Sense of place and sustainability of intangible cultural heritage — The case of George Town and Melaka

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Sense of Place comprises of Sense of Loss, Sense of Justice and Sense of Mission.
- Sense of Community is a vital intangible heritage that local would like to sustain.
- The intangible cultural heritage may evoke local's awareness and creativity.
- Awareness motivates our sense of belonging, regardless the time we stay in a place.
- Creativity leads to the Sense of Mission which is vital for preserving a WHS.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT
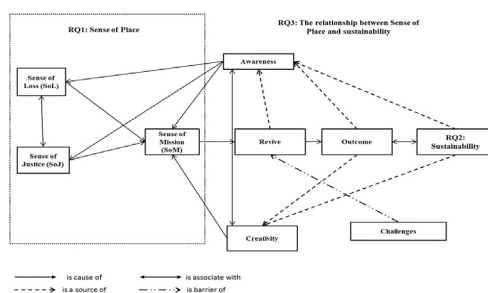
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ABSTRACT

The pressure of tourism on heritage sites is threatening the cultural heritage of such places. Local community voices should be studied in order to understand what and how to preserve the intangible cultural heritage at WHSs as they are the main players of this intangible heritage. With reference to the concepts of place attachment, this study examines the elements of 'person-place bonding' that may contribute to the sustainability of intangible cultural heritage, and how these elements help the sustainability of heritage tourism. In-depth interviews, observations were conducted in the WHSs of George Town and Melaka, Malaysia. A total of 32 documents were analysed. The 'Sense of Loss', 'Sense of Justice' and 'Sense of Mission' emerged as the three main themes of 'person-place bonding'. This bonding motivates community participation in sustaining the intangible cultural heritage they value. Besides, 'awareness' and 'creativity' are two vital codes that link the ecosystem of WHSs.

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1. Introduction

Heritage and tourism are two concepts that have been frequently discussed in conjunction with each other over the past few decades. Invariably their relationship is characterized by contradictions in that conservationists and ecologists perceive

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heritage tourism as compromising the goals of preservation and conservation for profit (Aas & Ladkin, 2005). Although it is undeniable that heritage tourism may help the economic growth for cultural-rich destinations, it might also threaten the heritage of the destination (Li, Wu, & Cai, 2008; Yang, Lin, & Han, 2010), especially the intangible cultural heritage. In particular, tourism gentrification (Gotham, 2005) forces the local residents of heritage cities to leave, and the standardization of tourism products, such as hotels and cafés, make such cities look the same all over the world (Richards & Wilson, 2006).

The World Heritage Convention (WHC) aims to safeguard the sustainability of World Heritage Sites (WHSs). However, being inscribed on the UNESCO's World Heritage List (WHL) appears to highlight such sites to the world, thus raising the chances of them becoming the next destination of a multitude of visitors. In other words, the inclusion of a site on the WHL is virtually a promise that the number of visitors will increase (Boyd & Timothy, 2001). This is particularly significant for the WHSs which are not popular to tourists before the WHS listing, for example, before the designation in 1995, number of tourists to Shirakawa-mura was under eight hundred thousand, and increased to more than eighteen hundred thousand in 2008 (Jimura, 2011). Accordingly, the World Heritage brand is desired by many developing countries for the added tourism income (Nicholas & Thapa, 2010; Yang et al., 2010), as tourists and revenue are expected to flow into the country in increasing numbers.

The pressure that tourism might put on WHSs, to some extent, arises from the conflicting value of the WHC, that is, WHSs ought to maintain a function in contemporary community life, while being preserved and conserved for transmission to future generations (UNESCO, 1972). In other words, there is a need to manage the sustainability of heritage tourism, especially the intangible cultural heritage, as it is always reconstructed by communities in response to their environments. Scholars acknowledge that there is a need for conversation, discussion, and collaboration among the stakeholders in order to minimize threats to the heritage (Aas & Ladkin, 2005; Bramwell & Lane, 1999; Mitchell & Reid, 2001; Selin, 1999). If mutual ground between the related stakeholders can be found, the local community's resources can be preserved and the heritage tourism can be sustained (Bramwell & Lane, 1999; Selin, 1999).

In emphasizing formal planning and stakeholder participation, the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 2005) suggest that an effective management system should comprise a constant cycle of planning, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and feedback, as well as the active involvement and participation of stakeholders in the planning process. The expectation of a complete and incorporated approach to achieving "… an appropriate and equitable balance between conservation, sustainability and development", and ensuring "… the active involvement of […] local communities" is further emphasized in the Budapest Declaration on World Heritage (World Heritage Committee, 2002). Unfortunately, little advice or guidance is given on how to achieve such a goal (Landorf, 2009; Wilson & Boyle, 2006).

Management of sustainable tourism at WHSs requires stakeholders' participation, in particularly a genuine engagement with local community stakeholder, however, even in the developed countries, such as the UK, there is an apparent lack of grass roots discussion in their WHSs management plan (Landorf, 2009). And, the suggestion of equitable community participation remains an idealistic thought (Aas & Ladkin, 2005). When community involvement does occur, input is limited to consultation regarding the strategies established by formal planning bodies, rather than active participation in strategy development (Landorf, 2009). Hence, how to involve community participation remains questionable due to the complexity of the implementation. Notwithstanding the numerous challenges to the development of collaboration for the preservation and conservation of the intangible cultural heritage, such as power imbalances (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Brohman, 1996; Jamal & Getz, 1995, 1999; Tosun, 2000), and the capability of the stakeholders for participation (Brohman, 1996; Reed, 1997), the local community should be included as they are the core players of intangible heritage.

The participation of stakeholders is important for planning and managing the heritage, and that place attachment is connected to community participation (Chapin III & Chapin Knapp, 2015; Su & Wall, 2010). Place attachment is considered to have the potential to encourage community participation and involvement in the development process (Anton & Lawrence, 2014, 2016; Chapin III & Chapin Knapp, 2015; Fornara & Caddeo, 2016; Manzo & Perkins, 2006; Scannell & Gifford, 2013). Although place attachment and place meanings play a vital role in the planning process, the planning literature has ignored the exploration of their connections in the process; whereas, the psychologists who study place attachment, on the other hand, seldom discuss on community development and participation (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). Places, especially heritage places, can create different feelings and meanings for different people. Nevertheless, how these emotional and cognitive-links assist in community participation have been overlooked.

Therefore, the values, beliefs and meanings that citizens attach to places, especially heritage sites, within the community, should be learnt, understood, appreciated, and preserved in order to obtain their support and involvement (Chapin III & Chapin Knapp, 2015; Gifford, 2014; Su & Wall, 2010; Williams, 2014). There are relatively few studies on understanding the local community's perspective in terms of their participation or of sustaining the intangible cultural heritage at WHSs, especially in developing countries, and hence, the voice of the local community is seldom heard.

This research endeavours to advance the knowledge concerning the concepts of place attachment and the sustainability of intangible cultural heritage, especially at World Heritage Sites (WHSs). It is motivated by a desire to understand how person-place bonding may contribute to sustaining the intangible cultural heritage of WHSs, specifically in respect of George Town and Melaka, Malaysia. To investigate these relationships, this study examines the place attachment of local community, which includes the NGOs, old town's local residents, and traditional traders, and how this person-place bonding contributes in reviving or transforming activities. It then evaluates how these relationships relate to the sustainability of intangible cultural heritage. This study has three research questions: 1. What is the person-place bonding that may contribute to the sustainable development of a WHS? 2. What does the community want to sustain at a WHS? 3. How does 'person-place bonding' help to sustain the intangible cultural heritage?

2. Literature review

2.1. Place attachment, sense of place, and place identity

The bonding that connects individuals and their meaningful places – place attachment (Altman & Low, 1992) – has gained attention over the past few decades. It refers to the experience of a