Chicago formatted reference list. Manuscripts with existing footnotes and in-text references may retain them as a resource for readers, but are not required. Footnotes are to be relocated as non-standardized endnotes listed before references.
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- Authors should strive for maximum clarity of expression. This point cannot be overstated. Additionally, authors need to bear in mind that the purpose of publication is the disclosure and discussion of artistic knowledge and innovations that expands the realm of human creativity and experience.

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- Published three or more papers in scholarly publications.
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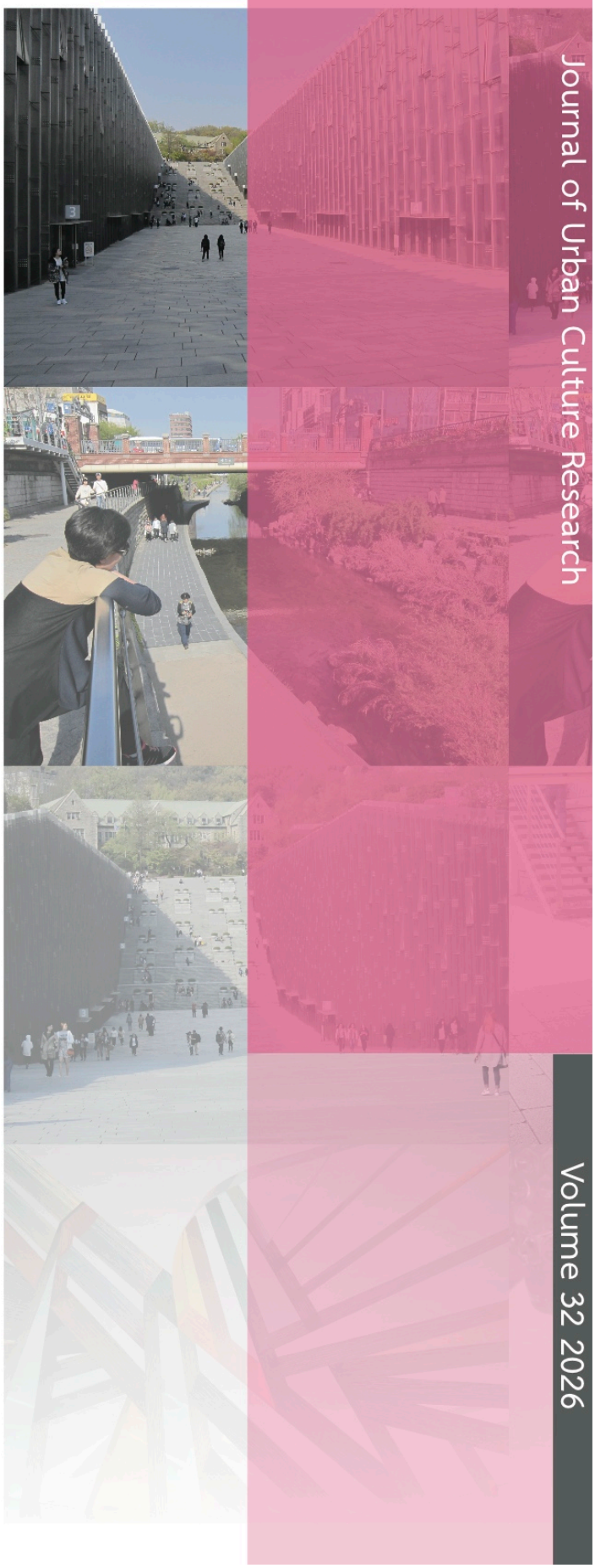
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When a candidate is approved by majority vote of the current JUCR board members, she/he will be invited to serve by the Editor in Chief for a specified term of three years. The Dean of Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts in turn will finalize the appointment. Continued membership of the Editorial Board will be reviewed every three years by a member of the Editorial Board with a decision about candidates submitted annually. The number of Editorial Board members will not exceed 20 unless otherwise agreed upon.



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JUCR encourages researchers and the full range of artists in visual arts, creative arts, music, dance, theater together with those in urban studies and planning to seek cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural practices.

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