



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 8.0 Introduction

This study was set out to explore the local community involvement in Cultural Heritage Management in Malaysia by using the Melaka Heritage Trail as a case study. Literatures in this subject have suggested a lack of empirical findings to investigate social attitudes (psychology) among local community in assessing their involvement towards cultural heritage management. In fact, this research is a first attempt to triangulate the Cultural Heritage Management system between heritage resources, local community and visitors in Malaysia setting.

Therefore, this study sought to answer the questions below:

1. What are the levels of attachment amongst the local community towards heritage?
2. How to encourage local community to recognise their heritage values and adopt their heritage?
3. What local community opportunities exist and what can be enhanced to encourage community involvement in decision making in the management of heritage and tourism in Malaysia?
4. What are local community contributions for long-term heritage management in Malaysia?

5. To what extent can 'bottom-up' approaches for heritage management be implemented within the 'top-down' management system found in Malaysia?

Moreover, the research questions above addressing the following specific objectives:

1. To determine existing levels of attachment amongst the local community towards heritage.
2. To identify the potential benefits of involving local communities in heritage asset management.
3. To evaluate the current institutional arrangement governing heritage asset management in Malaysia.
4. To assess to what extent the local community is part of the institutional arrangement.
5. To explore the current involvement of the local community and opportunities available in decision making in the management of heritage and tourism in Malaysia.
6. To examine the constitutional framework governing local community rights in decision making.
7. To identify the threats that exists to the successful development of local community involvement in heritage assets management.

The next sections summarises the research findings by triangulating research questions and objectives. Recommends and possible approaches to overcome the limitations and problems that were identified by the study. The contributions of this research to the existing body of knowledge, its limitations and suggestions for further research, are discussed at the end of the chapter.

## 8.1 Summary of Findings

The level of the local community attachment to culture and heritage in Melaka WHS is significantly higher for both dimensions of place identity and place dependence. These dimensions highlighted two different meanings of community involvement towards CHM. For example, their place identity attachment is strongly related to their emotional connections towards local culture and tradition. This suggests that the importance of intangible heritage assets as part of attachment value among the local community.

The government currently gives a full attention for conserving and managing tangible heritage assets (i.e buildings, monuments, artefacts, sites and constructed landscapes). However, little attention of managing intangible heritage has been identified as a reason for a lack of direct engagement with the local community. The importance of conserving and managing intangible heritage could encourage active participation from diverse groups of residents due to multiple cultures exists in Melaka WHS. This is in the fact that the component of intangible heritage is formed from the identity of the collective life of the community as a whole rather than individuals. This is an advantage for the government to sustain the management of cultural heritage assets because of community commitment to accept this is part of their identity. Consequently, an active involvement from the local community will enhance visitors' experience and expectation due to genuine local culture.

In contrast, the possible threats due to the excessive weight on intangible heritage in highlighting community identity could create a conflict among the diverse group of communities. For example an issue to determine which local culture should be presented as an iconic symbol for Melaka WHS. Therefore, the government should balance both tangible and intangible

heritage in representing the local community identity for the purpose of conservation and management.

Whereas, the institutional arrangement governing the heritage asset management in Malaysia is highly practicing a top-down decision making. In relation to the local community involvement, there is often one way flow of information or decision of government to the residents. There is no assurance that comments or concerns from residents being taken into account. Besides, as a 'token' for the government to fulfil the engagement with local community, selected individuals are invited to be a resident's representative in making a final decision on behalf of residents.

Every final decision made by the government towards heritage asset management contributes a positive impact to the local community, especially on local economic income. Conversely, most of the residents are not having a feeling in term of sense of ownership towards heritage. This is due to the presented heritage assets are not strongly related and less important to their identity ( culturally or traditionally). This suggests a less maturely understanding between local community and government in highlighting heritage assets of local cultural heritage.

The government has made a little attempt for the residents to become a decision maker. The government often uses a legislative policy as a point of law in making a final decision in management practices. An example related to the decision making process is a little attempt by the government to arrange a series of activities to educate the local community about the importance of conservation and management of heritage. Often such an engagement approach was subordinated to private agencies. This is the government's mechanism to encourage residents to generate economic income via tourism sectors. In fact, this is part of government

strategy to minimise local community engagement in influencing the final decision in management.

## **8.2 Contribution of the Study**

In general, this study is believed to have expanded the existing body of knowledge on community involvement towards managing cultural heritage assets particularly in developing countries, while providing valuable insights into the practicality of this approach in Malaysia. The importance of local community involvement in Malaysia, however, require two major improvements in legislation and understanding before it can be fully successful. Firstly, to overcome the limitations of community participation in the decision making process. Secondly, to consider the community attachment towards cultural heritage elements, before developing tourist attractions in heritage settings.

Further research can use this data as a foundation to develop a theory, or a model in the context of Malaysia in particular, and in developing countries, in general. Since this study is applied research, it also contributes to direct practical implications for heritage conservation policy and practice in the country. Policy makers and planners can evaluate the claims and use the arguments made in this study to develop a more effective community participation plan and review current legislation and government policies.

## **8.3 Limitations of the Study**

The findings of this study have been exploratory in nature because there is little previous research, at an academic level, and no extensive research has been undertaken to investigate the local community involvement towards managing heritage assets in historic cities in Malaysia. As stated early in Chapter One, this type of research relatively exists in the

Malaysian context. In the broader perspective, there is also a lack of theory and no extensive body of knowledge regarding community participation in developing tourist attractions and nor as a mechanism in practicing sustainable management in developing countries.

One major limitation of the study was time because the researcher was given a maximum of three months by the sponsoring university to complete the fieldwork. It was for this practical reason that the researcher had to do multiple survey techniques in a large sample of the respondent population within the case study area. For example, by anticipating the level of participation from local people (experience from the pilot test survey) due to cultural reasons (see Chapter Two: Methodology), a stratified sampling technique was chosen as the best technique in order to gain acceptable sample sizes for this study. However, this technique required more time in order to achieve the desired target sample size. In addition, there was an inconsistent number of respondents involved in this survey due to the fieldwork's dependency on the availability of respondents.

A further limitation arose when conducting the fieldwork as it incurred a considerable amount of financial cash to cover return flights to Malaysia, besides accommodation, local transportation, food and administration costs. If financial resources had not been so constrained, the researcher would have preferred to expand when sampling the case study parameters to include extensive community groups beyond the boundary of WHS area. An issue arose when surveying as some local people refused to participate in paper-based surveys or interviews which related to their economic and social life. This placed a gender related limitation on the study.

#### **8.4 Recommendations for Future Research**

The results of the study could potentially stimulate future research in this area. The researcher would recommend the following:

1. Refinement of the methodology and instruments in order to cope with questionnaire refusal to participate in the survey, questionnaire and interview.
2. Extend the analysis of community involvement and place attachment in a management context, such as by demonstrating a Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in order to establish the predictive nature of conceptual relationships.
3. Replication of this study in other historic cities in Malaysia.
4. A comparative study of similar or different heritage settings in order to further investigate the involvement of local communities in the development of heritage trails.

#### **8.5 Recommendations for Practical Applications**

With respect to the significance of place attachment value in fostering local community involvement, this study recommends that the authority considers the following:

1. Primary legislation must clearly define its priorities and the social and economic remit of the Melaka WHS and guarantee stated levels of community participation.
2. The implementing agency and any agency partners must clearly define their broad objectives, commitments and parameters for maximising social and economic benefits, as well as urban landscape benefits in the Melaka WHS.
3. The local community should be involved at an early stage as possible, ideally prior to developing a new tourist attraction in community neighborhoods.
4. The processes adopted for community involvement should be innovative, and distanced, and distinct from current established practice relating to 'consultation' and 'participation'.

5. A first step in any potential tourist attractions (within Melaka conservation area) should be to initiate an immediate programme to revitalise and enhance the functioning of local representation, most likely the existing system of community councils, in order for local interests to be adequately represented.
6. In order to maintain and enhance the cultural capital of the Melaka WHS, it will be necessary to invest in the social capital of the area (reinforcing local institutions, structures, culture) in the short to medium term.

## **8.6 Final Remarks**

To judge from the case study presented in this research, it seems that the involvement of the local community in decision making processes is still at a very 'fragile' stage in managing the cultural heritage in Malaysia and Melaka in particular. Certainly, this is due to limitations in the community ability to voice their opinion or be heard by the government. Despite the lack of government 'willingness' to incorporate the involvement of the local community into their administrative framework, the research findings suggest that the government also failed to comply with the needs of the local community especially to generate more economic opportunities. Apparently, the government has limited access to understanding the nature of community attachment towards heritage resources. Therefore, this research suggests that the relationship between the government and local community is not yet at the stage of maturity. In particular, it requires a longer process of understanding for the 'needs and wants' to be delivered and agreed between both government and community, in order to manage and mobilise the cultural heritage resources to meet both conservation and tourism needs.