

# Cultural Heritage Sustainability through Teaching and Learning: A University–PADAT Collaborative Approach

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## ABSTRACT

With over 7 million inhabitants, Selangor is the most developed and densely populated state in Malaysia and possesses a rich cultural heritage. The Perbadanan Adat Melayu dan Warisan Negeri Selangor (PADAT) is the Selangor state-owned agency responsible for documenting, preserving, and promoting Selangor's cultural heritage. As a museum-based heritage institution, PADAT is often perceived primarily as a space for displaying artefacts. Such perceptions, however, tend to underrepresent the evolving educational functions of museums and heritage institutions, particularly their roles in facilitating learning, knowledge transmission, and community engagement. In recent years, museums worldwide have shifted from being object-centred institutions to becoming active educational spaces that support learning. Despite this shift, the pedagogical function of state-level heritage institutions in Malaysia, particularly through structured collaboration with Malaysian universities, has received limited scholarly attention. Since its establishment in 2009, PADAT has implemented a range of education-focused initiatives to sustain cultural heritage through collaboration with both public and private universities. This study aims to examine the collaborative efforts that support the transmission of Selangor's cultural heritage, particularly through both formal and informal teaching and learning. This study employs qualitative methods, including document analysis, participant observation, and interviews with PADAT officials and academics from selected universities in Selangor. The findings show that collaborations between PADAT and universities employ a teaching and learning approach that integrates hands-on experiences, professional knowledge sharing, and community engagement across both formal and informal settings. These initiatives provide meaningful learning experiences for students while facilitating knowledge transfer and the broader dissemination of local cultural heritage. Overall, the study demonstrates that higher education institutions play a crucial pedagogical role in advancing the sustainability of cultural heritage through education-based collaboration.

**Keywords:** Teaching and Learning; Cultural Heritage; Sustainability; Collaboration

## INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage is an intricate, multi-layered concept that encompasses both the intangible and tangible aspects of a society's history, traditions, and practices. It is a fundamental part of our collective identity, shaping our understanding of the past and informing our present (Sharma & Sharma, 2017). According to various scholars, cultural heritage is the "legacy" passed down from previous generations to the present (Rostami et al., 2014). It includes both tangible elements, such as historical buildings, monuments, and artefacts, and intangible aspects, such as language, customs, rituals, and traditional knowledge. This broad concept emphasises the diversity and interconnectedness of cultural heritage, viewing it as a reflection of a community's values, creativity, and historical development. It serves as a catalyst for community engagement and pride, fostering a sense of belonging and a responsibility to preserve one's cultural milieu for future generations (Oladeji et al., 2022).

One of the most important characteristics of cultural heritage is its capacity to preserve a community's unique identity. Cultural heritage links the past to the present, giving people a sense of belonging and continuity within a culture. It demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of a people, evolving to reflect the changing social, political, and economic landscape (Chaigasem & Tunming, 2021). In addition, cultural heritage plays an important role in the development of cultural globalisation. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, cultural heritage is used to preserve and disseminate numerous identities that are important to a community's sense of nationhood and collective memory.

In today's globalised world, the preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage have become multifaceted tasks that require the cooperation of multiple actors. Fostering cooperation among cultural heritage stakeholders—government agencies, local communities, non-governmental organisations, education, and the commercial sector—helps ensure the long-term viability of these resources. Combining these diverse viewpoints and experiences helps formulate comprehensive, tailored heritage management strategies that address the specific needs and conditions of each community or area.

Fostering cooperation among diverse actors in the cultural heritage field is one of the most important strategies in this context. Combining these viewpoints and expertise helps develop comprehensive heritage management strategies that meet the specific needs and conditions of each community or region (Attwood, 2024). Enabling and supporting these co-operation projects depends crucially on the involvement of governments and legislators. Policies and legal systems that support public participation, cross-sector co-operation and the distribution of necessary resources and incentives help to create an environment conducive to the management of sustainable cultural heritage (Rosetti et al., 2022). The sustainability of cultural heritage is a collective endeavour that requires the active engagement and collaboration of multiple stakeholders, rather than the sole responsibility of any single body. By adopting this collaborative method, we can guarantee the preservation, celebration, and transmission of our cultural heritage to future generations (Hribar et al, 2015; Aziz et al., 2017; Masini & Soldovieri, 2017; Xia, 2023).

It is undeniable that cooperation with relevant stakeholders is essential for the preservation and promotion of one's cultural heritage. Generally, a decision, project, or policy affects individuals, groups, or organisations with a legitimate interest. Stakeholders in the cultural heritage sector play a critical role in preserving and promoting culture and in addressing the complex challenges it faces. Educational institutions play a crucial role as stakeholders and agents in promoting the sustainability of cultural heritage. Undoubtedly, education plays a central role in promoting sustainability, as students can act as catalysts within the framework of tradition. Malaysian higher education institutions, particularly universities, have long emphasized the importance of collaboration with industry and the community, whether through curricular or co-curricular programs and activities. Through this approach, students have the opportunity to apply their knowledge, skills, and competencies in their respective fields to address societal challenges.

Selangor, the most populous and developed state in Malaysia, is known for its diverse cultural composition that harbors a wealth of tangible and intangible heritage. The State of Selangor Malay Custom and Heritage Corporation (Perbadanan Adat Melayu dan Warisan Negeri Selangor, also known as PADAT) is a state agency responsible for protecting, preserving, and promoting Selangor's cultural heritage (Enakmen Perbadanan Adat Melayu dan Warisan Negeri Selangor, 2009). Historically, PADAT began as the Selangor Museum Board (Lembaga Muzium Selangor, or LMS), whose museum, the Muzium Sultan Alam Shah, has existed since 1998. The main objective of museology, as emphasized by Nepal (2021), is to collect, preserve, and manage natural, historical, cultural, and scientific objects, as well as intellectual works and knowledge, for educational purposes. Museums are no longer merely repositories of artifacts; they have evolved into effective forms of informal education and communication that link the past to the present. The preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage require cooperation with relevant cultural stakeholders, including those from academia. Museums play an important role in ensuring the sustainability and accessibility of these relics by acting as custodians of tangible and intangible cultural assets. Universities, in turn, are centers of academic research, education, and expertise that provide invaluable resources and knowledge to museums to support their endeavors (Aziz et al., 2017).

Since its inception, PADAT has established a long-standing partnership with various stakeholders, including Malaysian universities, to fulfill its responsibility as the custodian of Selangor's cultural heritage. Therefore, this paper examines how PADAT and Malaysian universities collaborate to preserve Selangor's cultural heritage, particularly through educational programs focused on teaching and learning.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design incorporating participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. Document analysis included a wide range of materials related to PADAT's educational and collaborative activities, including event programs, newspaper clippings, posters, brochures, press releases, and scripts for radio and television programs. These documents provided contextual and historical insights into PADAT's engagement with higher education institutions and the nature of its heritage-related initiatives.

Two Malaysian higher education institutions were identified as having established sustained collaborative relationships with PADAT: Taylor's University, a private institution, and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), a public university. Both institutions are located in Selangor and were selected due to their active involvement in PADAT's education-oriented programs. Interviews were conducted with PADAT officials and lecturers from both universities, particularly those directly involved in planning and implementing the collaborative initiatives.

Adopting a descriptive qualitative approach, this study investigated how University-PADAT collaborations function as a pedagogical platform for sustaining Selangor cultural heritage through teaching and learning practices. Data from observations, interviews, and documents were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and educational practices across sources. The use of multiple data sources enabled triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Instead of imposing specific theories on the data, the analysis focused on the data itself to provide a clear, relevant picture of how University-PADAT works together in heritage education.

## FINDINGS

### Experiential Learning in Cultural Heritage Projects

There are many types of learning, including experiential learning, which Kolby (2015) described as a "continuous process whereby the learners will bring individual learning needs and experiences to their learning environment and communities." This type of learning took place through the Impact Lab program, initiated by Taylor's University, a well-known private university in Malaysia based in Subang Jaya, Selangor. The collaboration came about as part of Taylor's Impact Lab initiative, an effort to foster collaboration between Taylor and a range of public and private-sector organizations. There are 11 Impact Labs, including the Liveable Urban Communities, under which the PADAT-Taylor's Collaboration program existed. In line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), each Impact Lab consists of solution-focused, transdisciplinary teams of academics, industry, and students working together to realize meaningful ideas. By partnering with governmental and non-governmental organizations, Taylor's Impact Labs strives to address pressing issues and make a positive and lasting impact on society.

Two collaborative programs with the theme "Bridging Heritage to the People" were conducted at two locations within two academic semesters as part of the Impact Lab initiative, the Liveable Urban Communities (LUC) Lab. As part of the Architectural Conservation and Tourism module, Taylor's worked with PADAT to deliver this revitalization project. The aim of the collaboration was to rejuvenate historical sites in Selangor through academic activities, enabling students to gain experience in cultural education and to develop a deeper, more nuanced understanding that goes beyond the confines of classroom teaching.

The first historical site chosen for the project was Kuala Selangor, which includes Bukit Malawati and the historical town of Kuala Selangor. The Muzium Sejarah Daerah Kuala Selangor, owned by PADAT, is also located in Bukit Malawati and attracts thousands of visitors, especially on weekends and public holidays. The Bridging Heritage to the People project was conducted during the March 2023 academic year. PADAT served as the main partner, with further participation from the Kuala Selangor City Council (commonly known as Majlis

Perbandaran Kuala Selangor or MPKS) and the Malaysian Urban Design Association (commonly known as PEREKABANDAR, Pertubuhan Rekabentuk Bandar Malaysia). 23 architecture students participated in the program. From 22 to 24 May 2023, the program, led by the PADAT team, began with a tour of Bukit Malawati and the old town, followed by an official visit to MPKS to gather key information about the site.

The project's results and findings were then shared at a meeting in Dewan Puncak Malawati, an open hall next to the Muzium Sejarah Daerah Kuala Selangor (Figure 1). This event was held on 1 July 2023, where students from 2 groups presented their proposals to revitalize the heritage of Bukit Malawati and the old town of Kuala Selangor, titled "Into the Congkak" and "Kelip-Kelip". During this time, the students had the opportunity to share their thoughts creatively with relevant heritage stakeholders, including PADAT (a local development agency), MPKS (the local municipal council), and PEREKABANDAR (a heritage organization). From 2 to 8 July 2024, Muzium Sejarah Daerah Kuala Selangor publicly exhibited the results. The exhibition was well received not only by outside visitors but also by the local communities. In fact, on the last day of the public exhibition, the then-Her Majesty Raja Permaisuri Agong and Her Majesty Tengku Permaisuri of Selangor, with their entourage, had the opportunity to visit the museum and view the work of the Taylors' students (Figure 2).



Figure 1: Taylor's University students presenting their findings to the audience



Figure 2: The former Her Majesty Raja Permaisuri Agong and Her Majesty Tengku Permaisuri of Selangor giving comments on the projects conducted by Taylor's University students

Encik Azim Sulaiman from Taylor's University moderated a closing ceremony and podcast session to conclude the event. The panelists were the President of PEREKABANDAR, Prof. Dr. Shuhana Shamsudin, and the Chief

Executive Officer of PADAT, Dr. Nadia Widyawati Madzhi, who discussed the topic of rejuvenation of Bukit Malawati and Pekan Lama in Kuala Selangor. The participants included representatives from the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS Malaysia), non-governmental organizations, PADAT officers, lecturers, and students from higher education institutions. Afterward, the podcast was made available on Spotify.

Taylor's Impact Lab extended its partnership with PADAT for the second time during the August 2023 academic term. Under the same theme and similar objectives, Jugra was chosen as the project's next location, a place known for its rich yet obscure historical accounts in the Kuala Langat district of Selangor. As with the previous project, PADAT acted as the main partner, supported by the Kuala Langat Municipality (Majlis Perbandaran Kuala Langat, or MPKL). This program involved 31 architecture students from the Architectural Conservation and Tourism module, and an MPKL site investigation at Jugra was conducted from 16 to 18 October 2023, culminating in a presentation ceremony at Istana Bandar on 26 November 2023.

The students' proposals for the promotion and rejuvenation of Jugra were presented at this event in the presence of representatives from ICOMOS, PADAT, and MPKL, as well as practitioners, local communities, and students. The event was inaugurated by Dr. Veronica Ng, then Director of the Liveable Urban Community Lab. Three groups presented their findings: Rekreasi DiRaja, Ketinting, and Kenduri. The presentation was followed by a public exhibition at Istana Bandar from 27 November to 2 December 2023.

PADAT collaborates with Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), the largest public university in Malaysia, which UiTM is a comprehensive university offering more than 500 academic programs, from undergraduate to postgraduate. Its main campus is in Shah Alam, the capital of the state of Selangor, with 13 autonomous state campuses and 21 satellite campuses. A Memorandum of Understanding between PADAT and UiTM's College of Creative Arts (CCA) was signed on 6 September 2022, establishing a three-year relationship to enhance mutual benefits. Under the agreement, both organizations will collaborate on research and development initiatives with CCA staff and students and regularly undertake activities and projects of mutual interest. It is essential to acknowledge that the signing of the MOU with CCA permits cooperation with other faculties, colleges, and departments within the UiTM system.

A collaboration of final-year students from the Bachelor of Visual Culture Studies (Honours) program at Fine Arts Studies, UiTM College of Creative Arts, took place on 29 June 2024 at the Museum of History and Traditional Games, Bukit Malawati, Kuala Selangor. The PADAT organization has assisted UiTM in establishing a program called "Mewangsa" to help students understand the fundamental elements and intricate regulations of art and culture. Moreover, this curriculum aligns with the Cultural Arts Event Management VSC650 criteria, which guide student evaluation against these established standards. Following the session, two artists, Mohd Khairul Anuar A Rahman and Kho Thong Fook, delivered an art lecture, demonstrating their skills in live painting to the program attendees. Additional highlights included a presentation of authentic Malaysian music (angklung) and martial arts (silat). Furthermore, the program is enhanced by the inclusion of traditional games competitions, including Konda Kondi, Tuju Selipar, Tarik Upih, Galah Panjang, and Pukul Berapa Datuk Harimau. Activities involving exploration of Bukit Malawati and the Ceramic Miniature Decoration Competition were also held throughout the program. Tuan Haji Maskor Bin Tumiran, a Special Representative of the Kuala Selangor Parliament, inaugurated the program, which was attended by 220 students from schools and higher educational campuses in Selangor. The event concluded with an award ceremony presided over by Tuan Thiban Subbramaniam, the coordinator of the Bukit Malawati State Assembly, held a ceremony to honor all the tournament winners.

### **Academics as Knowledge Mediators in Cultural Heritage Transmission**

Academics are becoming more involved in efforts to protect and revive cultural heritage. They do this by not only teaching but also serving as experts and advisors to cultural groups. These professionals, possessing vast knowledge and expertise, play a crucial role in connecting academia and industry, effectively bridging the divide between theory and practice. An expert has specialized knowledge or experience in a particular field or topic and is available for support, advice, or information. Since UiTM is recognized as a comprehensive university with numerous experts across all disciplines, PADAT has appointed many experts and advisors to contribute their knowledge and ideas in various programs and activities.

Academics engage in strengthening documentation, interpretation, and knowledge dissemination processes, as research is undeniably a vital component of museology. A PADAT-UiTM joint research project is conducted, entitled "A Research on Selangor Folklore through New Medium: Motion Comic." In the initial phase of the observation, the state's folklore was not very popular among locals. Efforts were made to popularize and preserve Selangor's oral literature through books and even theatrical performances. But to date, there is no documented folklore from Selangor in new media, such as motion comics or animations, from any source. Therefore, this research focuses only on the potential of motion comics to promote local folklore among young people in Malaysia. Historically, Kuala Selangor has an intriguing history of its own that needs to be discovered and transformed into valuable creative content to enrich the local folklore of Selangor's citizens. Kota Melawati, in Kuala Selangor was an early settlement and a powerful fortress during the days of the Malay Sultanate. It has left behind a historical legacy and many important artifacts, including the cannon, the lighthouse, Batu Hampar, Tangga Seratus, Perigi Beracun, and more. This motion comic digitally preserves Selangor folklore and displays it in the exhibition at PADAT Museums, complete with scannable QR codes. By scanning QR codes, visitors can use their mobile phones or other devices to learn more about the stories and legends of Kota Melawati at the museum. This technology preserves both the tangible and intangible culture of Selangor for future generations to learn about. As part of their knowledge-sharing efforts, UiTM researchers presented their research findings at creative arts symposiums and international conferences.

A senior lecturer from the UiTM College of Built Environment at PADAT conducted joint research as part of a sabbatical program. The research focused primarily on Selangor's tangible cultural heritage, particularly monuments and historical sites. These research papers were published in local and international journals, including *Peranan Perbadanan Adat Melayu Dan Warisan Negeri Selangor Dalam Pemuliharaan Dan Pemeliharaan Bangunan Warisan di Negeri Selangor: Gedung Raja Abdullah, Klang; Designation of Batu Arang, Selangor, as The Coal Mining And Geological Heritage Site: Issues And Challenges; and Assessing Façade Modification Of Heritage Shophouses In Klang Royal Town, Selangor.*

In addition to collaborative research, PADAT researchers often engage UiTM lecturers to provide scholarly validation and critical evaluation of their research outcomes. For example, before nasi ambeng, a traditional Selangor dish, was gazetted as Selangor's Heritage Food, several measures were in place to achieve this goal. The process of making nasi ambeng known began in 2021 with the study of written sources and field research, followed by a roundtable workshop led by an Associate Professor from the UiTM Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management who specializes in food heritage and gastronomy. This roundtable workshop was attended by Nasi Ambeng entrepreneurs' representatives from the Department of National Heritage, the Selangor Department of Arts, Culture and Heritage, Persatuan Jawa Selangor, UiTM lecturers, and nasi ambeng entrepreneurs from the 5 districts in Selangor, namely Sabak Bernam, Kuala Selangor, Klang, Kuala Langat, and Sepang. The discussion's findings led to a conclusion about the characteristics of Nasi Ambeng Selangor. In a grand ceremony known as the Fiesta Nasi Ambeng Tradisional Selangor 2022, a total of 2,022 trays of complimentary nasi ambeng were distributed to the public, establishing a record in the Malaysia Book of Records (MBOR) for the largest serving of nasi ambeng in the nation. The initiative is part of the state government's efforts to elevate Nasi Ambeng as a traditional cuisine in Selangor. On November 27, 2022, in Pantai Bagan Lalang, Sepang, approximately 15,000 individuals participated in this program. Following this success, on 24 February 2024, nasi ambeng was one of 10 dishes designated as National Heritage Food in the Declaration of Heritage Objects 2024 by the National Heritage Department of Malaysia, under subsection 49(1) of the National Heritage Act 2005 [Act 645].

## DISCUSSION

The collaborative initiatives between the two universities and PADAT demonstrate that students were directly immersed in the cultural heritage ecosystem, enabling them to gain experiential insights beyond theoretical instruction. Rather than merely learning about heritage as an abstract subject, students engaged through heritage practices and with key stakeholders involved in its management and preservation. By applying classroom knowledge within authentic heritage contexts, the projects signify a pedagogical transition from classroom-centered instruction to situated, real-world learning environments. The PADAT-Taylor's Impact Lab projects allowed the students to share their ideas on how to protect Selangor's cultural heritage. This changed them from

passive receivers to active cultural agents. This change toward active participation helps them build a strong sense of national identity and a sense of responsibility for their learning (Hegediš et al., 2023). Additionally, Taylor's and UiTM projects demonstrate that the sustainability of heritage is strengthened when learning occurs within authentic heritage ecosystems rather than detached classroom environments.

The role of academics has transcended traditional teaching functions to encompass broader responsibilities as knowledge mediators between universities, government agencies, and the public. Beyond educating students, academics contribute to research validation, heritage documentation, policy consultation, and public engagement initiatives, thereby bridging academic scholarship and community practice. When academics take part in heritage designation processes, it strengthens the credibility of these efforts by grounding them in solid research and scholarly standards. This involvement makes universities more than just places for learning; they become important partners in shaping policies, using their knowledge to help with state-level cultural management and turning research into official heritage recognition and laws.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear that the success of preserving and promoting local cultural heritage does not depend only on one person's work. Instead, it depends on a system that includes custodians, policymakers, local communities, government agencies, the private sector, schools, and universities, among others. By involving these stakeholders, a more comprehensive and pragmatic strategy for sustainable heritage management can be formulated that addresses the varied needs and issues of this group. Universities, as higher education institutions, play a crucial role in preserving and promoting cultural heritage. They have the resources, expertise, and platform to work with local communities, industry, and other stakeholders to ensure the sustainability and dissemination of cultural heritage. Universities are in a unique position to connect academic research, real-world uses, and community involvement. This combination makes them the best stakeholders for protecting and promoting local cultural heritage. Through collaborations with PADAT, Taylor's University, and UiTM, students have been provided with valuable educational opportunities to develop original ideas that help PADAT showcase its historic sites. Students who participate in Taylor's Impact Lab hold discussions with PADAT and local authorities, such as MPKS (Majlis Perbandaran Kuala Selangor) and MPKL (Majlis Perbandaran Klang). Such involvement helps them to gain a different perspective on the issues involved in the conservation and promotion of Selangor's cultural heritage. This hands-on experience deepens students' academic knowledge and teaches them important skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective communication. Collaborative efforts between heritage institutions and universities can cultivate a profound comprehension of cultural diversity and the significance of cross-cultural exchange. By exploring different cultural environments and perspectives, students can develop a more nuanced grasp of the complex nature of cultural heritage and the methods for sustainably preserving and disseminating it.

## Declaration Of Ai-Assisted Technologies In The Writing Process

Statement: During the preparation of this paper, the author used OpenAI (Grammarly and ChatGPT) to improve readability and language, following major revisions. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the publication's content. Furthermore, all the content is original and written by the authors. The tool was solely employed during the primary revision phase to assess readability and language, if necessary, and not to generate any content.

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