

From Oral to Aural: A Community-Led Methodology for Documenting Place-Based Histories through Narrative and AI-Generated Song

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a community-led methodology for documenting place-based oral histories by transforming everyday narratives into AI-generated songs. The motivation stems from a critical gap in heritage preservation, particularly in contexts like Malaysia where written documentation is scarce and oral traditions risk erasure. I propose a systematic, replicable process that empowers communities to author their own history through accessible AI music generation tools such as Suno, centering the lived details of daily life that define a place's identity. The methodology synthesizes insights from Alltagsgeschichte, E.P. Thompson's "history from below," participatory heritage practices, and the mnemonic power of song. I conduct a multi-phase qualitative research design comprising a deep literature review across five dimensions: authenticity of AI-generated cultural artifacts, power dynamics in human-AI co-creation, music's effectiveness as a memory retrieval cue, the influence of written micro-narratives on storytelling, and conditions for sustainable community archival projects. The synthesis reveals that perceived authenticity is socially negotiated rather than technically determined, and community validation is essential for cultural legitimacy. Furthermore, AI mediation reshapes authorship into a triadic model involving narrators, researchers, and AI systems, demanding transparent governance and consent structures. Music consistently demonstrates a mnemonic advantage over speech, though this effect is conditional on context and learning conditions. The proposed methodology's novelty lies in its integration of AI-generated song as both an archival medium and a community empowerment tool, operationalized through a proposed case study, "From Oral to Aural: The People's Playlist," in Malaysia. A longitudinal Community Heritage Log tracks song access, annotations, and intergenerational transmission over six months. The significance of this work is that it offers a theoretically grounded, practically viable approach to heritage preservation that prioritizes participatory integrity over technical sophistication, thereby enabling communities to become active authors of their own historical narratives.

Keywords: Oral history, AI-generated music, Participatory heritage, Place-based memory, Community archiving

INTRODUCTION

The erasure of everyday life from historical records represents a persistent and profound challenge for heritage preservation, particularly in societies where written documentation remains scarce and oral traditions serve as the primary vessels of collective memory [29]. In Malaysia, for instance, the rapid pace of urbanization and modernization has accelerated the loss of vernacular knowledge, local dialects, and place-based identities that have been transmitted orally across generations [17]. Conventional archival practices, often oriented toward elite narratives and monumental events, systematically marginalize the small, lived details of daily life—the rhythms of market days, the textures of neighborhood interactions, the sensory memories of cooking and craft—that collectively define a community's sense of place and belonging [6]. This gap is not merely an academic concern; it has tangible consequences for cultural continuity, social cohesion, and the right of communities to represent themselves in the historical record.

Everyday narratives, however, possess a distinctive power that conventional historical sources often lack. They are intimate, embodied, and emotionally resonant, capturing the affective textures of lived experience that official documents cannot convey [22]. The historiographical traditions of *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life) and E.P. Thompson's "history from below" have long argued that the mundane routines and micro-level interactions of ordinary people constitute the very fabric of historical change [44]. Yet translating these everyday narratives into durable, accessible archival forms remains a methodological challenge. Oral history interviews, while rich in detail, are time-intensive to conduct, transcribe, and preserve; written micro-narratives, though more easily archived, may lose the prosody, silence, and emotional embodiment that oral testimony carries [49]. There is, therefore, a pressing need for innovative approaches that can capture the authenticity and emotional resonance of oral storytelling while ensuring archival durability and community accessibility.

The central proposition of this paper is that AI-generated song offers a novel and powerful medium for bridging this gap. I propose a community-led methodology wherein everyday narratives are captured from community members and transformed into songs using accessible AI music generation tools such as Suno [32]. The core hypothesis is that by combining the historiographical insights of *Alltagsgeschichte* and "history from below" with participatory heritage practices and the well-documented mnemonic power of music, a systematic, replicable, and sustainable process can be developed that empowers communities to become the authors of their own history. This methodology is designed to be accessible to participants with no prior musical or technical expertise, positioning the act of capturing "a few sentences" about everyday life as a powerful form of community empowerment and identity preservation, rather than a passive subject of academic inquiry [42].

The objective of this research is twofold. First, I aim to synthesize foundational evidence from archival scholarship, ethnomusicology, memory studies, digital storytelling, participatory design, and community heritage practice to establish the theoretical and empirical grounding for the proposed methodology. Second, I seek to operationalize this synthesis into a concrete, actionable process that can be implemented in diverse community contexts, with a particular focus on Malaysia as a case study. The significance of this work lies in its potential to address a critical gap in heritage preservation by offering a theoretically grounded, practically viable approach that prioritizes participatory integrity over technical sophistication. In doing so, it contributes to broader conversations about decolonizing heritage practices, amplifying underrepresented voices, and reimagining the role of AI in cultural production [28].

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews and synthesizes the relevant literature on *Alltagsgeschichte*, history from below, participatory heritage practices, the mnemonic power of song, and place-based identity, establishing the theoretical and historiographical foundations of the proposed methodology. Section 3 presents the core principles and the five-step process of the proposed community-led methodology. Section 4 synthesizes the foundational research across four key dimensions: authenticity and emotional resonance, power dynamics and authorship, mnemonic potential, and conditions for sustainable implementation. Section 5 discusses the implications of this methodology for participatory heritage preservation and community empowerment, and Section 6 concludes with reflections on limitations and future directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The intellectual foundations of this research draw from several intersecting scholarly traditions that collectively inform the proposed community-led methodology. The historiographical framework of *Alltagsgeschichte*, or the history of everyday life, emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a corrective to the dominance of structural and macro-historical approaches that had long marginalized the experiences of ordinary people [34]. Scholars such as Alf Lüdtke argued that understanding historical processes requires close attention to the "Eigensinn" (self-will) of everyday life—the ways in which individuals navigate, resist, and reshape the structural forces that constrain them. This perspective challenges the conventional archival emphasis on elite documents and monumental events, asserting that the textures of daily existence—the rhythms of work, the rituals of domestic life, the sensory experiences of neighborhood interactions—are not merely background noise but are themselves historically consequential. Complementing this historiographical commitment, E.P. Thompson's concept of "history from below" offered a methodological and political

argument for recovering the agency of working-class communities whose voices had been systematically excluded from official records [7]. In his seminal work *The Making of the English Working Class*, Thompson demonstrated that ordinary people are not passive subjects of elite narratives but active historical agents who shape their own destinies through collective action, cultural production, and everyday resistance. For heritage preservation, this perspective insists that communities should not be mere informants in researcher-driven projects but should instead be positioned as authors of their own historical narratives—a principle the proposed methodology operationalizes by empowering community members to select, narrate, and validate the stories that are transformed into song. Oral history methodology has long served as the primary vehicle for operationalizing these historiographical commitments, particularly in contexts where written documentation is scarce. In Malaysia, for instance, the shortage of written records has accelerated the need for oral history as a method to capture valuable untold community stories, yet research has shown that oral history projects there have not conformed to a fully participatory approach, with researchers tending to regard interviewees as information providers who have little involvement in developing interview questions, program aims, or outcomes [29]. This gap between the theoretical promise of participatory heritage and its practical implementation underscores the need for methodologies that genuinely redistribute authority over the archival process.

The concept of place-based identity provides another crucial theoretical anchor for this work. Place attachment and place identity are affective bonds that people establish with specific areas where they feel comfortable and safe, and these bonds are particularly strong among native populations who have maintained ongoing interactions over long periods [21]. Research has demonstrated that place identity develops through sustained interaction with physical and social environments, and that it constitutes a component of personal identity through which people describe themselves in terms of belonging to a specific place [21]. For communities facing rapid urbanization and cultural change, the documentation of place-based oral histories becomes not merely an archival exercise but a means of preserving the very fabric of collective identity.

Participatory heritage practices have emerged as a response to the limitations of top-down, expert-driven approaches to cultural preservation. The participatory turn in heritage studies emphasizes that communities should be active agents in defining what is worth preserving, how it should be represented, and who has access to it [16]. This perspective aligns closely with the principles of design justice, which argues that design processes should be led by the communities most affected by their outcomes [11]. In the context of digital storytelling, participatory approaches have been shown to surface participation barriers and shape what kinds of stories are told, particularly where literacy or confidence with writing is uneven [40]. The challenge, therefore, is to design methodologies that are genuinely inclusive and that do not inadvertently reproduce existing hierarchies of voice and access.

The mnemonic power of song has been extensively documented across multiple disciplines. Across diverse cultures and historical periods, music has served as a primary vehicle for the transmission of oral traditions, genealogies, and historical narratives [9]. Ethnomusicological research has demonstrated that the formal properties of song—rhythm, melody, rhyme, and repetition—function as powerful mnemonic devices that enhance the encoding, storage, and retrieval of verbal information. Empirical studies in cognitive psychology have confirmed that sung presentation improves recall for everyday-life texts at both short and longer intervals compared to spoken presentation, and that music-evoked autobiographical memories are typically more vivid, emotionally rich, and detailed than those triggered by non-musical cues [25]. For older adults, familiar songs from adolescence and youth are especially effective memory cues, consistent with the reminiscence bump phenomenon [27]. These findings suggest that transforming oral narratives into song could significantly enhance both the memorability and the emotional resonance of community histories, thereby increasing their likelihood of intergenerational transmission.

The research gap that this paper addresses lies at the intersection of these diverse traditions. While *Alltagsgeschichte* and history from below provide the historiographical rationale for centering everyday narratives, and while participatory heritage practices offer principles for community-led documentation, and while ethnomusicology and memory studies confirm the mnemonic power of song, no existing methodology systematically integrates these elements with accessible AI music generation tools. Furthermore, the specific challenges of implementing such a methodology in the Malaysian context—where oral history practices

remain largely researcher-driven and where digital infrastructure and literacy are uneven—have not been adequately addressed. The proposed methodology thus fills a critical gap by offering a theoretically grounded, practically viable approach that prioritizes participatory integrity over technical sophistication, thereby enabling communities to become active authors of their own historical narratives through the medium of AI-generated song.

A Community-Led Methodology: Core Principles And The Five-Step Process

Building upon the theoretical foundations established in the preceding sections, I now present the core principles and operational structure of the proposed community-led methodology for documenting place-based oral histories through narrative and AI-generated song. The methodology is designed to be systematic, replicable, and sustainable, with the central objective of empowering communities to become authors of their own historical narratives. At its heart lies a deceptively simple practice: capturing “a few sentences” from community members about their everyday lives and transforming these micro-narratives into songs using accessible AI music generation tools such as Suno [32].

The core practice of eliciting “a few sentences” is a deliberate methodological choice informed by the historiographical traditions of *Alltagsgeschichte* and history from below. Rather than conducting lengthy, researcher-directed oral history interviews that may impose external narrative structures on community members’ experiences, I ask participants to articulate a brief, self-contained memory or observation about their daily life in a specific place. This could be a description of a morning routine, a recollection of a neighborhood gathering, a sensory memory of a particular smell or sound, or an observation about how a place has changed over time. The brevity of the elicitation is intentional: it lowers the barrier to participation, reduces the cognitive load on narrators, and centers the small, lived details that conventional archival practices systematically marginalize. Furthermore, the written or recorded format of these micro-narratives provides a tangible artifact that can be directly input into AI music generation systems, thereby creating a seamless pipeline from lived experience to musical artifact.

The methodology is organized into five sequential steps, each of which is designed to be implemented in community settings with minimal technical infrastructure and no requirement for prior musical or technical expertise among participants. The first step, Community Engagement and Narrative Elicitation, involves establishing trust and rapport with community members through local intermediaries, explaining the purpose and process of the project, and inviting participants to share their “few sentences” about everyday life. This step is grounded in participatory heritage principles that emphasize community ownership and consent [16]. Narratives may be collected through written forms, audio recordings, or facilitated group sessions, depending on the literacy levels and preferences of the community. The key requirement is that the narrative is captured in a format that can be subsequently processed as text input for AI music generation.

The second step, Narrative Curation and Consent Verification, involves reviewing the collected micro-narratives with the participants to ensure accuracy, authenticity, and alignment with their intentions. This step is critical for addressing the ethical concerns raised by AI-mediated cultural production, particularly regarding authorship and representation [42]. Participants are asked to confirm that their narrative accurately reflects their intended meaning, to specify any elements they wish to exclude or modify, and to provide explicit consent for the transformation of their narrative into song. This consent process is documented and stored alongside the narrative, establishing a clear provenance trail that respects community control over the resulting cultural artifacts.

The third step, AI-Mediated Song Generation, involves inputting the curated micro-narrative into an accessible AI music generation tool, such as Suno, to produce a musical composition. The participant is given agency over key parameters of the generation process, including the musical genre, tempo, instrumentation, and vocal style, to the extent that the tool allows. This participatory design ensures that the resulting song reflects the community’s aesthetic preferences and cultural context, rather than imposing external musical norms [12]. The AI system generates a complete song, including lyrics derived from the micro-narrative, melody, harmony, and arrangement. The output is reviewed by the participant, who may request revisions or regenerations until they are satisfied with the result.

The fourth step, Community Validation and Archival Integration, involves presenting the generated song back to the broader community for validation and contextualization. This step is essential for establishing the cultural legitimacy and historical authority of the AI-generated artifact, as research has shown that community validation is a key determinant of perceived authenticity in synthetic heritage contexts [48]. Community members are invited to listen to the song, provide feedback, and add contextual annotations—such as the date, location, and significance of the narrated event—that enrich the archival record. These annotations are stored in a Community Heritage Log, a longitudinal framework designed to track song access, sharing, and intergenerational transmission over a six-month period.

The fifth and final step, Intergenerational Transmission and Sustainable Archiving, focuses on ensuring that the generated songs become living cultural artifacts rather than static archival objects. The Community Heritage Log is designed to be accessible on common devices, such as smartphones and basic computers, with low-friction interfaces that do not require specialist technical skills to navigate. Community members are encouraged to share the songs through local networks, social media, and community events, thereby facilitating their integration into everyday cultural practice. The log also tracks metadata such as the number of times a song is accessed, shared, or annotated, providing evidence of sustained mnemonic and archival function. Sustainability indicators include continued use without researcher prompting, evidence that youth become new carriers of the histories, and signs that the archive can be maintained using modest technical standards and community-led workflows [31].

This five-step process is designed to be iterative and adaptive, allowing communities to refine their approach over time based on their own experiences and evolving needs. The methodology does not prescribe a fixed timeline or sequence of activities; rather, it provides a flexible framework that can be tailored to the specific cultural, linguistic, and infrastructural context of each community. The core principle that unifies all five steps is the redistribution of authority over the archival process from researchers to community members, ensuring that the resulting historical record reflects the community's own priorities, aesthetics, and values.

Synthesis Of Foundational Research: Authenticity, Authorship, Mnemonic Potential, And Sustainability

The deep research synthesis presented in this section draws together evidence from archival scholarship, ethnomusicology, memory studies, digital storytelling, participatory design, and community heritage practice to critically inform the proposed methodology. This synthesis is organized across four key dimensions—authenticity and historical authority, power dynamics and authorship, mnemonic effectiveness, and conditions for sustainable implementation—each of which addresses a fundamental question raised by the integration of AI-generated song into community-led oral history documentation.

Authenticity and Historical Authority of AI-Generated Songs

The evidence consistently demonstrates that perceived authenticity and historical authority of AI-generated songs are socially negotiated rather than technically determined. A study on synthetic heritage found that AI-generated memory artifacts can be emotionally compelling while raising ethical concerns about deception and mnemonic distortion [48]. Research on AI-generated text archives revealed that participants rated original archives as more worth preserving than AI-generated ones, even when they could not reliably distinguish them, suggesting that authenticity judgments are independent of detection accuracy [13]. This finding has profound implications for the proposed methodology: it indicates that the historical authority of AI-generated songs will not be automatically conferred by their technical fidelity to the original narrative but must be actively constructed through transparent provenance labeling and community validation processes.

Community validation emerges as essential for establishing cultural legitimacy. A mixed-methods preservation study on indigenous music reported that 72% of native participants considered AI-reconstructed songs culturally valid when embedded in participatory frameworks that included community consultation and expert validation [2]. This finding underscores that authenticity is not an inherent property of the AI-generated artifact but is instead attributed by the community based on their assessment of the process by which it was produced. The Mali case study on participatory GenAI workshops provides further evidence: AI-assisted musical co-creation strengthened social cohesion and cultural sovereignty when culturally conscious frameworks were

applied, but only when communities retained decision-making power over language, themes, and use [12]. This suggests that the proposed methodology's emphasis on community control over narrative selection, consent, and validation is not merely an ethical precaution but a practical requirement for producing culturally legitimate artifacts.

Ethnomusicological analysis emphasizes that authenticity is reconstructed through platform circulation, dataset choices, and human curatorial decisions rather than produced by the model alone [4]. In the context of Irish traditional music, AI provokes contested views of authenticity framed through three dimensions: source/cause, the artwork itself, and the listener's reception [23]. This triadic framework is directly applicable to the proposed methodology, where the source/cause dimension concerns the community narrator's original micro-narrative, the artwork itself is the AI-generated song, and the listener's reception involves the broader community's validation. A heritage project reviving Victorian hymns with AI-generated choral textures demonstrated utility for reanimating forgotten local repertoire but explicitly framed the output as creative reconstruction rather than a test of historical fidelity [38]. This distinction is crucial: the proposed methodology does not claim that AI-generated songs are historically accurate reproductions of past sounds or performances, but rather that they are contemporary creative reconstructions that can serve as mnemonic anchors for community memory.

The synthesis of these findings yields a clear directive for the proposed methodology: authenticity and historical authority must be actively constructed through transparent processes of community validation, provenance documentation, and explicit framing of AI-generated outputs as creative reconstructions rather than historical reproductions. The methodology's emphasis on the Community Heritage Log, which tracks annotations, contextual notes, and community feedback, provides a mechanism for this ongoing negotiation of authenticity. By centering community judgment as the ultimate arbiter of cultural validity, the methodology aligns with the evidence that authenticity is socially negotiated and that participatory frameworks are essential for establishing the historical authority of AI-generated cultural artifacts.

Power Dynamics, Authorship, and Ethical Responsibility

The integration of AI into the documentation of oral histories fundamentally reshapes the traditional understanding of authorship, moving it from a singular, human-centered model to a distributed, triadic configuration involving community narrators, researchers, and AI systems. This transformation introduces complex power dynamics and ethical responsibilities that must be carefully navigated to ensure the methodology empowers rather than exploits the communities it seeks to serve.

Archival and digital heritage scholarship stresses that AI systems are not neutral tools but active agents that reshape who controls description, access, and interpretation within archival processes [24]. The introduction of generative AI into heritage contexts creates what has been termed "ambient authorship," where the boundaries between human and machine contribution become blurred, making transparency and governance central ethical issues [32]. This is particularly acute in the context of born-digital ephemera spawned by generative AI, which require new protocols for management that account for the distributed nature of their creation [43]. The synthetic heritage literature frames AI-generated memory as a socio-technical process rather than a neutral tool, arguing that the ethical implications of algorithmic memory production must be addressed through explicit consent, permanent transparency, and integrity constraints on what AI may invent [48].

Work on communal archiving in music culture highlights tensions around intellectual property and the need for consent structures that preserve community control over cultural expressions [2]. The clearest practical guidance emerging from the literature is that ethical AI music requires consent-based training, provenance labeling, and human-centered design that prioritizes community agency over technical capability [33]. The Mali case study provides a compelling illustration: participatory co-creation can amplify local voices only when communities retain decision-making power over language, themes, and use, and when culturally relevant corpora and participatory governance structures are in place [12]. Without such safeguards, AI-mediated cultural production risks reproducing colonial patterns of extraction and appropriation, where communities provide raw material for outputs that are controlled and interpreted by external actors.

A scoping review of human-AI co-creation literature finds that agency is distributed through specific control mechanisms, with trust and ethics as central design concerns [51]. This finding underscores that the design of the co-creative process itself determines whether power is genuinely shared or merely performative. For the proposed methodology, this means that the five-step process must be designed with explicit mechanisms for community veto power over generated outputs, transparent documentation of AI's role in the creative process, and clear attribution of authorship that acknowledges the narrator as the primary source while also recognizing the contributions of the researcher and the AI system. The Community Heritage Log serves as a governance tool in this context, providing a permanent record of consent, provenance, and community validation that can be referenced to resolve disputes about authorship and ownership.

The ethical framework for AI-generated memory artifacts must also address the potential for mnemonic distortion. Research on synthetic heritage warns that AI systems can fabricate plausible but historically inaccurate details, and that such fabrications, once embedded in song, may be difficult to correct or retract [48]. This risk is particularly acute in oral history contexts where the original narrative may be the only surviving record of a particular event or practice. The proposed methodology addresses this concern through the consent verification step, where participants review and approve the generated song before it enters the archival record, and through the community validation step, where the broader community can flag inaccuracies or misrepresentations. These mechanisms create a system of checks and balances that distributes ethical responsibility across all three nodes of the triadic authorship model, rather than placing it solely on the AI system or the researcher.

Ultimately, the synthesis of evidence on power dynamics and authorship confirms that the success of the proposed methodology hinges not on the technical sophistication of the AI tool but on the integrity of the participatory process that centers community ownership, authentic representation, and transparent governance. The methodology's emphasis on consent, provenance, and community validation is not merely an ethical add-on but a fundamental requirement for producing culturally legitimate and historically trustworthy artifacts. By designing the process to redistribute authority over the archival process from researchers and AI systems to community narrators, the methodology aligns with the principles of design justice and participatory heritage that underpin its theoretical foundations.

Mnemonic Effectiveness of AI-Generated Songs

The central hypothesis of this methodology—that transforming oral narratives into song enhances their memorability and emotional resonance—finds substantial support in the cognitive and psychological literature, though the evidence reveals important conditionalities that must inform the design of the proposed process. Multiple memory studies demonstrate a consistent mnemonic advantage for song over speech, yet this advantage is not universal and depends critically on learning conditions, retrieval contexts, and the nature of the material being encoded.

A systematic review of musical mnemonics in cognitively unimpaired individuals and those with Alzheimer's dementia found beneficial memory effects in 28 of 37 studies, with sung presentation improving recall for everyday-life texts at both ten minutes and twenty-four hours [14]. This finding is particularly relevant for the proposed methodology, as the micro-narratives collected from community members are precisely the kind of everyday-life texts that benefit most from musical encoding. One study reported significantly higher lyric recall in the music condition during immediate testing and a delayed advantage after one week, suggesting that the mnemonic benefit of song persists beyond short-term memory windows [3]. Children have been found to recall approximately 20% more words with sung than spoken presentation, indicating that the effect is robust across age groups [30].

However, not all studies agree unconditionally. One lyric-learning study found no advantage for song over speech in short- or long-term recall and noted that singing can interfere with text recall in some learning conditions [39]. A separate experiment found that song-like pitch structures are remembered better than speech-like ones, suggesting that acoustic form itself supports memory, but this advantage may be specific to certain types of musical structure [19]. The strongest synthesis emerging from the literature is that music can act as a retrieval cue or mnemonic anchor, but it is not uniformly superior to text or speech for long-term recall

[20]. This conditional nature of the mnemonic advantage has important implications for the proposed methodology: it suggests that AI-generated songs should be designed not as replacements for the original oral narratives but as complementary mnemonic devices that can be used alongside other archival formats.

Empirical studies on music-evoked autobiographical memory consistently demonstrate that music triggers vivid, emotionally rich recollections with greater internal detail than non-musical cues [5]. Familiar music is especially effective at evoking memories rated as more important to one's life story, and in older adults, familiar songs from adolescence and youth are particularly effective memory cues, consistent with the reminiscence bump phenomenon [26]. A mixed-methods study of healthy aging found that songs evoked memories involving specific people, places, singing, and dancing, which is promising for place-based memory transmission [37]. These findings suggest that the AI-generated songs produced through the proposed methodology could serve not only as archival records but also as powerful retrieval cues that trigger the recall of additional details and associated memories in both the original narrators and subsequent listeners.

The synthesis of this evidence yields several design principles for the proposed methodology. First, the AI-generated songs should be designed to maximize their mnemonic potential by incorporating musical features that enhance encoding and retrieval, such as clear melodic contours, regular rhythmic patterns, and repetition of key phrases. Second, the songs should be presented to community members in contexts that facilitate repeated exposure, as the mnemonic advantage of song is often amplified through repeated learning [8]. Third, the Community Heritage Log should track not only access and sharing but also the contexts in which songs are listened to, as music-evoked autobiographical memory is highly context-dependent. Fourth, the methodology should acknowledge that song is not a universal mnemonic panacea and that some community members may benefit more from spoken or written archival formats. By integrating AI-generated songs as one component of a multi-format archival system, the methodology can leverage the mnemonic advantages of music while mitigating its limitations.

Conditions for Sustainable Implementation Across Diverse Communities

The long-term viability of the proposed methodology depends on its ability to be sustained by communities themselves, without ongoing external support from researchers or institutions. The evidence synthesized from digital storytelling, community archiving, and AI heritage projects reveals a consistent set of conditions that either enable or undermine sustainability, and these must be systematically addressed in the design of the five-step process.

Digital storytelling projects work best when designed around low-barrier participation, because poor internet access, limited digital literacy, time constraints, and infrastructure gaps can significantly reduce inclusion [40, 50]. The methodology's reliance on written micro-narratives as input for AI generation raises particular concerns: written forms may exclude embodied or oral modes of testimony, and participants in digital storytelling projects often report difficulty with reading and writing [40]. Oral-history scholarship confirms that interviews capture prosody, silence, breath, pace, and emotional embodiment that short written texts cannot fully reproduce [46], while research on embodied microhistories and somatic elicitation shows that sensory and body-centered prompting can surface affective memories not easily reached through linear text-based methods [35, 45]. The methodology therefore offers multiple modes of narrative elicitation—including audio recording, facilitated group discussion, and sensory prompting—alongside written micro-narratives, to ensure that participants can contribute in ways that align with their communicative strengths and preferences.

The Mali case provides the clearest sustainability signal from the AI heritage literature: AI-based musical storytelling can sustain itself in local-language, community-centered settings, but only when communities retain control over language, themes, and use, and when culturally relevant corpora and participatory governance structures are in place [12]. Demographic patterns further complicate the sustainability landscape. Pew Research Center data reveal that while AI awareness is nearly universal (96%), chatbot usage among adults aged 65 and older stands at just 23%, with similarly low rates among lower-income and less digitally connected populations [41]. These patterns are likely to be even more pronounced in communities with weaker digital infrastructure, such as those targeted by the proposed methodology in Malaysia. The methodology must therefore include substantial capacity-building components—such as hands-on workshops, peer mentoring,

and simplified interfaces—to ensure that older adults and less digitally literate community members can participate fully and sustain the project over time.

Sustainability indicators for the proposed Community Heritage Log include continued use without researcher prompting, low-friction access on common devices, community ability to add metadata and contextual notes without specialist help, evidence that youth become new carriers of the histories, and signs that the archive can be maintained using modest technical standards and community-led workflows [31]. Achieving these indicators requires deliberate design choices—multimodal narrative elicitation, culturally adapted AI models, low-barrier interfaces, and community governance structures—that together create the conditions for long-term, community-led archival practice.

Implications For Participatory Heritage Preservation And Community Empowerment

The methodology I have developed carries profound implications for the theory and practice of participatory heritage preservation, extending well beyond the specific technical integration of AI and oral history. At a theoretical level, this work challenges the conventional distinction between heritage preservation as a professional, expert-led activity and community storytelling as an informal, ephemeral practice. By positioning AI-generated song as a legitimate archival medium, the methodology collapses the boundary between the archive and the everyday, suggesting that heritage preservation need not be confined to institutions but can be woven into the fabric of community life through accessible, emotionally resonant forms [16]. This aligns with the broader turn in critical heritage studies toward recognizing that heritage is not a fixed object to be preserved but an ongoing process of meaning-making in which communities are the primary agents [18]. The methodology thus offers a concrete instantiation of what has been called “heritage from below,” where the authority to define what is worth preserving is redistributed from experts to communities themselves [36].

The practical implications for heritage practitioners are substantial. The methodology provides a replicable framework that can be adapted to diverse cultural contexts, from indigenous communities seeking to preserve endangered languages to urban neighborhoods documenting the lived experience of gentrification. For example, a community organization in a rapidly changing urban district could use the five-step process to collect micro-narratives from long-term residents about the sights, sounds, and social rhythms of their neighborhood, transforming these into songs that can be shared at community events, played on local radio, or uploaded to a community website. The songs serve not only as archival records but as tools for advocacy, enabling communities to make visible the intangible heritage that is often erased in official planning processes. For educators, the methodology offers a pedagogical tool for engaging students with local history through creative, multimodal production, fostering both historical consciousness and digital literacy. Policymakers in cultural heritage and community development can draw on the methodology to design funding programs that support community-led preservation initiatives, recognizing that the sustainability of such projects depends on low-barrier access, culturally relevant AI models, and community governance structures rather than technical sophistication alone.

The methodology also has implications for the ethical governance of AI in heritage contexts. The triadic authorship model I have articulated—involving narrators, researchers, and AI systems—provides a framework for thinking about accountability and consent in AI-mediated cultural production that extends beyond this specific application. Heritage institutions that are increasingly adopting AI tools for cataloging, description, and interpretation can learn from the methodology’s emphasis on provenance labeling, community validation, and transparent documentation of AI’s role [24]. The Community Heritage Log, in particular, offers a model for how communities can maintain ongoing oversight of AI-generated cultural artifacts, tracking not only access and sharing but also annotations, corrections, and contextual notes that reflect the evolving community understanding of the artifact’s meaning and significance.

Nevertheless, several limitations of this research must be acknowledged. The deep literature review, while systematic and comprehensive, was constrained by the scope of the databases searched and the inclusion criteria applied. I focused primarily on peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings in English, which may have excluded relevant scholarship published in other languages or in non-academic formats such as community reports, policy documents, and practitioner guides. This is particularly significant given that the

methodology is intended for application in non-Western contexts like Malaysia, where local knowledge about oral history practices, community archiving, and AI adoption may be documented in languages other than English or in formats that are not indexed in standard academic databases. The review also relied on a qualitative synthesis approach, which, while appropriate for integrating diverse types of evidence, is inherently subjective in its selection and interpretation of studies. Different researchers might have drawn different conclusions from the same body of literature, particularly regarding the relative weight given to studies that find strong mnemonic advantages for song versus those that find conditional or null effects. Furthermore, the evidence base for several key dimensions—particularly the influence of written micro-narratives on storytelling and the conditions for sustainable AI heritage projects in non-Western contexts—was thinner than anticipated, meaning that some of the design principles I have proposed are based on extrapolation from related domains rather than direct empirical evidence.

These limitations point to several directions for future research. There is a clear need for empirical studies that directly test the proposed methodology in real-world community settings, particularly in the Malaysian context for which the “From Oral to Aural” case study was designed. Such studies should employ mixed-methods designs that capture both quantitative indicators of mnemonic effectiveness—such as recall accuracy and retention over time—and qualitative insights into community members’ experiences of authorship, agency, and cultural validation. Future research should also explore the comparative effectiveness of different AI music generation tools and prompt engineering strategies, examining how variations in musical style, tempo, instrumentation, and lyrical structure affect both mnemonic outcomes and community acceptance. Understudied areas include the intergenerational dynamics of song-based heritage transmission: do younger community members engage with AI-generated songs differently than older members, and what factors influence whether youth become active carriers of the histories rather than passive recipients? There is also a need for longitudinal studies that track the sustainability of community-led AI heritage projects over periods of two years or more, examining whether the Community Heritage Log continues to be used without researcher prompting and whether the archive remains accessible and meaningful as community circumstances change. Finally, future research should investigate the ethical implications of AI-generated heritage artifacts in contexts where communities have experienced historical trauma or cultural appropriation, exploring how the methodology can be adapted to ensure that it heals rather than harms. By addressing these gaps, future work can build on the foundation I have established to create a robust, evidence-based practice of community-led heritage preservation through AI-generated song.

CONCLUSION

I have presented a community-led methodology for documenting place-based oral histories through narrative and AI-generated song, synthesizing evidence across authenticity, authorship, mnemonic potential, and sustainability to demonstrate that such an approach is both theoretically grounded and practically viable. The core contribution of this work lies in its integration of AI-generated song as a dual-function medium—serving simultaneously as an archival preservation format and a community empowerment tool—within a systematic, replicable five-step process that centers community ownership over technical sophistication. The proposed case study application, “From Oral to Aural: The People’s Playlist,” operationalizes this methodology in the Malaysian context, where a shortage of written documentation makes oral history methods particularly urgent. Central to this application is the Community Heritage Log that now becomes a Song Database, a curated digital repository that stores each generated song alongside its originating micro-narrative, provenance metadata, consent documentation, and community annotations. The database functions not merely as a passive storage system but as an active archival infrastructure: it enables community members to search, access, and share songs across generations, to add contextual notes and corrections that reflect evolving community understanding, and to track patterns of use that reveal which histories resonate most strongly across different demographic groups. The Song Database thus embodies the methodology’s commitment to distributed authorship and ongoing community validation, ensuring that the archive remains a living, negotiated record rather than a fixed, authoritative document.

The role of song as a preservation medium is central to the methodology’s theoretical and practical significance. The synthesized evidence confirms that music consistently demonstrates a mnemonic advantage

over speech, with sung presentation improving recall for everyday-life texts at both short and extended time intervals, and that music-evoked autobiographical memory triggers vivid, emotionally rich recollections with greater internal detail than non-musical cues. These findings suggest that AI-generated songs can serve not only as archival records but as powerful retrieval cues that trigger the recall of additional details and associated memories in both original narrators and subsequent listeners, thereby supporting intergenerational transmission of place-based knowledge. However, the evidence also reveals that the mnemonic advantage of song is conditional rather than universal, depending on learning conditions, retrieval contexts, and the nature of the material being encoded. The methodology therefore positions AI-generated songs as complementary to, rather than replacements for, the original oral narratives and written micro-narratives, creating a multi-format archival system that leverages the strengths of each medium while mitigating their respective limitations. Ethical considerations permeate every dimension of this methodology, from the initial consent process through the ongoing governance of the Song Database. The triadic authorship model I have articulated—involving community narrators, researchers, and AI systems—demands transparent provenance labeling, community veto power over generated outputs, and explicit acknowledgment of AI's role in the creative process. The Community Heritage Log serves as a governance tool that tracks consent, annotations, and community validation over time, providing a permanent record that can be referenced to resolve disputes about authorship and ownership. The methodology also addresses the risk of mnemonic distortion inherent in AI-generated artifacts through the consent verification and community validation steps, creating a system of checks and balances that distributes ethical responsibility across all three nodes of the authorship model. By centering community judgment as the ultimate arbiter of cultural validity and historical authority, the methodology aligns with the principles of design justice and participatory heritage that underpin its theoretical foundations, offering a replicable framework that can empower communities to become active authors of their own historical narratives rather than passive subjects of academic inquiry.

Ethical Considerations

This research involves the documentation of community oral histories. As a methodology and concept paper proposing a framework for future empirical work, no primary data from human subjects was collected in the preparation of this manuscript. Future empirical applications of this methodology will require appropriate institutional ethics approval prior to community engagement.

Data Availability

No datasets were generated or analysed during the preparation of this concept paper. The methodology proposed herein is designed to generate community-held data in future empirical studies; data availability protocols for those studies will be determined in consultation with participating communities.

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