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*The Post-Soviet Era Through the Eyes of Georgian Authors of the 21st Century
(According to Nino Kharatishvili's Novel "Lack of Light")*

Ana Gogilashvili, Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani University, Georgia

The Barcelona Conference on Arts, Media & Culture 2024
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Abstract

Nino Kharatishvili is a Georgian author working in Germany who is mostly interested in artistic analysis through remembering the past and analyzing the present of her motherland. The last novel of Nino Kharatishvili "Lack of Light" was published in 2021 and showcases Georgia of 90's by the example of inhabitants of common Tbilisi yard. Darkness, hunger, cold, bloodshed, drugs, criminal lords, murder, suicide – all these tragic realities and events force the characters to fight for survival. They become typical geezers, children of a typical environment, relevant to the dark era they live in, both literally and figuratively. Due to unstable criminal situation established in the country, their talents are buried. Their ambitions, childhood dreams and hopes remain unreachable and unthinkable. Crucial and noteworthy aspect is that Georgian literary figures of the 21st century display a keen interest in and produce works dedicated to Soviet and post-Soviet themes. This is a result of the fact that, as it was mentioned in the introduction, the Georgian thinking, way of life and humans' actions still unable to break free of Soviet and Russian influence, which is mainly perpetuated by occupied territories and the enduring mental impact handed down to current generations.

Keywords: Russian Occupation, Post-Soviet Georgia, Modern Georgian Literature

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Introduction

Tragic events of 1921 created another appalling page in the history of Georgia. The military units of Russian 11th Army invaded Georgia on 11th of February 1921. After several days of unequal battles near Kojori and Tabakhmela and grievous losses, the Georgian units surrendered and thereby a short-term history of Georgian Democratic Republic came to an end. Our country found itself in the grip of Russian occupation that gave rise to a seventy-year pressure of the rigorous Soviet ruling.

The subject of my study is Soviet and post-Soviet era in the eyes of Georgian literature of the 21st century. The matter under inquiry is chosen due to the fact that many modern authors even today try to expose the results of the Soviet cultural and ideological expansion, which unfortunately wasn't limited to 70 years and still remains and makes itself felt even after the Soviet order came to an end. Brutal events which took place during the Soviet ruling and the spineless life of post-Soviet Georgia was chosen by many Georgian writers of the 21st century as a period of development of narrative thread in their literary works. All of this is caused by the fact that on one hand, the literary-artistic analysis of already closed chapter of history can be much more objective (since it is free from censorship), and on the other hand, the circumstance that this matter is still relevant in the 21st century, is another confirmation that the imprint of the Soviet order is still quite evident in Georgian reality and has an impact on our everyday life, people's mindset and the way of life. Moreover, the aggressive and concurring policy of Russia, which constantly leaves its mark on Georgia (20% of the country is occupied in addition to creeping and mental occupation), makes it even more difficult to experience the feeling of finally leaving behind the Soviet era.

Soviet and Post-Soviet Influence on Georgian Culture and Literature

According to entrenched classic definition, occupation is a violent seizure of the territory of one country by another country, though one has to bear in mind that this process is also accompanied with the nation's mental and cultural identity occupation. The latter means purposeful expansion directed against the culture created by the nation due to which more people lose their own personality and values, which is followed by wrecking and poisoning of humans consciousness and establishment of a social medium, in which dignity and strive for lofty ideals becomes a laughing stock, while personal profit, career ambitions and many other expressions of a weak spirit comes to the fore. It should be noted that this process doesn't just mean society coming to its baseness. It is intentionally supported by the occupants, as the development of healthy social values is off their interests. Moreover, it is the major threat for the conquerors. Taking into consideration all above mentioned we have to consider the Soviet occupation as an example of both physical and mental occupation, due to which the national and cultural heritage of Georgian nation has had been intentionally destroyed for decades. Georgian intellectuals and thinkers didn't find it difficult to see this reality and potential threat outlasting the generations. Mikheil Javakhishvili wrote: "The last will: my children, let's clean forget this Russian language so that not even one word is remembered." Ilia Chavchavadze words are worth mentioning as well: "The God put no brain into Russians' bald heads and no feelings into their stinky hearts". In his turn, Merab Mamardashvili said: "Shame and disgrace to me, if I think of Ossetians or Abkhazians as serious enemies of Georgia. Georgia has one and only enemy – the Communist Soviet System". Many other intellectuals also felt that we have to break free from the clutches of Russia as soon as possible, however history, fortune or the will of people in power ordered otherwise and Georgia found itself in the grip of both mental and territorial occupation. As a

literature researcher Rostom Chkheidze writes, provided literature flow and its course was ruled not by its internal laws, but rather determined by social and political systems, two-century long Russian pressure, in thorny embrace of which Georgia found itself, could become really oppressive and fatal to our literature (Chkheidze, 2012, p. 48).

As Ilia Chavchavadze determined, a writer's purpose is to awake the nation at the time of hardship and strongest oppression, and many Georgian writers shouldered this burden during the Soviet regime. However, it should be noted that this needed great courage and determination, sometimes heroism, and cost some of them their lives. Among the first wave of writers of anti-Soviet attitude one can name Mikheil Javakhishvili, Grigol Robakidze, Nikolo Mitsishvili, "the Blue horn" poets etc. Situation relatively changed from the second part of the 20th century, after the death of Stalin. Writers were no longer sentenced to death for the disclosure of the Soviet bloodthirsty policy, though it was still very risky to openly express anti-Soviet attitude. Among the "fearless" Georgian literary figures one has to name Chabua Amirejibi, Otar Chelidze, Guram Dochanashvili, Otar Chkheidze, Guram Gegeshidze, and Shota Chantladze, Rezo Tcheishvili, among others.

Darkness and Struggle in "Lack of Light"

Nino Kharatishvili is a Georgian author working in Germany who is mostly interested in artistic analysis through remembering the past and analyzing the present of her motherland. This fact is clearly confirmed by an especially popular and award-winning novel "The Eighth Life (for Brilka)," which tells us about several generations of a family whose life goes sideways owing to the Soviet System.

The last novel of Nino Kharatishvili "Lack of Light" was published in 2021 and was translated into Georgian in 2022 by Maia Panjikidze. This work is interesting in many ways: first of all, in regards to the epoch study, and secondly, perfected description manner peculiar for the writer, and the diversity of the development of the plot brilliantly thought out.

The novel showcases Georgia of 90's by the example of inhabitants of common Tbilisi yard. Darkness, hunger, cold, bloodshed, drugs, criminal lords, murder, suicide—all these tragic realities and events force the characters to fight for survival. They become typical geezers, children of a typical environment, relevant to the dark era they live in, both literally and figuratively. Due to unstable criminal situation established in the country, their talents are buried. Their ambitions, childhood dreams, and hopes remain unreachable and unthinkable.

The epigraph of the novel is also very symbolic. The author decided to start her narration with the following verse of Terenti Graneli:

I've got so used to death,
How I'm still living I can't guess!

I've got so used to ghosts,
I want to see their tracks in the snow and frost!

I've got so used to sadness,
All my poems are whining and helpless.

I've got so used to night,
This light will torture my sight.

I've got so used to death,
How I'm still living, I can't guess! (Graneli, 2021)

This piece of poetry by Terenti Graneli is very appropriate as it conveys the inner screams and the voice of heart of the lead characters. The main figure and narrator of the novel is Keto Kipiani—one of the inhabitants of Tbilisi yard. It is worth to mention that the writer uses unique and interesting way of storytelling as the action takes place exclusively in one of the exhibition spaces of Brussel, from beginning till the end. There three friends who haven't seen each other for ages finally meet at the retrospective photo-exhibition of Dina, their deceased friend. The entire work is a story of daily life and relationships of that period, a story of remembering the endured pain and happiness.

The Characters in "Lack of Light"—Forced to Confront the Collapse of Their Dreams and Ambitions

Very powerful is the imaginative side of the work. Pain and joy found deep in each character's heart, the writer's amazing ability to deeply understand the psychology of all heroes, a narration saturated with lots of very interesting inner monologues, struggle of characters lost in the world for return to their own and innovatory self-actualization, for ones—despair, for others—stubborn attempts to find a better world – there are the themes and imaginative ways by the unity of which Nino Kharatishvili crafts her works.

Keto's brother, honorable and talented Rati Kipiani, appears in the novel as the first victim of the wicked environment of the post-Soviet Georgia. The most caring person, a prominent student and an exemplary citizen was turned into a criminal by bloody and ruthless times. With the loss of an innocent friend killed by a so-called messenger of the dark world, the betrayal of his beloved girlfriend and lots of unjustness surrounding him, he became a villain himself. Eventually due to drug use his life completely fell apart.

Another victim of the era, fated to see hardships from the very start, is Dina, a girl, talented photographer who desperately fell in love with Rati. She lives in the Tbilisi yard's basement with her mom and sister dealing with significant financial struggles, though these daily concerns have no influence on her joyfulness and avant-garde spontaneous spirit. This is a girl who brings light and beauty everywhere. Dina is a symbol of freedom in the novel. In contrast with disastrous life of a character and her contrastive mood the author shows us that freedom is an inner state and in no way depends on material possessions.

The tragedy of Dina and Keto, two inseparable friends, begins when with great difficulty they manage to collect some money to free Rati from jail and on their way to prison come across a horrific scene: due to untimely payment of so-called "tavani (debt)" the thieves' world members have had already killed a man and were going to kill the other one. Girls are caught up a dilemma deciding between humanity and private comfort. Keto and Dina choose the worthwhile way of rescue the nearest and dearest and thereby unconsciously sacrifice their own future in return of human life saving. They pay the hard-earned pounds to the abuser, while Rati remains in jail. In order to release him, Dina reluctantly agrees to an unwanted intimate relationship with Rati's deadly enemy. The boy finally gets released from prison, but Dina's actions can't be forgiven and forgotten, both of their hearts get shattered. Eventually, the boy

follows a path of “criminality” and “drugs”, while Dina puts her neck into a noose and therefore frees herself from the vicious world. Dina is as a symbol of freedom so her last step can be perceived as self-murder of freedom in that dark and ruthless world.

All characters of the novel carry on their shoulders the devastating burden of Soviet-era or its remnants. Rati and Keto’s grandmother, Eteri, who comes from noble family, in her early years witnesses her father’s resettlement. “I see somber, grim men, who arrive at 3AM, when a city is in deep sleep. I hear mom crying, ... see how [father] stands tall with pride and politely asks Bolsheviks not to touch him so that he can get into the waiting car himself, preserving his dignity” (Kharatishvili, 2022, p. 61).

Another friend of Keto and Dina, Nene, also fell victim to post-Soviet disorder. The girl was separated from her beloved and compelled to marry another man due to needs of her uncle, who had ties with “black” criminal underworld. All this led to yet another tragedy, when Nene’s former boyfriend was killed by the hands of her husband. Nene decided to divorce with her husband, but later found herself involuntarily marrying an older man in Moscow.

The fourth friend of the girls, very clever and talented Ira, affected by never-ending violence and tragic adventures of her friends, came to hate the mankind. This had an impact on her sexual orientation. The girl decided to move to America and built her career as a lawyer.

Keto, the narrator of the novel, also lives abroad, in Germany, all alone. She failed at living a happy private life since desperately falling in love with her brother’s friend Levan, but to have a crush on best friend’s sister was considered a sin in 90’s in Georgia. This misperception sacrificed their love. It took plenty of time fooled away and emotional energy for Keto to realize the hopelessness of their relationship and the couple separated for good.

Conclusion

Based on the novel we can analyze the impact of that period on humans’ life and assume once more that the post-Soviet era brought to light many taints and faults collected during the Soviet era. Between 1921 and 1991 a harsh crackdown of free-thinking often resulting in bloodshed or resettlement, severity, deception and betrayal, culminated all at once and turned the country into an insane asylum. It is worth noting that the darkest times described in the book destroyed numerous people full of hope and faith to have a brighter future, while within the so-called “lost generation,” only those were saved who ventured abroad and sought refuge in other countries.

Another crucial and noteworthy aspect is that Georgian literary figures of the 21st century display a keen interest in and produce works dedicated to Soviet and post-Soviet themes. This is a result of the fact that, as it was mentioned in the introduction, the Georgian thinking, way of life and humans’ actions still unable to break free of Soviet and Russian influence, which is mainly perpetuated by occupied territories and the enduring mental impact handed down to current generations. Authors like Nino Kharatishvili and others mentioned above certainly deserve praise, since they don’t spare their creative skills and abilities to shed light on these nationally significant issues and to serve as a continuous reminder to the readers. Exposing and understanding problems is the first step taken towards their resolution.

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Exploring the Morphological Aesthetics of Sound: Insights From Cymatics and Sandboxes

Elvert Durán Vivanco, Universidad del Bio-Bío, Chile
Valentina Ambiado, Laboratorio AOIR, Chile
Carlota Durán, Teja Verde Ecodesign, Chile
Camila Arzola, Laboratorio AOIR, Chile
Braulio Gatica, Gravitacional Smart Landscape, Chile

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Abstract

The Sandbox Game has been extensively explored in pediatrics and psychiatry, highlighting tactile and sensory engagement's mental and emotional benefits—mainly through interaction with sand. Such engagement fosters self-awareness, stress reduction, and overall emotional well-being while promoting a deeper connection to the present (Knudsen, 2023; Malonai, 2023). The multisensory stimulation provided by sand—combined with sound-based tools and visual interactions with geometric patterns—is a core element of mindfulness practices aimed at enhancing psychological health (Gibson, 1979; Joye & van den Berg, 2011). In the artistic research project "Cymatic Artifact" (2021-2023 UBB), we explored the transformative properties of sand and its resonance with other materials, investigating its potential to contribute to well-being through tactile engagement. We examined how natural elements—such as dunes, wind, and sound geometry via bamboo sections functioning as wind organs or sound gardens—can be integrated into therapeutic environments (Chladni, 1787; Castro & Pássaro, 2017). Our findings suggest that incorporating these elements can significantly enhance the design of therapeutic products and artistic installations. This research underscores the role of creative processes in harnessing sound energy to develop innovative design objects, such as ceramic spheres with textured surfaces inspired by cymatic patterns, thereby advancing both artistic and practical knowledge in design and well-being (Borgdorff, 2010; Blessing, Qureshi, & Gericke, 2013; Knudsen, 2023).

Keywords: Cymatics, Therapeutic Design, Multisensory Interaction, Sound-Driven Design, Material Exploration

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Introduction

The interaction between sound and various states of matter reveals an intriguing morphological and aesthetic language that can be explored from multiple disciplines, including physics, psychology, and design. This exploration highlights how sound, typically perceived as an auditory experience, can simultaneously manifest visually in geometric patterns caused by vibration. These patterns, created in granular materials such as sand, serve as a visual representation of sound waves in motion. By examining these phenomena, one can uncover how sound waves, influenced by factors such as frequency and amplitude, translate into observable forms that provide insight into the complex relationship between sound and matter (Jenny, 1967; Frayling, 1993). In this context, sound does not merely interact with the environment but actively shapes it, producing an intricate choreography of geometric forms that speak to the underlying forces at play.

The phenomenon of standing waves consists of the interaction of sound waves, which are parameterized by variables such as amplitude, frequency, and wavelength. These waves interact with surfaces in specific ways, creating regions of constructive interference (nodes) and destructive interference (antinodes), which can be observed visually in granular materials such as sand. The ability to manipulate and observe these patterns provides a unique opportunity to study the behavior of sound in various materials. In liquid media, these waves produce transient patterns that dissipate once the sound ceases, but in semi-formed materials like sand or salt, the patterns persist, leaving behind a record of the sound's impact. This phenomenon reveals the self-organizing capacity of certain materials when exposed to specific types of energy, such as sound waves (Grillotti, 2019; Jenny, 1967). This ability to preserve geometric patterns offers a compelling insight into the intersection of physical forces, material behavior, and sensory perception.

In the realm of cymatics, the study of these geometric patterns goes beyond their aesthetic beauty. These patterns are not only visually captivating but also reveal deeper insights into the physical processes through which sound influences matter. The creation of these forms is not random; rather, it is the result of complex interactions between sound waves and the medium they traverse. This phenomenon has profound implications, not only for our understanding of acoustics and material science but also for its potential applications in human well-being (Knudsen, 2023; Delle Monache & Rocchesso, 2021; Ruz et al., 2010). Through the analysis of cymatic patterns, researchers have discovered correlations between these geometric forms and potential therapeutic benefits, suggesting that the careful manipulation of sound and its geometric representations can have a positive impact on emotional and cognitive health.

This article builds upon previous research conducted by the same authors, incorporating new insights and updates based on the ongoing exploration of design methodologies. The original publication laid the groundwork for understanding the significance of cymatics and sound-driven design, while this version expands upon that foundation by incorporating contemporary developments in design theory and material science. The translation of this research ensures that the core findings remain intact, while adapting the content to fit the specific context of the current study. This process highlights the continuity of the research while introducing innovative approaches that reflect the evolving nature of the field. The work is part of the proceedings from the Congreso Cultura Proyectual, held in Santiago, Chile, in October 2024, and serves as a continuation of the authors' investigation into the intersection of art, science, and design.

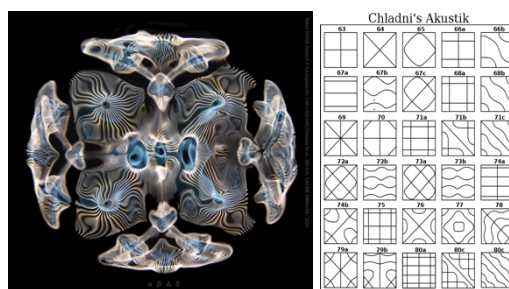


Figure 1: (Left to Right) Cymatic Sand Record, Liquid Cymatics (Source: Author), Chladni Figures (1852)

Materials and Methods

The methodology of this research is grounded in procedural design, integrating insights from multiple fields of knowledge, including acoustics, material science, and user-centered design. Sound-driven design (SDD) has emerged as a novel practice within design, focusing on the multisensory aspects of sound interactions and their potential impact on human well-being (Delle Monache & Rocchesso, 2021). By incorporating sound into the design process, this approach seeks to enhance the sensory experience of users, fostering a deeper connection with the environment and promoting emotional and cognitive well-being. Our approach builds on proven procedural design strategies, drawing from previous experiences in sound design and therapeutic practices, while proposing a more specialized integration of sound and material interaction in the design of cymatic artifacts.

To achieve the goals of this project, we adopt the Research through Design (RtD) methodology (Blessing et al., 2013; Frayling, 1993). RtD is characterized by its dual focus on both theoretical foundations and practical applications, providing a hybrid approach that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The process of designing prototypes and models plays a central role in RtD, allowing for iterative testing and refinement of design concepts. Prototypes act as crucial verification tools, facilitating the exploration of various media, processes, and materials, and enabling designers to test their hypotheses in real-world settings. Through this iterative process, the research itself becomes a dynamic system of feedback and refinement, enhancing the understanding of how design can influence sensory experiences and their associated outcomes.

The research is organized into three primary stages: (a) Artistic Installation; (b) Reproduction, Digitization, and Cymatic Materialization; and (c) Design Project Process. Each stage builds upon the previous one, integrating artistic and scientific principles to explore the relationship between sound, materials, and human well-being.

Artistic Installation

The design of this cymatic artifact is inspired by the geometric patterns created when sound interacts with granular materials such as sand. These patterns serve as a visual representation of the sound waves at play, providing valuable insights into the relationship between sound and form. To capture these patterns, sound recordings were made in the AOIR laboratory, as well as during an artistic installation conducted in 2023 in the Yani dunes (Quidico / 37°23'16"S 73°36'44"W). The installation utilized the resonance capabilities of sand, wind, and bamboo sections, which acted as a natural wind organ. These elements were carefully chosen for their ability to amplify sound and create a dynamic interaction with the

surrounding environment, producing a rich array of sound patterns. The recordings were captured using specialized instruments, including geophones for low-frequency vibrations and condenser microphones for higher frequencies, allowing for a detailed exploration of the sonic phenomena involved.



Figure 2: (Left to Right) Yani Dunes, Sound Installation AOIR Laboratory, Teja Verde Website

Reproduction, Digitization, and Cymatic Materialization

The recordings obtained from the artistic installation were processed using advanced audio editing software, which allowed us to isolate and manipulate specific sound frequencies to stimulate granulometric patterns. These patterns were then reproduced using Chladni plates, which provided a physical medium for observing the interaction of sound with granular materials. The frequencies used in this process included those known to have potential health benefits, such as alpha (8-13 Hz), beta (14-29 Hz), and gamma (30-100 Hz) waves, as well as Extremely Low Frequencies (ELF) that are inaudible to the human ear but are present in the Earth's electromagnetic spectrum (Ruz et al., 2010; Macleod & Holdridge, 2006). By studying these frequencies and their effects on materials, we hope to uncover new insights into the therapeutic potential of sound-driven design.

Parametric Design Technology and Digital Processes in Translating Cymatic Geometric Patterns

The role of digital technologies in materializing complex forms has become increasingly important in creative design processes. Computational tools, particularly those used in parametric design and algorithmic programming, enable designers to generate highly precise forms that mimic natural phenomena such as cymatic patterns. These digital tools offer several advantages, including greater accuracy, reduced energy consumption, and a lower environmental impact compared to traditional methods (Berridge & Robinson, 2003). Additive manufacturing techniques, such as 3D printing, have proven to be particularly effective in capturing intricate geometric patterns, allowing for the rapid prototyping and testing of cymatic designs (Grillotti, 2019). These technologies enable us to explore new ways of materializing sound and geometric patterns, offering a bridge between artistic expression and scientific inquiry.

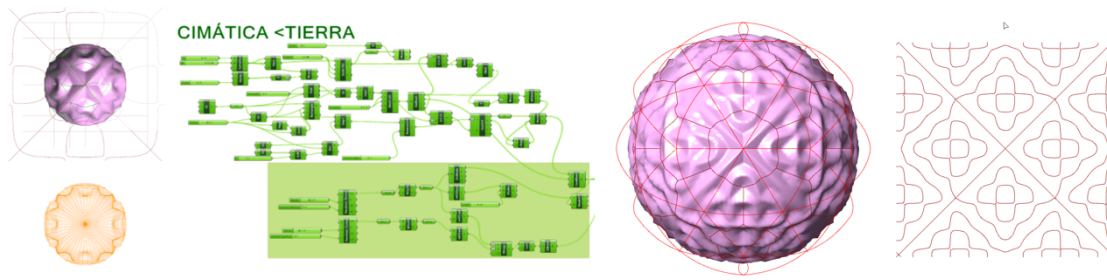


Figure 3: (Left to Right) Parametric Programming, Rhinoceros & Grasshopper. Parakeet Plugin. Cymatic Frequency on Copper Sheet. Sphere With Texture, According to Cymatic Geometric Patterns

Sand, Ceramics, and Biophilia

Biophilia, the human tendency to connect with nature and other living organisms, plays a key role in the design of objects that promote well-being (Kellert & Calabrese, 2015). In the context of our research, biophilia informs the design of cymatic ceramic pieces, which are intended to foster a deeper connection with the natural environment. By incorporating natural materials and organic forms into the design of these artifacts, we aim to enhance emotional and psychological well-being. The interaction between users and these objects encourages a sense of connection to nature, which can lead to improved cognitive and emotional flexibility (Joye & van den Berg, 2011; Malonai, 2023).

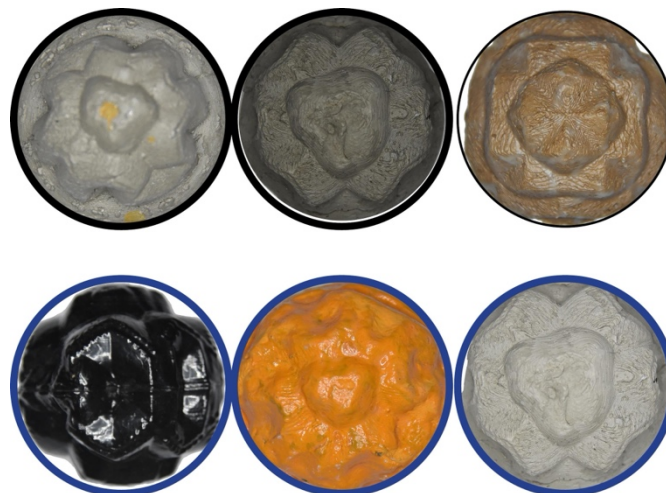


Figure 4: First Prototypes in 3D Printing at Low Resolution and 1 mm Extrusion. Studies of Proportion and Hapticity

For this project, we collaborated with Teja Verde Ecodiseño (Chile Diseño, n.d.), a ceramic design studio, to create high-quality ceramic pieces that combine artistic and therapeutic elements. The ceramics were first modeled using PLA 3D printing before silicone rubber molds were created to capture the intricate geometric details. These molds were filled with high-definition clay pastes, resulting in finely crafted cymatic ceramic pieces that serve as both aesthetic objects and therapeutic tools.

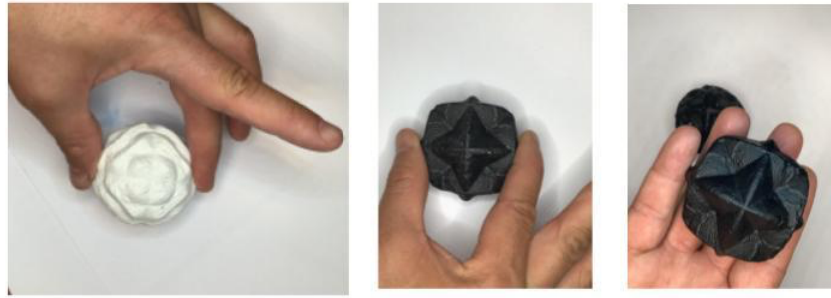


Figure 5: Study of Hapticity, Types of Clay, and Finishing Alternatives (Source: Author)

Results

Cymatic Artifact Exhibition:

- Museum of Natural History, Concepción. December 2023
- Cymatic Artifact Exhibition: College of Architects of Concepción. January 15th to 23rd, 2024

Object syntax of the exhibition consists of three essential components:

- Set of cymatic spheres based on sound recordings (3)
- Backlit LED sand table (1)
- Reproducible sound source via QR code (3)



Figure 6: Prototypes Set Outcome Display. Exhibition at the Museum of Natural History, Concepción (Source: Author)

Conclusion

The research conducted over the past two years has opened new avenues for understanding the relationship between sound, design, and human well-being. Our findings suggest that the design process can have a significant impact on the sensory experiences of users, potentially offering therapeutic benefits. At this stage, we consider the results as preliminary but promising, as they provide a foundation for future exploration. The next steps will focus on testing and optimizing the components, pieces, and processes to refine the design methodology and validate the theories presented in this work. Through continued research and development, we hope to contribute to the growing field of sound-driven design and its potential applications in improving human health and well-being (Blessing et al., 2013; Frayling, 1993).



Figure 7: Infographic Poster of Cymatic Artifact Exhibition at the Museum of Natural History, Concepción (Source: Author)

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A Study on Biographies of the Garo Community in Terms of Colonial Cultural Invasion and Modernity in the Village of Hariakona, Sherpur, Bangladesh

Khabir Uddin, Jagannath University, Bangladesh

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Abstract

In Bangladesh, the Garos is one of the most prominent matriarchal indigenous groups. They have lived in this country for generations, preserving their own tradition and lifestyle. The Garos has an extensive religious, social and cultural heritage as the matriarchal group. As a result of colonial cultural invasion, this rich history, tradition and the distinctive diversity of Garo society has been diminished. Today, the Garos own identity is in danger of extinction. Especially with the conversion of Christianity this terrible cultural invasion started in the Garo community. In addition to the contact with modern civilization, a significant change has taken place in Garo society. Garos prefer to use plastic and polythene instead of different materials that were used in their daily lives, such as bamboo, tree leaves or clay household items. The Garos has abandoned the traditional jumchas, and they have started farming in the modern way. The use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides on land has been expanding at an alarming rate. New and complex diseases have also been increasing at this time. The existence of the Garo is threatened by changes in their way of life due to colonial cultural invasion and modernization. The results of the study are obtained by using a qualitative method. Primary data are given greater importance, in addition to secondary data. A focus on the changes and crises faced by the Garo population at Hariakona village in Sherpur district has been placed on their way of life. In this study, possible solutions for the cited crisis are proposed which will help to realize a general change in Garo's livelihood.

Keywords: Cultural Invasion, Colonialism, Modernity, Garo, Christianity

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Introduction

The lifestyles of the Garo people have changed significantly as a result of modern civilization. The Garos have a very eco-friendly and diverse natural way of life before they come into contact with modern civilization. The matter of naturalism is reflected in Garos beliefs and social festivals. In order to satisfy the different forces in nature, Garo society has a centuries old religious and social practice of offering favorite food items such as vegetables, fruits, meat or alcohol. The ancient practice of worshiping different gods and Goddesses while harvesting, sowing seeds or selecting land has also existed in the past. In essence, these activities made the Garos religion animistic. But these old religious beliefs and social festivals of Garos have been lost through the influence of modern civilization. Now, before sowing seeds or selecting land, the Garos don't feel the need to satisfy the god with alcohol and meat on the land. The impact of modernity has brought about changes in society, politics and health across the Garo. As compared to the past, there has been less social harmony and unity between Garos. The Garos have lost their political power and are included in the state's rule. They've lost the right to their land. They are now submitting themselves to court for settlement of land disputes or inter alia. Health changes also appear to be significant, in addition to social and political change. In the Garo community, consumption of crops and vegetables which are grown with chemical fertilizers and pesticides increases the incidence of various new and complicated diseases. Moreover, the average life expectancy has also decreased. Qualitative research methods reveal the changes that have taken place in the Garo society as a result of colonial cultural invasion and modernization. A survey of a particular village has been carried out, aiming at fully identifying the changes and current crisis that have occurred. Secondary data sources have been obtained from various previously performed studies, books and reports on the subject. Understanding how the traditions of a particular population change as a result of colonial cultural invasion and modernity is an essential part of this study.

Literature Review

Garo's an indigenous people living in Bangladesh. Due to the influence of modern civilization, Garo people are losing their identity day by day. The lifestyle of this tribal people is full of diversity in certain parts of the mountains and plains. There is quite a lot of research in the area of Garos. The researchers who had come to the Indian subcontinent since the beginning of the British period had been looking at the Garos. An analysis of the Garo's lifestyle needs to include research articles and books, as sources of secondary data that were included in this study.

Ellen Bal's "They Ask Me If We Eat Frogs: Garo Ethnicity in Bangladesh" provides a critical investigation into the category of tribes in South Asia. Specially, it focuses on one tribal community, the Garos of Bangladesh. It also deals with the evolution of Garo ethnicity. 'God and the Garos' tells something important about the cultural and religious sector of Garos." The Strong Women of Modhopres' reviews the history of the Garo people of both India and Bangladesh since they were first encountered by the British more than two centuries ago. Particular attention is paid to the unusual matrilineal kinship organization of the Garos and to the special role that women play in this society. 'Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal' by E. T. Dalton discusses the history of ethnicity of Bengal. It includes the history and lifestyle of Garo. 'Indigenous Communities, Cultural Survey of Bangladesh' provides the cultural diversity of Bangladesh. It also represents the ethnic culture of Bangladesh. 'British Annexation of Garo Hills' provides a detailed analysis of the events which led to the British

annexation and administration of the Garo Hills. Religious syncretism involves the harmonious fusion of multiple religious ideologies, rituals, and customs into a distinct, unified belief system. ‘Religious Syncretism Among the Bangladeshi Garos’ and ‘Syncretism in the Religious Belief and Rituals of Achik Mandi Ethnic Group of Bangladesh’ transpire how Garo community abandons their traditional religious convictions and wholeheartedly embraces a new faith. ‘Garo Customary Laws and Practices: A Sociological Study’ discusses the administration of justice among the Garo. This study is intended to raise new questions on the changing lifestyle of the Garo community.

Objectives

- To draw a portrait of Garo community and investigate how colonial cultural invasion has affected their way of life.
- To discover how modernity oppresses their cultural life, and destroys their socio-economic and political system, it also affects their tribal farming, production method.

Significance of the Study

The study indicates to the contemporary changes of Garo community of Bangladesh. The research contributes to a better theoretical understanding of how a population is subjected to colonial cultural invasion and modernity. The study's rationale is to learn more about how an indigenous group is ripped from its roots. Finally, the research helps to understand how the Garo people's traditional way of life is highly under in danger. The study's significance in providing potential solutions to recover from the crisis and return to the Garo people's traditional way of life.

Methodology

Qualitative method was applied in the study. In addition to firsthand observation, interviews and surveys are conducted. Interviews and surveys have shown changes in the Garo's way of life. Their agriculture, food habits, social structure, and values are all influenced by modernity. Secondary data was assembled to provide a historical portrait of the Garo community. Cross-checking was done after collecting primary data.

Research Area and Garo Community of This Village

Hariakona is a village in Block 5 of the Singbaruna Union No 1 at Shribordi Police Station, Sherpur district. The northeast and southwest sides of it lie on the Indian state of Meghalaya's Zero Line. International boundary line 1091 to 1095 is considered as part of the village. To the south of Hariakona is a part of Chandapara and to the southwest is Babelakona village. There is a Primary School, Women's Club, Christian Initiative Society, Sundari Youth Group, two Baptist churches and one Catholic Church in the village.

Greater Mymensingh is mainly mentioned in the Garo inhabited Area of Bangladesh. Garos are living in nearly all the Sherpur district except for Garo Hills on Mymensingh, Birisiri and Netrakona. Different groups of Garos had already established themselves throughout the various regions when they first arrived in this country. A group of Garos reached the south part of the Garo Hills along the Someshwari river, after establishing their kingdoms at Susong Durgapur, Mymensingh and Bhawal areas in Dhaka. “In present-day Bangladesh,

there are still a lot of Garos living in the six thanas of Sherpur district, including Nalitabari, Haluaghat, Susang Durgapur, Kulmakanda, and Shribordi” (Sangma, 1993).

It is said that the village of Hariakona was founded 300 years ago. “According to popular belief, this village was inhabited by a number of Garos, including Dinang Bura, Shawan Chambugong, Mingrin Mrong, Rudu Marak, from the neighbouring districts of Madhupur and Meghalaya in India” (Sangma, 2020). Apart from the Garos, Kochs, Hajongs and Burman people also lived in Shribordi upazila. In Hariakona, there are 165 families. There are 1,000 people in total. All of them had left their own religion and turned to Christianity. Here the ratio of Baptists and Catholics is 70:30. The village has two Baptist and one Catholic Church. Agriculture and animal husbandry is a major source of livelihood for the Garo community. Those who do not have land work as day laborers on other people's land. Many of them are looking for a livelihood in the nearby towns and cities. In 2021 Hariakona has been connected to electricity. A narrow road has been made for movement through the Jhura (Jhura means narrow canal). Most bridges made of trees and wood are wobbly and dangerous.

Results and Discussion

1. Identity of the Garos as an Ethnic Group

In Bangladesh, the Garos are one of the old matriarchal tribes. They have a long history with nature and soil in this region. For thousands of years, they had survived as the original inhabitants of this land by their own way of life and cultural traditions. Anthropology says that Garos are members of the Mongolian race whose original habitat was in Tibet (Kamal, 2007). They moved to India later during the Vedic period. The origin of the name ‘Garo’ is disputed by scholars. In particular, it is due to the lack of reliable information on Garos written history. There is also some insight into their ethnographic history in the debate on the origin of the Garos name. They don't call themselves ‘Garo.’ In their own language, they don't have a word like that. This is a foreign name. The Bengali are thought to have given this name. In that context, it is appropriate to quote Hamilton. From 1807 to 1814 AD, he visited Rangpur and parts of the Garo Hills. In light of Garos interview at that point, he referred to: “According to my studies, the word ‘Garo’ is Bengali, and there doesn't appear to be a universal term for this country; instead, each of the tribes that make up the nation itself has a name that is unique to them” (Bal, 2007).

The first residence of the Garo is believed to have been Tibet. They've come to India from there.

Both verse and prose have been used to tell the story of migration, but the former is extremely difficult to understand due to its excessive use of allegory and poetic license, as well as its antiquated terminology. The only useful notion we can extract from the abundance of detail is that there was a widespread migration of people from beyond the Himalayas into the plains to the south of them. In addition, the names and the story's circumstances have been altered. (Playfair, 1909)

It is widely believed that the Garos are descendants of ancient China. Today's Mongolia and a part of Tibet belonged to China in ancient times. The Garo are closely related to Kehdeo people who live in the southern part of China.

It is not implausible that the Keh-Deo and Garos are the terminals of a race that originated in northwest China between the upper reaches of the Yang-tsi-Kiang and Ho-ang-Ho rivers but moved to a more hospitable climate and friendly soil. This migration wave could have easily been broken eastward and westward, which would have affected the rock-like, fierce, and warlike tribes that later inhabited the hills of eastern Assam and upper Barma. (Baldwin, 1934)

In India there is a wide range of habitat for the Garos. The Garos live in various parts of India, including Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and West Bengal. In Bangladesh, the Garo population mainly lives in Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Sherpur and Netrakona. In Dhaka, there are about 5 000 Garos. In addition, there are some Garos living in Chittagong, Sylhet, Moulvibazar and Habiganj for the purpose of education and employment. Burling's comments regarding the number of Garos living in Bangladesh can be accepted.

Bangladesh is home to about 1,00000 Mandais, the most of whom reside in a few-kilometer-wide area that runs along the southern edge of the Garo Hills. India and Pakistan became independence when British India was divided in 1947. The Garo population has steadily spread among Bangladesh's Mandis. (Sadia, 2021)

2. Christianity as a Tool of Colonial Power

In Bangladesh, The Garos are one of the indigenous peoples. They've lived as primitive humans in this country for a long time, bearing their own history and culture. Researchers estimate that Christianity infiltrated the Garo society of Bangladesh for about 150 years. Although in India, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to spread Christianity. Pope Louis X signed a contract with the Portuguese Government on 7 June 1514. In accordance with this agreement, Portuguese Catholics were allowed to preach in India, establish dioceses, appoint bishops and lay priests. Eventually the influence of Catholicism started to fade, when Portugal lost its position in trade competition with Britain.

Among the Garo tribes of Bangladesh, the first preacher of Christianity Rev. Rupert Bion. In 1853, at Durgapur area of Mymensingh he preached Christianity to 400 Garos. Between 1872 and 1882, Christianity was first established in this area.

2.1 Christianity in Hariakona Village

Compared to a long history of Garo inhabitants living at Hariakona, the arrival of Christianity was very early. Before the establishment of the church, a primary school was established in the village of Hariakona. According to the authorities, Hariakona village did not have enough resources for church management in its early days. So, as a strategy, a primary school was set up to create a sufficient number of persons to run the church. Although the primary school was founded in 1942, because of lack of infrastructure activities could not begin at that time. A church was set up in Hariakonaa village three years after the school had been fully operational. In 1945, the Hariakona Baptist Church was founded.



Photograph 1: While Praying in Hariakona Baptist Church

2.2 Strategy of Christianization and Beginning of Cultural Invasion

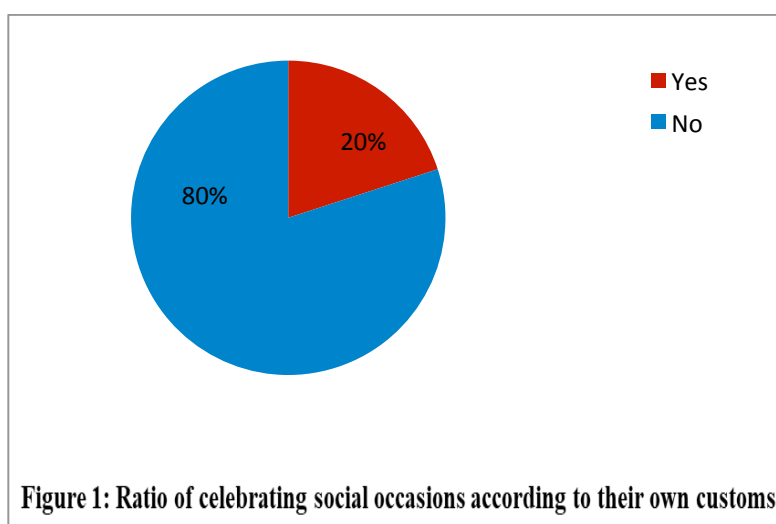
Christianity in the indigenous Garo people is a very interesting concept, according to Christian missionaries. As the primary strategies, they focus on social development issues such as education and health care. According to them, these people living in the mountains are uneducated and barbaric. To spread the light of education among them is a sacred duty of the missionary. They've also given a great deal of importance to health care. People who lived in the mountains were supplied with medicines and vaccines for a wide range of complex, incurable diseases. In particular, incentives for the development of different infrastructure such as road and bridge have been provided. In the area of social development, short term training has been provided. As a result, in the greed of temporary needs, the indigenous people used to step into the missionary's trap.

Under the circumstances, missionary work may seem to be good and public service. But there was a terrible evil intention behind it. Tribal people were described as inferior in the name of education. The colonial power has been described as superior. They have dismissed with scorn thousands of years of rich indigenous knowledge. They've been told that they wouldn't be free if they didn't take modern education provided by the missionaries. In those days, a wave of powerful propaganda had been generated among the tribes to convince them that modernization was needed for improving society and keeping up with times. In other words, it is easier to govern and control the population when they lose access to their own rich world of knowledge. Missionaries mainly focused on creating a gap between self and other that means the indigenous group and the colonial power. The tribe's own medical system was destroyed by the discovery of new diseases in the tribe's society and the provision of antidotes and modern medicines to those diseases. They are linked with a market system, which is brought about by modern healthcare practices. In the name of building infrastructure in the hills, their own house building methods and materials have been destroyed. There is also the commercial mindset, and a vast negative attitude to capitalism's social system. In destroying the mountain environment or an overall ecological balance in this area, it plays a major role. It's about Christian missionaries coming into tribal societies in the hills, to undermine their identity by spreading education, providing medical care and social development.

The missionaries reported that, despite the many obstacles in the hills, they were still trying to civilize the savage people. For example, in the preaching of Christianity in the village of Hariakona, the authorities said:

Difficulties of road communication, environmental problems, lack of proper education, decreasing of social traditional, spiritual values and practices are realities of the village, but we are struggling to advance. The village is surrounded by hillocks and in the middle of the village the belatti brook (chinring) is flowing. (GBC, 2022)

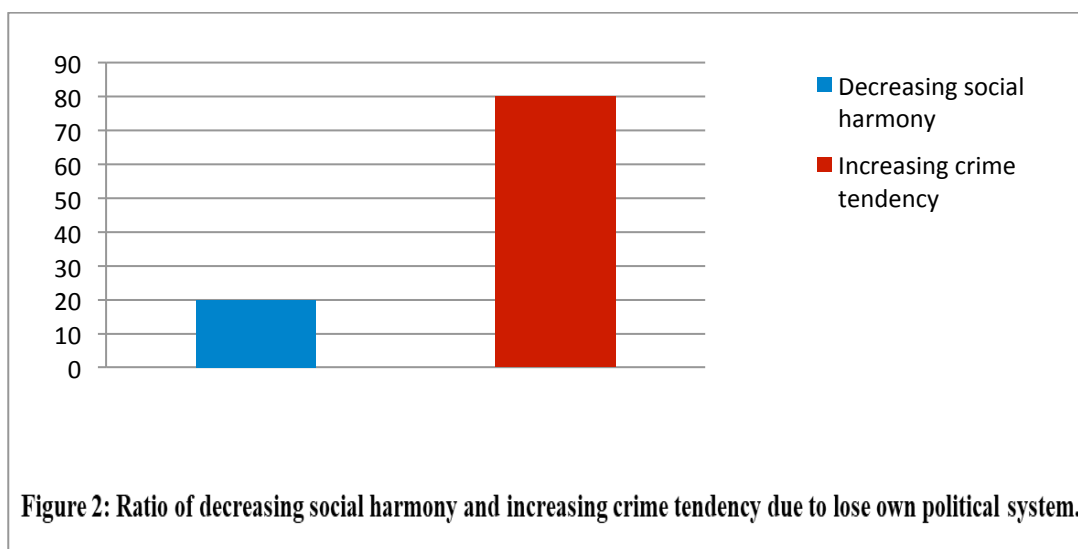
However, external factors are to blame for these difficulties and crisis. Indeed, these crises have not affected the livelihood of the Garo people in Hariakona village. Instead, the missionaries exaggerated these crises so that they would be able to gain entry into a village as representatives of civilization. It means you need a dying patient if you want to be a great doctor. One's medical knowledge can only be judged to be successful and outstanding if he is able to cure the patient. Likewise, missionaries have systematically created incurable diseases in the indigenous Garo community. It's established that the Garos society is barbarian and uncultured. Colonial ruler took up the role of a great servant and physician at that time. The separation of people from their origins, culture and history is the main goal of a colonial power.



In order to reach Christians in the village of Hariakona, three essential points have been identified:

- Each and every believer of the church will be stronger spiritually and financially is our target.
- Children will be grown up in proper atmosphere of faith and we want to work for that. Utilizing of youths power and making of self-employment opportunities in the society. We have many spiritual, and social development planning.
- The church runs primary school developing of modern education.

The church's purpose has been to capture the new generation's brains. The method may be similar to boarding school. If a new generation is brought up with new beliefs, tradition can easily be broken. The purpose of the church is successful if it educates the indigenous people in modern education and sends them to different workplaces outside traditional occupations. That is, the only aim of the Church is to somehow alienate the indigenous group from its own roots.



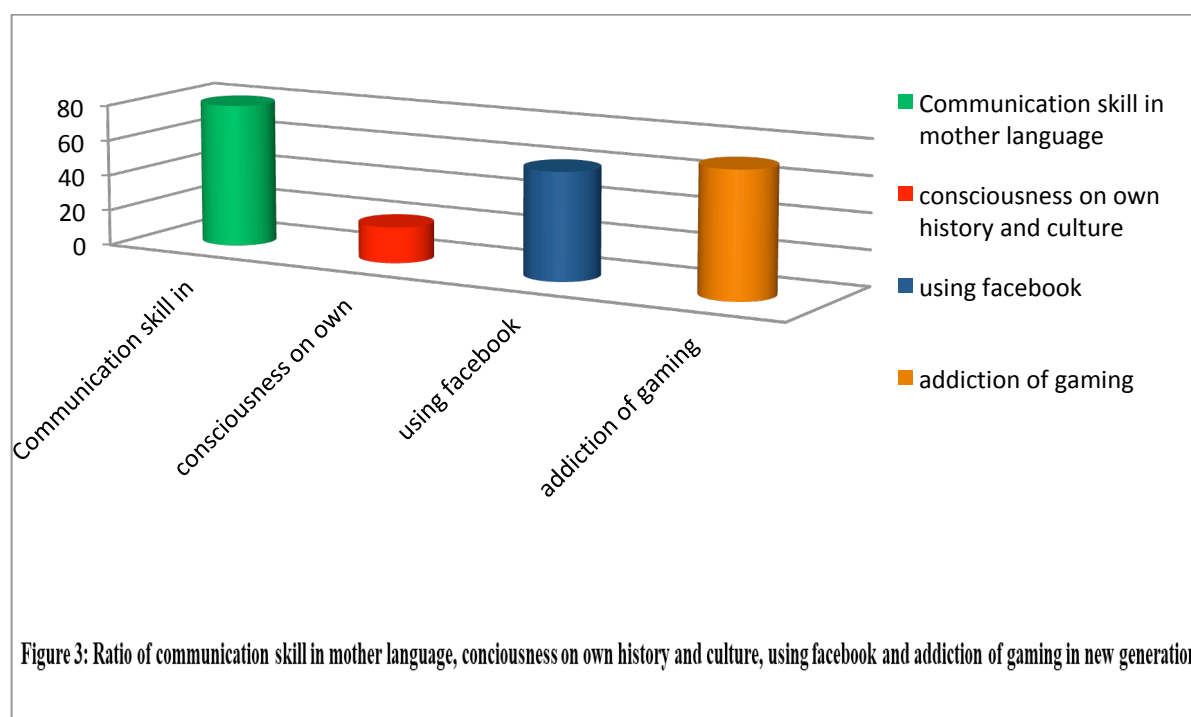
3. Changes Brought About by Modernization in the Lifestyle of the Garo Community at Hariakona Village

3.1 Agricultural Method and Livelihood

Garos traditional agricultural method is Jumchash. Jumchas is the cultivation of crops on some portion of this mountain's slopes by burning a weed. The Garos have farmed crops on the mountains for thousands of years, and they've earned their living. They eat vegetables, fruits and roots, meat of wild or domestic animals and birds in addition to grain crops. By eating grains and vegetables, fruits and roots that were grown naturally from forests, the Garos had good health. Legend has it that strong men in the Garo community were able to single-handedly lift a thick tree from one place to the next to make the poles for the house. Accessed roads in the mountains would allow them to travel freely. Wild plant and vine parts have been used as medicinal products in case of illness.



Photograph 2: Modern Agricultural Equipment



3.2 Household Materials and Electricity

In 2021, Hariakona village was connected to electricity. Trees are used to build a few bridges. Some infrastructure is also being built. There is a guarantee from authority that better roads will be built. These arrangements are intended for improving the quality and way of life of the tribal groups. To bring them out of the barbaric state and bring them under the modern civilization. These plans and activities are, in fact, very harmful to the tribes. Only their traditional life allows them to live in happiness and prosperity. The Garos used to cook in clay pots back then. They took a banana or lotus leaf and used it as a plate. That wouldn't hurt the environment. They're using household materials like steel, melamine and plastic these days. It's terrible to use the polythene, in particular. There are lots of stores in Hariakona village, and they all have chips, chocolate, biscuits, cakes or soft drinks. They have used polythene for transporting all products bought from the nearby markets. They're throwing this polythene all over the place. As a result, every day, thousands of polythene accumulate on the hills. Land is being lost in the long run. Everyone in the village agreed in this respect during the field survey. TVs are being switched on at tea stall. The network actively promotes different programs on Bengali, Hindi and English channels. There's a majority of families with smartphones in the village. The availability of modern technology means that cultural elements from outside are easy to come by. This is leading to a loss of the Garos cultural heritage. The field survey found that 90 percent of the villagers supported it.



Photograph 3: Modern Household Materials

4. Interviews

In order to gain a clearer understanding of changes resulting from colonial cultural invasion and modernization in the lifestyle of Garo people living in Hariakona village, interviews have been incorporated into this study.

The president of the Tribal Welfare Association in Sherpur district is Pranjal M. Sangma (65). He's well known in his community as a local tribal leader.

Researcher: when did the Tribal Welfare Association be founded?

Pranjal: It was established in 1977. In the context of a volatile political situation following Bangladesh's Independence War, it was set up to guarantee security and peace for indigenous communities. The Tribal Welfare Association of Greater Mymensingh and Sylhet is an integrated platform for the various tribal groups.

Researcher: What's the scope of your job?

Pranjal: Currently, it works in 54 upazilas in 12 districts on tribal rights.

Researcher: Have you and your organization conducted any activities to foster education in the mother tongue, or protect its welfare programs?

Pranjal: Yes, we're organizing a day of observation and seminar. Supporting other organizations who are interested in working on this, is one of our responsibilities.

Researcher: In respect of the Garo Community's livelihood, mention a few specific problems.

Pranjal: The biggest problem we're having right now is the land issue. In pursuit of afforestation, the Forestry Department has been seizing our own land these days. In order to keep our land, we must fight in court. We'd like this land problem to go away. Another major problem is the culture of invasion.

Researcher: Can you take any action to discourage the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in mountainous areas?

Pranjol: It's an issue of collective awareness. In addition, the Government is responsible for implementing alternative methods. On our part, we're trying to raise awareness. In this context, however, it cannot be enough to rely only on awareness.

Researcher: Thank you very much for this important opinion.

Pranjol: You are also welcome.

Identified Problems

A number of problems were identified when we observed the lifestyle of the Garo people living in Hariakona village. For example:

- Their cultural heritage is in danger of extinction as a result of the colonial invasion.
- The Achik Mandi language's extinction has been accelerated by the lack of systematic practice.
- Garos are being deprived of their land rights by the forest department in the name of afforestation.
- The influence of modernity is destroying their own way of life.
- They are going to ask the Supreme Court for a settlement of their dispute after losing their political power.
- Consumption of crops based on chemical fertilizers or pesticides is leading to a growing number of complex and new diseases.
- The environment of the mountains is polluted by plastic and polythene.
- The wild elephant attacks have damaged the crops.
- It is hard to transport the products made into a distant market, due to inadequate roads and bridges.
- The Garos are not receiving fair prices, owing to rising number of the greedy merchants.

Probable Solutions

The following solutions are suggested for the abovementioned problems:

- The creation of social awareness in order to protect their cultural heritage.
- In order to protect the language Achik Mandi, government and social measures need to be taken.
- The government should take steps to ensure the rights of Garos on their own territory.
- By counteracting the influence of modernization, we shall take concrete steps to preserve their traditional lifestyle.
- Taking necessary steps to restore their social structure and judicial system.
- Use biofertilizer rather than chemical fertilizers or pesticides.
- To avoid environmental pollution of the hills, to abandon plastic and polythene.
- In order to prevent wild elephant attacks, the Government should take appropriate measures.
- In order to ensure the transport of goods, construction of suitable roads and durable bridges.

- In order to eradicate greedy merchants and give an equitable price for the Garos crops.

Conclusion

The lifestyles of the Garo people in Hariakona village have been significantly influenced by colonial culture invasion and modernization. Each tribe has its own history, tradition, language, culture. The right to live in an area and maintain their own way of life and culture is owned by all native peoples. Colonial cultural invasion usurped that right. The primary task of the British Empire is suppression of native peoples, to consolidate their personal power or hold on to it. In repressing, the colonial power has used various tools. In various ways, the Garo people's own way of life and culture has been systematically destroyed.

In addition to colonial cultural invasion, modernity has played this role. The Garos embraced them as the various elements of modern civilization became readily available. The capitalist market system is working here at the same time. The Garo people have been forced into the trap of the capitalist economy. They have become dependent on the goods coming out of town, after losing their very prosperous way of life. The existence of Garo society was further threatened by this. The social unity of the Garo community was damaged. It destroyed its own judicial system and forced it to bow to state power. Changes in Garo society that occurred as a result of colonial cultural invasion and modernity are the main focus of this research. The research has made a significant contribution in providing effective solutions for the changes and crisis that have occurred within the Garo society.

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Contact email: lanchubangla.jnu@gmail.com

***Deconstructing and Reconstructing Realities:
Collage as a Feminist Tool of Empowerment, Protest, and Expression***

Sadia Mir, Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar, Qatar
Patty Paine, Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar, Qatar

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Abstract

This paper explores the multifaceted role of collage as a feminist strategy for empowerment, protest, and expression, highlighting its significance in the feminist art movement. Collage, characterized by its inherent process of cutting, rearranging, and juxtaposing various elements, is a metaphor for the feminist endeavor to dissect and reconfigure societal narratives about gender and power. We analyze works by prominent feminist artists who employ collage techniques to challenge and subvert traditional gender roles and stereotypes. This study delves into the historical emergence of collage in feminist art, tracing its roots to early 20th-century avant-garde movements and its resurgence in the 1970s feminist wave, when artists used collage to critique social constructs and promote gender equality. By examining contemporary examples, we demonstrate how collage remains a dynamic and critical medium for feminist expression, a mode of resistance capable of accommodating diverse voices and perspectives. Through theoretical frameworks and visual analysis, this paper argues that collage's accessibility and disruptive aesthetics make it an effective tool for feminist protest, capable of forging solidarity and driving social change. The implications of this research suggest that collage not only reflects feminist struggles but actively shapes them, offering a unique and potent means of cultural and political critique.

Keywords: Collage, Collage Art, Feminist Art, Feminism, Intersectionality

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Introduction

As both an artistic method and a conceptual approach, collage embodies the act of fragmentation and reassembly, making it uniquely capable of addressing the complexities of identity and representation. Emerging during a time of profound social and cultural upheaval, collage has served as a medium for disruption. Collage beckons viewers to look beyond superficial appearances by layering diverse materials and combining fragmented imagery. Writer and curator Sarah Knelman emphasizes collage's unique power in transforming the familiar into the unfamiliar. She observes that collage art can “forge from familiar elements something strange, to hide and reveal, deconstruct and reconstruct, eradicate and conjure.” In this transformative process, Knelman (2021) highlights how collage often intertwines with the visual and literary strategies of propaganda and advertising, allowing it to convey complex and sometimes contradictory messages by borrowing from each. Knelman elaborates on the broader implications of collage, noting its ability to expose culture as a fragile construct. “The great potential of collage,” she writes, “is to reveal culture itself as a vulnerable thread of associative ideas, woven together through our assumptions and expectations, and grounded by institutions, law, language—and images that are easily rearranged, so that their meanings shift” (Knelman, 2021). This fluidity of meaning within collage reflects its capacity to challenge and reshape perceptions.

The fragmented nature of collage resonates with the fractured experience of marginalized identities. Collage allows artists to create new visions by dismantling the old—qualities that have made it especially resonant for feminist practices. Taking pre-existing images and recontextualizing them mirrors the feminist struggle to reinterpret and reclaim narratives about women and their societal roles. For feminist artists, collage has been a tool for deconstruction and transformation, enabling them to challenge dominant narratives and envision new, liberated possibilities for female identity. Collage has been used to interrogate and reshape female identity and narratives, often creating contesting or alternative meanings from received objects and images.

Collage emerged as a notable artistic technique in early 20th-century avant-garde movements and was quickly adopted by feminist artists. Characterized by its layering and juxtaposition of materials, collage offers a unique medium for critique, empowerment, and expression. The medium's inherent ability to juxtapose disparate elements became a powerful tool for feminist artists who sought to deconstruct dominant narratives and critique societal structures. For example, Hannah Höch, a prominent member of the Berlin Dada movement, harnessed collage to subvert the visual culture of Weimar, Germany. Using mass-produced images to create satirical compositions highlighting the absurdity of gender stereotypes and the commodification of female bodies, her work underscored the medium's capacity to disrupt established meanings and provoke critical engagement.

Feminist artists in the 1960s and 1970s further harnessed collage to explore themes of identity, gender, and power relations. Artists like Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago, pioneers of the Feminist Art Movement, embraced collage to reclaim traditionally feminine materials and techniques, such as quilting and sewing, merging them with elements of modernist art. Often called “femmage,” this practice celebrated women's domestic arts and subverted the male-dominated art world's exclusionary practices (Parker & Pollock, 1981). By appropriating these materials, they challenged the patriarchal art historical canon and asserted the legitimacy of women's creative expressions, thereby reshaping the boundaries of fine art.

A Feminist Framework

When considering collage art as a form of social critique, we contextualize the work in terms of intersectional identity (hooks) and historical visual narratives (Pollock). Such analysis examines how collage visually disrupts traditional representations and art conventions (Krauss) and uses fragmented elements to create new meanings (Kristeva). As such, we can consider the performative and fluid nature of the identities represented (Butler) and how collage expresses alternative female subjectivities (Cixous). By synthesizing these insights, we can understand how collage functions as a site of disruption and reconstruction, challenging dominant narratives and proposing new feminist possibilities.

Intersectionality and Social Context: Bell Hooks

Bell Hooks emphasized the intersectionality of race, class, and gender as fundamental in shaping experiences of oppression and resistance. When applied to collage art, hooks' theories suggest that this medium can challenge dominant narratives by layering disparate images, texts, and symbols to center marginalized identities and histories. As Hooks (1984) argues, "Intersectionality allows us to focus on the complexity of identity and how different axes of oppression interact." This complexity is mirrored in collage, which critiques how intersecting identities are represented and subverts traditional narratives surrounding marginalized groups, particularly regarding race and class. As a form of visual art, the collage challenges systems of oppression and speaks to the lived experiences of women, especially women of color, by questioning who is seen, heard, and included in the cultural canon.

Bell Hooks' theory of intersectionality is central to understanding how collage art can serve as a tool for social critique. Collage allows the juxtaposition of different images, textures, and materials to convey multifaceted identities that cannot be reduced to singular categories. Hooks argues for the importance of recognizing the multiple and overlapping systems of oppression that affect people differently depending on their gender, race, and class (Hooks, 1984). In collage art, the layering and overlapping of different visual elements can represent the intersectionality of identities, highlighting the complexity of lived experiences. Using diverse and often incongruous materials, collage artists can illustrate how social identities are constructed and contested.

Visual Disruption and Historical Reclamation: Griselda Pollock

Griselda Pollock concept of historical visual narratives emphasizes how art has historically been used to perpetuate power structures and gender roles. Pollock explores how feminist artists use collage to deconstruct gendered representations and to develop new visual languages that more accurately reflect women's experiences. Pollock's analysis highlights feminist revisionism and historical reclamation as key strategies within this artistic practice. According to Pollock (1999), "[t]he feminist critique of art history requires us to look at what is not represented, to read the gaps and silences of traditional narratives." Collage disrupts traditional art history and visual culture by reclaiming forgotten or silenced histories of women and by challenging male-centered narratives. The reinterpretation of historical images or icons within collage creates a space for alternative feminist narratives that resist erasure and offer new ways of understanding history through a feminist lens.

Medium-Specific Subversion: Rosalind Krauss

Rosalind Krauss's examination of postmodern art highlights how collage serves to disrupt the unified, "sacred" nature of traditional art forms. In her work, Krauss (1985) underscores the importance of breaking away from the rigidity of artistic conventions to embrace the fragmented and the unfinished. Collage as an art form disrupts the notion of a coherent, linear narrative, instead embracing disjunction, rupture, and multiplicity. This process challenges the boundaries between high and low culture, fine art, and mass media, situating collage as a postmodern feminist critique that questions and destabilizes established forms of artistic expression. This form of disruption critiques formal art traditions and social structures that rely on similar rigid boundaries and hierarchies. In this way, collage's visual disruption embodies social disruption, challenging accepted norms and inviting viewers to reconsider their preconceptions.

Intertextuality and Semiotic Disruption: Julia Kristeva

Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality provides further insight into the power of collage to generate new meanings through combining different elements. By bringing together disparate images, texts, and textures, collage exemplifies Kristeva's concept of creating meaning through difference (Kristeva, 1980). The new relationships between these fragmented parts challenge fixed interpretations and invite viewers to engage in an active process of meaning-making. Collage disrupts traditional language and visual codes by using fragmented texts and images to create new meanings, challenging established semiotic systems. The artist repurposes familiar symbols and narratives, disrupting the symbolic order and creating spaces for alternative interpretations that resist hegemonic structures. This practice can be seen as inherently feminist, as it rejects the passivity of traditional spectatorship and instead encourages a dynamic, participatory engagement.

Performativity and Fluidity of Identity: Judith Butler

Judith Butler's theories on gender performativity are also helpful in understanding collage as a critique of identity formation. Butler (1990) explains gender as an identity constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. Similarly, collage's fragmented nature speaks to the idea that identity is not fixed but is performative and constantly reconstituted through social interactions. By juxtaposing images that convey different aspects of identity, collage challenges the notion of stable, essentialized identities, instead highlighting the fluid and constructed nature of gender, race, and other social markers.

Écriture Féminine and Female Subjectivity: Hélène Cixous

Hélène Cixous' ideas around female subjectivity and writing are particularly relevant to understanding how collage can express alternative female subjectivities. Cixous (1976) encourages women to write themselves into being and articulate their experiences and subjectivities in ways that defy patriarchal limitations. Collage, similarly, allows for a visual articulation of self that is unconstrained by the conventions of traditional representation. It provides a medium through which female artists can explore and express their identities in complex, non-linear ways, embracing ambiguity and diversity. Such expressions can be considered acts of resistance against patriarchal language, providing a space for alternative stories and identities to emerge.

By synthesizing these insights into a framework, we can understand how collage functions as a site of disruption and reconstruction. It dismantles established visual and cultural narratives, creating space for articulating new identities and subjectivities.

Discussion

Application of Framework: Barbara Kruger

Barbara Kruger is an American conceptual artist and collagist known for her bold use of text and monochromatic imagery, often addressing themes of power, identity, consumerism, and gender politics. One of her most iconic works, *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)* (1989), exemplifies her use of photomontage to provoke viewers into questioning established narratives and societal norms. Created for the 1989 “Mobilize for Women's Lives” march in Washington, D.C., this piece supported the movement for reproductive rights when debates over women's bodily autonomy were highly contentious.

In *Your Body is a Battleground*, Kruger merges large, declarative text with stark black-and-white imagery, intentionally borrowing the visual language of advertising to draw in viewers. This strategy not only evokes familiarity but also subverts the persuasive tactics of mass media. The work presents a powerful face of a woman split down the center—half positive and half negative—representing the dichotomy of public perception around women and their bodies. The accompanying slogan, “Your Body is a Battleground,” is equally striking, carrying multiple layers of meaning. It critiques the historical regulation and objectification of women's bodies through patriarchal policies, cultural expectations, and the legal system. It also functions as a rallying cry, urging women to reclaim agency over their bodies and framing them as sites of resistance and empowerment.

Kruger's artistic practice can be situated within a postmodern and feminist framework, specifically as part of the feminist movement of the 1980s that critically examined the intersections of gender, power, and consumer culture. During this era, artists like Kruger used their work to challenge the idealism of modern society and question the hegemony of patriarchal structures, often targeting the pervasive influence of urban capitalism. Kruger's use of bold statements, coupled with her repurposing of media imagery, is emblematic of a broader feminist strategy to resist traditional norms and uncover how identity—particularly female identity—is shaped by external forces (Kruger, 1991; Mitchell, 1991).

This work remains impactful and relevant today as the struggle for bodily autonomy persists globally. Kruger's language is confrontational yet open-ended, demanding that viewers reflect on their perceptions and complicity. By using the same visual tools as consumer advertising, Kruger highlights how women's bodies are commodified in everyday life, blurring the lines between public and private, control and freedom. *Your Body is a Battleground* serves as a reminder of the oppressive forces women face and the power of visual art as a form of political resistance.



Figure 1: Kruger, B. (1989). *Untitled (Your body is a battleground)*.
The Broad, Los Angeles, United States. © Barbara Kruger.

Kara Walker

Kara Walker is an American contemporary painter, silhouettist, printmaker, installation artist, and filmmaker who explores race, gender, sexuality, violence, and identity in her work. Walker employs cut-paper silhouettes to explore the historical tensions of race and gender in the antebellum South, using collage to critique the romanticization of slavery and its brutal reality (Walker, 1997). *Gone: An Historical Romance of a Civil War as It Occurred b'tween the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart* (1994) refers to Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel *Gone with the Wind*, set during the American Civil War. In reviving the eighteenth-century cut-paper silhouette to critique historical narratives of slavery and the ongoing perpetuation of ethnic stereotypes, Walker has transformed the craft into a new type of epic history painting.



Figure 2: Walker, K. (1994). *Gone: An historical romance of a civil war as it occurred b'tween the dusky thighs of one negress and her heart*.
MoMA, New York City, United States. © Kara Walker.

Kara Walker's narrative compositions often begin and end with paired figures, but the journey between these points is anything but a traditional depiction of romance. Instead, her chaotic, tragicomic imagery subverts conventional expectations, complicating the relationship between power and oppression. Walker's art confronts brutal truths about race, gender, and history in a way that simultaneously captivates and disturbs. Her works evoke

both a visual and psychological confrontation that implicates viewers in the often-hidden legacies of systemic racism and violence that continue to shape society today.

Central to Walker's practice is her use of the silhouette technique, a strikingly simple and evocative medium. Silhouettes inherently flatten their subjects, reducing people to archetypal forms that become metaphors for historical roles and narratives. Walker has remarked, "The silhouette allows for an avoidance of the subject—of not being able to look at it directly—yet it's always there, staring back at you" ("The Melodrama", 2011). This choice of medium allows her to present scenes loaded with historical and racial content while simultaneously denying the viewer the specifics that might make it more palatable. It forces an uncomfortable confrontation: we cannot look directly at the individual expressions of her figures, but their implied gestures and postures are unmistakably expressive, carrying the weight of the narratives Walker chooses to explore.

By deliberately using silhouettes, Walker draws viewers into a stark, binary world—black and white—where boundaries are sharply defined, mirroring the social constructs of race that have historically divided humanity. The silhouettes engage with both American history and cultural memory, evoking the antebellum South and referencing works like *Gone with the Wind*, which romanticized the plantation era while concealing the brutal reality of slavery. Walker's images, by contrast, strip away the veneer of romanticization, exposing the grotesque and violent relationships underlying these myths.

Walker's use of historical motifs serves as a vehicle for confronting contemporary racial tensions. She brings the past into conversation with the present, showing that the legacies of slavery and racism continue to shape perceptions and interactions. By placing silhouettes of enslaved people alongside those of their owners in scenes that are at once familiar and fantastical, she makes visible the complex power dynamics that still resonate today. Walker's works also reflect on the constructed nature of racial identities. She challenges the binary understanding of race and the power dynamics that emerge from this artificial dichotomy. In discussing this, she notes, "The history of America is built on this foundation of racial inequality and social inequality. And we buy into it. Whiteness is just as artificial a construct as blackness is" (McKeon, 2012).

Through her tragicomic imagery, Walker invites viewers to engage with the profound discomfort of American history, a pain that, in many ways, persists today. Her work does not offer easy answers or moral clarity but instead holds up a mirror to society, reflecting its darker sides. She invites viewers to question their understanding of power, history, and identity by using silhouettes—both concealing and revealing. It is this uncomfortable ambiguity that makes her work so powerful. Rather than allowing for a straightforward narrative of victim and perpetrator or romantic love conquering adversity, Walker's imagery reminds us of the complexities and contradictions inherent in these stories, ultimately questioning how much progress has been made since the days depicted in her scenes.

Faith Ringgold



Figure 2: Ringgold, F. (1998). *Tar beach*. Guggenheim, New York City, United States.
© Faith Ringgold.

In Faith Ringgold's *Tar Beach* (1988), a painted quilt, Ringgold combines images of urban landscapes, family life, and the supernatural to construct a narrative that reflects both personal and collective histories. The fragmentation of these visual elements allows Ringgold to explore themes of flight and freedom, particularly for Black women and girls. Flying over the city in the narrative disrupts the physical and metaphorical boundaries placed on Black bodies, offering a vision of liberation. In this sense, Ringgold's work critiques existing social structures and imagines new possibilities for Black feminist futures.

Faith Ringgold's *Story Quilts* combines painting, quilted fabric, and storytelling in her collages, creating complex narratives that address issues of race, gender, and history. Thus, she challenges the exclusion of Black women's experiences in art history while reconstructing narratives that center their voices and stories. (Ringgold, 1990). Her quilts are aesthetic objects and political statements, asserting the validity and importance of Black women's lives and experiences. In doing so, Ringgold's work proposes new feminist possibilities, envisioning a world where marginalized voices are heard, and their contributions to culture and history are recognized. Her works draw on African American traditions and storytelling to address issues of race, gender, and social justice, situating personal narratives within a larger historical and cultural context (Ringgold, 1998). Through this intersectional lens, Ringgold redefined the artistic possibilities of collage, transforming it into a medium of resistance that could engage with complex social and political issues.

Faith Ringgold's quilts, for instance, do not adhere to the conventions of fine art painting; instead, they fuse painting with craft (quilting) and storytelling. In doing so, she challenges the hierarchy between "high" and "low" art forms and, more importantly, excludes non-Western and non-male artists from the art historical canon. Ringgold's use of quilt-making is especially significant, as it brings attention to a historically feminized and racialized form of artmaking. Traditionally seen as "women's work," quilting was often dismissed as domestic craft rather than legitimate art. However, by bringing quilting into fine art, Ringgold subverts these conventions, placing women's work and Black women's experiences at the center of her artistic practice.

Wangechi Mutu

Wangechi Mutu, born in 1972 in Nairobi, Kenya, is a Kenyan American artist renowned for her complex multimedia works that explore gender, race, postcolonialism, and the body, often through Afrofuturist and feminist lenses. Mutu combines techniques like collage, painting, and sculpture, frequently using materials from diverse sources, including medical illustrations and fashion magazines. This blend allows her to create “hybrid” figures juxtaposing organic and mechanical elements, challenging traditional representations of the female body and confronting colonial visual tropes.



Figure 4: Mutu, W. (2004-2005). *Histology of the different classes of uterine tumors*. National Galleries Scotland, Edinburgh, UK. © Wangechi Mutu.

Wangechi Mutu’s mixed media collages incorporate magazine imagery, painted surfaces, and sculptural elements to question female objectification and cultural stereotypes, particularly those surrounding African women (Mutu, 2005). In her series, *Histology of the Different Classes of Uterine Tumor*, Mutu uses 19th-century medical diagrams as a basis for invented portraiture. The original illustrations, symbolic of colonial power, suggest a wide range of cultural preconceptions, from the ‘superiority’ of European ‘knowledge’ to the classification of nature (and consequently race) into genealogical hierarchies. Mutu challenges these imposed values, using physical disease as a metaphor for social corruption.

Wangechi Mutu's work is celebrated for its visceral aesthetic, richly layered imagery, and powerful social critique, establishing her as a significant voice in contemporary art. Mutu's practice addresses the intersection of gender, race, and cultural identity, primarily focusing on how Black women's bodies are framed, both invisibly and overtly, by global socio-political structures. Her work confronts the historical legacies of colonialism, the objectification of female bodies, and the cultural erasure faced by African and African diasporic communities. Through her arresting visual language, Mutu calls attention to these overlapping oppressions, highlighting how marginalized identities have been, and continue to be, shaped by systemic forces.

Mutu's exploration of the female body as a site of contestation and transformation is deeply personal and politically charged. Using mixed media, she creates surreal and often unsettling compositions that blend the natural, mechanical, beautiful, and grotesque. Combining elements such as magazine clippings, medical illustrations, and organic materials produces hybrid figures that defy simple categorization. These figures are neither entirely human nor

entirely machine; instead, they embody the tensions of modern existence, reflecting how women—particularly Black women—navigate a world that simultaneously fetishizes and devalues their bodies. Mutu uses these hybrid beings to challenge dominant narratives and stereotypes that have historically defined Black women through a colonial and patriarchal lens.

Her work is also a powerful exploration of the impacts of globalization and consumer culture on identity. By incorporating imagery that references Western fashion magazines and advertising, Mutu critiques the pervasive influence of these industries in defining and commodifying beauty standards, particularly for women of color. The juxtaposition of these glossy images with visceral, organic forms is a visual metaphor for how external forces often fragment and reconstruct Black female bodies. Through her art, Mutu resists this fragmentation, creating figures that, though disjointed, possess an undeniable sense of agency and resilience. They are simultaneously monstrous and divine, embodying the complexities of navigating a world that seeks to control and categorize them. Using natural materials, she emphasizes the relationship between the body and the earth, suggesting that exploiting the natural world is intrinsically linked to exploiting marginalized peoples. In doing so, Mutu draws parallels between the colonial exploitation of African lands and the commodification of Black bodies, pointing to the broader socio-political structures that underpin these forms of violence.

Ultimately, Wangechi Mutu's work is a dynamic and profoundly layered commentary on modernity and identity. Her art challenges viewers to confront the legacies of colonialism, the ongoing impacts of globalization, and the complex realities of being a Black woman in a world that often seeks to define and contain her. Through her powerful use of mixed media, Mutu creates a space for African diasporic identities to be seen and celebrated in all their complexity. By envisioning new futures that transcend the limitations of the past, she offers a profound commentary on resilience, transformation, and the possibility of liberation.

Frida Orupabo

Frida Orupabo, born in 1986 in Sarpsborg, Norway, is a prominent sociologist and multimedia artist. Her work explores complex themes related to race, gender, sexuality, family relations, violence, and identity. Through her art, Orupabo engages with archival material, often sourcing images from public archives, the internet, and her collection to reconstruct narratives surrounding the Black female body. Her distinctive collage method layers and juxtaposes images, creating hybrid figures that challenge conventional representations and encourage viewers to confront historical and cultural stereotypes (Modern Art, 2024; Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2021). Orupabo uses digital media to create collages that explore themes of race, gender, and identity. Her work often features fragmented bodies and faces that express the multiplicity of identity and the violence of racial and gendered objectification (Orupabo, 2018). As Orupabo's work reminds us, collage has been central to explorations of feminism, as it has been to many ideologies of resistance.



Figure 5: Orupabo, F. (2019). *Untitled*. Galerie Nordenhake, Stockholm, Sweden.
© Frida Orupabo.

Orupabo's approach to art is deeply personal and political, as she uses collage to reclaim and recontextualize Black identities through feminist frameworks. Her figures often gaze directly at the viewer, establishing an active, almost confrontational agency that complicates the traditionally passive depiction of Black women in Western art. This style resonates with scholars like bell hooks, who have highlighted the marginalization of Black women's experiences in feminist and racial discourse.

Parinaz Eleish

In *My Own Seat At The Table* (2022), Parinaz Eleish speaks to the speculative forward direction of collage. This mixed-media and collage piece encapsulates the struggle of claiming space and agency, especially within contexts that historically marginalized voices like those of women and people from intersectional backgrounds. By choosing the title *My Own Seat at the Table*, Eleish asserts her autonomy in creating her place within spaces that may not have been readily inclusive. This theme resonates with feminist ideals of challenging and redefining traditional roles and advocating for inclusivity and representation.



Figure 6: Eleish, P. (2022). *My own seat at the table*.
Leila Heller, New York City, United States. © Parinaz Eleish.

In the broader context of feminist discourse, the concept of “a seat at the table” symbolizes visibility, influence, and the power to contribute meaningfully. Eleish's work speaks to the

ongoing feminist struggle for representation, underscoring women's need to claim their space rather than waiting to be invited. Her artwork visually reflects the layers of personal and collective histories, using collage to metaphorically reconstruct fragmented identities and experiences, ultimately crafting a cohesive and empowered narrative. This resonates particularly within feminist art, where mixed media often symbolizes the reassembly of fragmented or suppressed identities into a holistic, self-defined presence. Eleish's personal background as an Iranian Egyptian artist further enriches the feminist narrative in *My Own Seat at the Table*. She bridges cultural identities, making her perspective uniquely intersectional and relevant to feminist discourse. Through her art, she encourages viewers to reflect on who is included and who is left out in spaces of power and influence, a critical question within contemporary feminism.

Conclusion

Collage serves as a critical feminist tool by enabling artists to deconstruct and reconstruct societal narratives and personal identity. The medium's inherent characteristics—fragmentation, layering, and juxtaposition—allow artists to disrupt traditional representations and offer new, complex perspectives on power, gender, and race. Theoretical frameworks from scholars such as bell hooks, Judith Butler, and Griselda Pollock, can provide insights into how collage art critiques and reshapes identity, history, and representation. bell hooks' intersectionality theory is particularly relevant as it highlights how collage art can layer disparate images and symbols to center marginalized identities and challenge dominant narratives. Additionally, Judith Butler's theory of performativity helps us understand how collage can reveal the constructed nature of identity, allowing for more fluid and dynamic depictions of gender and selfhood. Griselda Pollock's feminist art critique further supports the assertion that collage disrupts traditional visual culture by reclaiming forgotten or silenced histories and offering alternative feminist narratives.

Collage art is a uniquely positioned tool for feminist critique, suited to dismantling hegemonic structures while creating space for diverse expressions of identity, history, and culture. Through the works of pioneering feminist artists and the lens of intersectional and postmodern theories, we argue that collage remains an essential practice for challenging and reshaping societal power dynamics. By its very nature, collage embraces fragmentation, juxtaposition, and reconstruction—making it a potent medium for disrupting dominant narratives and fostering alternative visions of feminist resistance and empowerment.

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***Perceived Skills Development Acquisition Needs of Agricultural Students in
Public Colleges of Education in Kwara State, Nigeria***

Isreal Adewumi, Kwara State College of Education, Nigeria

Mukaila Aremu, University of Ilorin, Nigeria

Olayinka Jelili, Kwara State University, Nigeria

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Abstract

The concept of skills acquisition is a global concept that needs to be embraced at all levels of human endeavor given this, the study was set to investigate the perceived indices for skills development acquisition needed among NCE agricultural undergraduate students in public colleges of Education in Kwara state, Nigeria. The sample size comprises all the NCE students in all three colleges of education in Kwara state, the sample frame of 35% of the respondents was used making a total of 150 respondents used as the sample size. The multi-stage sampling procedure was adapted, Instrument for data collection was a questionnaire, while descriptive & inferential statistical tools were used for data analysis. Results of the findings revealed that the majority of the respondents (92.7%) could communicate adequately, (92%) had a good sense of human relationships, (92.5%) possessed the ability to cope with academic stress, (87.5%) possessed the ability to adopt innovation while 89.6% possessed a problem-solving strategies skills, The results also affirm that NCE agriculture students required more skills development; in some of the areas like innovative skills acquisition (=3.50), & e-skills acquisition (=3.47) among others. It therefore recommended that the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) extend its intern-ship training program on skills acquisition to 6months instead of 4 months, which will enable agriculture students to fully acquire necessary skills acquisition that are relevant to the establishment & sustainability of agro-based enterprises.

Keywords: Skills Development, Students, Needs, Colleges of Education

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Introduction

Skill acquisition can be defined as the process of learning to do something to earn a living & support one's livelihood. Skills can be acquired from various sources, depending on the type of skills; however, the environment plays a significant role in enhancing the development of proper and adequate skills. According to Oluwaseun (2023), the development of soft skills has become a central focus of job occupations, with the potential to engage more than two-thirds of all NCE graduate job seekers by 2030, as reported by Ademola (2022). Soft skills have increasingly become essential for a successful professional career and have gained attention in social media, among employers, and legislators in recent years (Youth Employment Funders Group, 2023). There is a large number of NCE agriculture graduates seeking employers and lawmakers in recent years (Youth Employment Funders Group, 2023). Currently, a large number of NCE agriculture graduates are seeking employment in the agriculture industry, increasing competition to secure and retain employment. However, in Nigeria, studies have shown that the majority of entry-level NCE agriculture graduates are not adequately equipped with the relevant skills required by the industry, suggesting that many of them lack marketable skills and have difficulty finding quality jobs in the industry (Oluwadamilola & Babajide, 2024).

Many issues currently hinder the agricultural industry, with the workforce predominantly composed of elderly individuals, while youth involvement in acquiring soft skills remains low (Umar et al., 2024). Some reasons for this challenging situation among NCE agriculture graduates include a lack of interest in the profession, inappropriate curriculum design, insufficient funding, an unfriendly environment, inadequate teaching staff, modern facilities, a shortage of qualified personnel, and an over-reliance on theoretical content teaching with little practical application (Ogunlade & Ige, 2023). As a result, students are unable to develop practical skills that would allow them to demonstrate their full potential and gain a competitive advantage in society (Okonkwo & Olugbenga, 2023). These soft skills gaps have hindered agricultural progress due to insufficient skills, which underscores the need for students to be aware of and prepared for future job challenges.

Research has shown that many NCE graduates fail to meet the demands of the global labor force. This failure is often attributed to the misconception that white-collar jobs are a guaranteed safety net in a changing economy, focusing only on theoretical skills & disregarding the importance of acquiring practical skills. The emphasis should be on practical learning to enable students to acquire the skills needed for future job opportunities and enhance their ability to effectively communicate and apply technical and vocational knowledge across industries. Therefore, students need to prepare for the future and acquire soft skills that will enhance their employability and help them succeed in their chosen careers. Agriculture students in particular need to understand and master these soft skills to prepare for the global job market. Although several studies have explored the soft skills of university students, few studies have specifically examined agriculture students in public universities of education in Kwara State, Nigeria. This study aims to fill this gap in the existing literature.

The main objective of this study is to investigate the perceived soft skills needs of agricultural students in public colleges of education in Kwara State, Nigeria. In particular, the study aims to:

1. Identify the types of soft skills that agricultural students in NCE schools consider necessary.

2. Determine the soft skills needs in three colleges of education in Kwara State.
3. Identify and rank the perceived constraints associated with soft skills acquisition.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Kwara State, Nigeria. The state was created on May 2nd, 1967, and is predominantly agricultural, covering an area of about 60,388 square kilometers. According to the 2006 population census, Kwara State has a population of approximately 3.5 million people, divided into sixteen local government areas. Kwara State's rainfall patterns are favorable for the cultivation of crops such as yam, maize, tomatoes, okra, pepper, & amaranth. The state experiences two growing seasons, from April to July and September to November, with an annual rainfall of about 800mm & 1500mm, respectively.

Kwara State is known for its educational institutions, with three public colleges of education: College of Education, Oro (established in 1976), Kwara State College of Education (Technical), Lafiagi (established in 1991), and Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin (originally established in 1976 and later renamed). These institutions offer agricultural programs designed to equip students with soft skills to complement their professional careers.

Sampling & Sample Techniques

A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed to select the desired sample. The first stage involved the purposive selection of three public colleges of education in Kwara State: COED Ilorin, COED Oro, & COED Lafiagi. The second stage involved categorizing the students based on their academic levels in each selected college. The third stage entailed the random selection of 50 NCE agriculture undergraduate students from each of the three colleges, totaling 150 students.

The data collection instrument was a questionnaire titled "Perceived Soft Skills Needs of Agriculture Students in Public Colleges of Education in Kwara State." All 150 distributed questionnaires were retrieved & deemed useful for analysis. To analyze the first research question, descriptive statistics were employed. For the second research objective, descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations were calculated for each variable using a four-point Likert scale: "never" (4 points), "rarely" (3 points), "often" (2 points), & "always" (1 point). A cutoff mean of 2.50 was set such that skill acquisition with a mean of 2.50 or above was considered necessary or present, while skills with a mean of less than 2.50 were considered unnecessary or non-existent. For the third objective, means & standard deviations were calculated for all factors using the same Likert scale, with a cutoff mean of 2.50 indicating serious limitations in skill acquisition.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Perceived Types of Soft Skills Possessed by Agriculture Students in Colleges of Education in Kwara State

Soft Skills Possessed	Percentage
Effective communication	97.2
A good sense of humor	96.0
How to deal with academic stress	95.0
Ability to access information online	95.6
Ability to complete obligations by deadlines	92.0
Problem-solving strategies	89.6
Ability to develop alternative solutions	89.4
Ability to work independently	88.4
Ability to start livestock farming with minimal supervision	88.0
Ability to coordinate & manage the affairs of others	92.5
Ability to develop ideas for implementation	87.1
Ability to judge situations	88.3
Ability to work under pressure	84.7
Ability to read & write	83.9
Has certain cognitive abilities	80.7
Multiple answers were recorded	

Source: Field survey, 2024

Perceived Types of Soft Skills Possessed by Agriculture Students

According to the findings in Table 1, the respondents demonstrated proficiency in fifteen (15) identified types of soft skills. The majority of respondents (97.2%) reported being able to communicate effectively, 96% had a good sense of humor, 95.0% exhibited coping strategies against academic stress, 95.6% could source information online, 92% had problem-solving strategies, and 89.6% had problem-solving skills. Additionally, 88.4% could work independently, 88% exhibited teamwork skills, and 87.1% could initiate animal husbandry with minimal supervision. Other notable skills included innovative skills (84.7%), the ability to coordinate and handle others' affairs (83.9%), idea generation (83.1%), evaluating circumstances (83.1%), and the ability to work under pressure (80.7%).

These findings align with those of Adedayo (2023), who found that Nigerian university students possess communication skills, time management skills, creativity, leadership, and interpersonal skills. Additionally, these results corroborate the findings of Anjola and Aderemi (2024), who reported that Nigerian agriculture students possess essential skills like communication, leadership, time management, and work ethics. This implies that respondents are adequately developing the soft skills necessary to be prepared for future employment opportunities.

Table 2: Perceived Types of Soft Skills Needed by Agriculture Students in Colleges of Education

Types of Soft Skills Needed	Mean	Standard Deviation	Ranking
Creative thinking skills	3.51*	2.08	1 st
Team works skills	3.50*	2.06	2 nd
Problem-solving/decision-making skills	3.48*	2.04	3 rd
Leadership/management skills	3.47*	2.02	4 th
Digital skills	3.44*	2.04	5 th
Communication skills	3.42*	2.06	6 th
Adaptability skills	3.39*	2.10	7 th
Critical thinking skills	3.38*	2.11	8 th
Time management skills	3.36*	2.12	9 th
Interpersonal skills	3.27*	2.11	10 th

Source: Field survey, 2024

Perceived Types of Soft Skills Needed by Agriculture Students

The results in Table 2 show the types of soft skills required by agricultural students in colleges of education in Kwara State. In the list of soft skills required by agricultural students, creative thinking skills topped the list with a mean of 3.51 (SD=2.08), followed by skills in the cognitive domain. The average of all the soft skills indicates that university students need all these skills as all soft skills achieved a mean score above the cut-off mean of 2.50. However, the different standard deviations indicate different levels of agreement among the respondents. The standard deviations for skills such as creativity & teamwork are relatively low indicating a high level of agreement among the respondents, while the standard deviations for skills such as critical thinking and time management are high indicating differences of opinion.

This is in line with the findings of Oluwalola (2024), who found that students need various soft skills, including teamwork, communication, leadership, time management, problem solving, and analytical skills. These findings are consistent with those of Sacpudim and colleagues (2024), who highlighted the importance of communication, teamwork, and decision-making skills among university students. Furthermore, the results of this study support the findings of Sarker and colleagues (2024), who stated that students need essential soft skills such as critical thinking, communication, and teamwork. Sharma and Dayanand (2024) also argue that soft skills are essential for students as they facilitate exploration of their environment and improve employability.

Furthermore, these results support the conclusions of Murugan and colleagues (2024) on the importance of communication, decision-making, work ethics, problem-solving, time management skills and other soft skills. These results are also in line with Oviawes (2024) who agree that college students should have soft skills such as communication, creative thinking, critical thinking and collaboration/team skills.

Table 3: Constraints Faced to Skills Acquisition Through ICT Usage by Respondent

Constraints	Mean	Ranking
Inadequate financial capacity	1.76	7 th
Poor electricity	2.74	4 th
Poor technical know-how	1.68	8 th
Poor interest in agriculture	2.39	5 th
Inadequate availability of internet	1.77	6 th
High cost of e-skills	2.80	3 rd
Inadequate provision of necessary skills required	3.46	1 st
Poor training on soft skills acquired	1.68	8 th
High cost of training Equipment	3.05	2 nd

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Constraints to ICT Usage by Respondents

Table 3 reveals that inadequate provision of necessary skills required (3.46), next is inadequate financial support (3.05), high cost of e-skills (2.80), poor electricity (2.74), & poor interest in agriculture (2.39) were major constraints affecting respondents' acquiring necessary soft skills acquisition. This is in line with Bamiwuye and colleagues (2024), who carried out work on ICT, highlighting the high cost of acquiring ICT equipment, slow internet access speed, poor access to ICT facilities in the library, and irregular power supply as major constraints. This result also brings to the fore that the government should make available all the necessary equipment & information & communication sector regulators, such as Nigerian Communications Commission Education (NCC E), should ensure better system linkage.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Agricultural students in Kwara State Normal Schools understand the importance of acquiring soft skills. These students possess a range of soft skills, including communication, adaptability, cognitive domain skills, teamwork, ability to manage academic stress, ability to work independently, leadership, critical thinking and creative problem solving. Among these soft skills, the most essential for students are creative thinking, cognitive domain skills, problem solving and decision-making, leadership and management, digital literacy, communication, adaptability, critical thinking and time management. In contrast, interpersonal skills are considered less vital.

The college management committee (CMC), working with the government, should try to expose students to more internship training and lengthen the duration. This could include conferences, seminars, and workshops that help students learn more soft skills. To enable NCE students completely understand professional soft skills including cooperation, creative thinking, time management, timeliness, and effective communication, the government should set up 6-month internship programs. Group dynamics, including interactions between students and between students and teachers in problem-based courses, should be used to help students develop their skills. Among other things, these programs will greatly improve their communication and leadership abilities.

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Contact emails: adewumiisreal@gmail.com
adewumi@kwcoeoro.edu.ng

Developing a Course in a P-12 Educational Leadership Doctoral Program to Support Disability Education

Sarana E. Roberts, California State University at Bakersfield, United States

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Abstract

Educational leaders can be the biggest support and resource in schools and districts for special educators who teach students with disabilities in preschool-12th grade settings. Although candidates in preschool-12th grade doctoral leadership programs assume assistant principal, principal, and director positions in public school settings that service students with disabilities, many have not had a single course that prepares them to support this student population. The absence of their pedagogical knowledge on historical context as well as law and policy in special education is particularly concerning as these leaders will be expected to support students with disabilities, their teachers, family members, and support personnel to meet student needs. To address this issue, one instructor developed a university doctoral leadership course covering historical context, law, and policy in special education, and their application to future preschool-12th grade leaders.

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Special Education, Disability Education, Instruction

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Introduction

Educational leaders can be the biggest support and resource in schools and districts for special educators who teach students with disabilities in preschool-12th grade settings (Benz et al., 2000; Brownell et al., 2003; Cobb, 2015; DiPaola et al., 2004; Klinger et al., 2001). Although candidates in preschool-12th grade doctoral leadership programs assume assistant principal, principal, and director positions in public school settings that service students with disabilities, many have not had a single course that prepares them to support this student population. The absence of their pedagogical knowledge on historical context as well as law and policy in special education is particularly concerning as these leaders will be expected to support students with disabilities, their teachers, family members, and support personnel to meet student needs. Roberts and Guerra's (2017) mixed methods study of 84 principals in South Texas located in schools with high Hispanic populations, indicated principals needed more curricular knowledge in the area special education. However, principals also reported they were most in need of special education laws surrounding Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and Section 504. The second were that principals needed support in was course content to support the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) within the school setting.

Likewise, in a more recent study, Sun and Xin (2020) found principals had limited knowledge of special education and thus did not engage in special education in their leadership practice. In addition, their understanding of special education, and their experiences are related to their practice, but their gender, levels of schools they employed are not correlated with their practice. Higher education leadership programs including special education content is encouraged in order to prepare more school leaders to better support teachers and students in special education. To address this issue, one instructor developed a university doctoral leadership course covering historical context, law, and policy in special education, and their application to future preschool-12th grade leaders. The research provides a guide for how one instructor determined relevant topics and issues to discuss in a doctoral course focusing on special education. It also highlights important elements of a special education course in an educational doctoral leadership program.

Determining What to Cover

The challenge to creating a course is determining what might be important to cover. The question posed was what aspects of special education and disability are needed for an educational leadership doctoral program? Using prior research to inform what aspects to address in an educational leadership program was also crucial. The researcher decided to use the following to inform course creation: prior literature on educational leadership, special education doctoral leadership courses, local due process hearings, and course alignment to the doctoral program's goals.

Literature on Educational Leadership

Literature in the area of educational leadership to support individuals with disabilities was reviewed. Literature on educational leadership indicates that principals face many challenges when supporting special education programs. For instance, principals have challenges promoting collaboration when differences exist, establishing a clear vision for inclusive practices, and supporting differentiated instruction (Cobb, 2015). Additionally, principals are concerned with avoiding litigation and teacher attrition (Cobb, 2015). Administrators of

special education programs have complex responsibilities (Gilson & Etscheidt, 2022). One of the responsibilities that were reported to be crucial where administrators were lacking was understanding and overseeing the policies and practices that ensure compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Principals specifically report needing additional skills to support implementing and evaluating programs and systems of support for students with disabilities (DiPaola et al., 2004). Moreover, Crockett et al. (2012) argue that leaders who are highly knowledgeable about special education along with educational administration are better equipped to promote equity for students with disabilities, foster collaborative partnerships among school personnel and families, encourage effective teaching practices, and promote students' learning. Other researchers stressed a need to have leadership programs develop candidates as advocates and promoters of social justice (Frattura, 2006; Pazey & Cole, 2013).

Special Education Doctoral Leadership Courses

Special education doctoral leadership courses were researched to determine what aspects of special education leadership were important to the profession. While programs differed on some aspects covered most programs in special educational leadership were consistent in their focus on disability education, the history of special education, and major laws and policies that govern special education. Covering disability education meant addressing the inclusion and lack of students with disabilities in general education school environments. Thus, disability as a study- termed disability studies - would also need to be addressed since many special education leadership programs have a disability studies lens. For context, disability studies is a field of study that emerged from the civil rights movement. Rather than focusing on individual impairments, it utilizes a social model to understand the world of disabled individuals. This includes understanding the structural and attitudinal barriers that contribute to the ableism of individuals with disabilities.

Local Due Process Hearings

Working with students with disabilities in the P-12 public education setting requires an understanding of basic law and policy pertaining to special education. However, it can be argued that an administrator or leader does not need to know every aspect of special education to support teachers and their students' needs. However, they should know the laws and policies that their districts, schools, teachers, and support staff need to adhere to in order to support students with disabilities and prevent litigation. Given that educational leadership doctoral candidates would only have this one course in special education, it was crucial to determine the most pressing laws and litigation issues to cover. To determine what aspects to cover in law and policy, local due process hearings from the state of California were assessed. The last three years of due process hearings were pulled from California's Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH) and examined to determine the type of issues that were frequently mentioned and resulting in due process litigation. Prominent issues surrounding IEP and student rights violations were found across due process hearing documents. For instance, many hearings challenged whether school districts had broken the law by denying the student with a disability their services as outlined in their IEP. In other instances, the IEP disputes were disagreements with what would be considered the most appropriate placement for the student and changing placements without proper notice. This included disputes over access to general education settings and curriculum.

In terms of student rights violations, districts were frequently accused of not adhering to deadlines set by the state of California. One of the contested violations was whether a student had been unlawfully suspended, while another dealt with the length of time a student could be suspended and whether they were still receiving access to services during the suspension period. Violations of parents' rights consisted of including parents during student decision-making meetings and adhering to parent request for testing and IEP meetings. The findings from review of local due process hearings indicated a need to cover federal mandates that govern the IEP process, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). However, it also pointed to a need to address state level laws and policies to help district and school leaders acquire knowledge about deadlines and timelines related to suspension procedures, as well as student and parent rights.

Alignment With the Goals and Objectives of the Doctoral Program

The doctoral program that this course was being developed for had several competencies for its candidates. It was important that the topics addressed within this new course met these competencies as goals for candidates. First, students needed to be able to demonstrate functional area knowledge. This meant that the student would be able to show advanced literature-based knowledge in functional areas of education and leadership that developed equity in educational opportunities and address social justice issues. This goal aligned well with disability education as inequities within society and the education system that serve to oppress and other individuals with disabilities could be addressed through the history of special education and civil rights issues. The second goal was for students to demonstrate oral and written communication skills, presenting professional systematic and inquiry-based analysis. To support this goal, a research paper and presentation on regarding an issue or phenomenon in special education was required.

The third goal was for students to demonstrate problem-solving skills through advanced reasoning and critical thinking skills to address long-standing barriers to equity and to provide social justice in educational opportunities. This goal was threaded throughout each session of the course. The fourth goal was for candidates to develop leadership skills. To support this, the course needed to focus on building interpersonal skills by learning about conflict resolution and de-escalation of IEP issues. For the last and fifth goal candidates needed to develop ethical personal and professional decision-making to equip candidates with the ability to identify and address equity and social justice issues in their schools.

The Doctoral Course Design

Based on the research considering what to cover, the following main topics were identified: historical context, law and policy, California policy & litigation, evidence-based practices, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), research in special education, current issues, and research presentations. The session on historical context covered the history of special education, disability rights, and the civil rights movement. The session on law and policy covered federal laws that impacted special education and how those laws are enacted in schools. Session three addressed special education timelines and policies in the state of California. The session also reviewed litigation, due process and due process hearings that have occurred in the region of the doctoral program. The fourth session explained evidence-based practices and ways to identify evidence-based practices for any area of instruction to support the needs of students with disabilities or students in need of additional support in English language arts, math, behavior, and social emotional learning. Session five addressed

RTI and MTSS by teaching candidates about school-wide strategies design to provide layered and ongoing support that meets the needs of all students. The sixth session allowed for candidates to discuss their research topics on an issue or phenomenon in special education that they were interested in knowing more about. In this session, the instructor led discussions about how to write a literature review paper, and alignment across research questions and the methods used to examine them. For session seven, candidates suggested topics based on interest and issues they were experiencing in schools, which was termed the current issues session. Lastly, for the eighth and final session, candidates presented on their research topics.

Conclusion

The success of P-12 students with disabilities is linked to the support they receive from their administrative leaders. Thus, having administrators who are knowledgeable about special education is vital. Individuals who go on to receive doctorates in educational leadership programs should, after extensive years of experience, have basic knowledge of disability issues and concepts related to special education in order to support all students in their schools and districts. Yet, many do not receive such instruction in their doctoral programs or prior educational programs making the need for doctoral programs to create courses that focus on special education imperative. The current work sought to develop a doctoral course that focused on special education and disability issues needed to support special educators and students with disabilities in school settings. This work detailed the process for developing the course. Currently, the course is being taught, providing opportunities for doctoral candidates to reflect on their learning. These reflections are designed to provide insight into what aspects of the course were impactful and best support various leadership positions as well as opportunities to improve the course. This work is ongoing.

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Contact email: sroberts21@cslib.edu

***Ethnography of Nationalism on the Indonesia-Malaysia Border:
Dynamics of Transnational Identity in the Study of Culture, Art, and Citizenship***

Jagad Aditya Dewantara, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia
Dasim Budimansyah, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia
Kokom Komalasari, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia
Cecep Darmawan, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia
Nuri Annisa, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study investigates identity transnationalism and nationalism along the Indonesia-Malaysia border in West Kalimantan. Residents with familial ties in both nations face challenges in maintaining their cultural, artistic, and tribal identities across national lines. Despite their common ancestry, these individuals remain politically divided but culturally unified. Our research explores how transnational communities manage their complex sense of self and examines the role of culture and the arts in preserving community unity amidst national diversity. This study addresses a gap in the academic literature by focusing on transnationalism's cultural and artistic dimensions in border regions, a seldom-explored topic. Using critical ethnography, data were gathered through documentation analysis, in-depth interviews, and participant observation with Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi community informants. Informants were chosen based on their familial ties in both Indonesia and Malaysia, representing culturally intertwined yet politically distinct communities. The research shows that transnational communities at the frontier use diverse strategies to preserve and express their cultural identity, despite political constraints. Cultural and artistic festivals are crucial for fostering community cohesion and identity, helping overcome territorial limitations. The findings significantly contribute to understanding the coexistence of transnational and national identities and the potential of arts and culture to strengthen community bonds despite political fragmentation. Emphasis is placed on supporting cultural programs that help communities preserve their identity and adopting a more inclusive and sensitive policy approach to the dynamics of transnationalism in border regions.

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Introduction

The Indonesia-Malaysia border in West Kalimantan represents a unique area that highlights the complexities of transnational and national identities. Among borderland communities such as the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi, familial ties extend across national boundaries. However, the existence of political borders divides them administratively, creating challenges in maintaining cultural, artistic, and tribal identities. These communities navigate a delicate balance where shared ancestral heritage fosters cultural unity, yet political divisions pose significant obstacles (Martono et al., 2022).

Research on transnationalism often emphasizes economic migration or geopolitical relations, leaving the cultural and artistic dimensions underexplored. However, culture and art play a crucial role in fostering and preserving community solidarity, especially in border regions vulnerable to social disintegration due to political fragmentation. Through cultural and artistic festivals, transnational communities assert their identities and strengthen cross-border connections (Sulistyarini et al., 2021).

This study aims to explore how transnational communities manage their complex identities amidst political challenges. Using a critical ethnographic approach, this research employs document analysis, in-depth interviews, and participant observation with informants from the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi community. Informants were selected based on their cross-border familial ties, representing culturally interconnected yet politically distinct communities (Fatmawati & Dewantara, 2022).

The findings reveal that cultural and artistic strategies are central to how border communities sustain their identities (Musa et al., 2021). Additionally, the study contributes significantly to understanding the coexistence of national and transnational identities. It highlights the potential of culture and art to overcome territorial divides and foster unity. This research advocates for supporting cultural programs that facilitate identity preservation and calls for more inclusive policies to address the dynamics of transnationalism in border areas. By examining the intersection of culture, art, and citizenship in transnational contexts, this study offers valuable insights into the power of cultural practices to reinforce cross-border community cohesion despite political fragmentation.

Method

This study employs a critical ethnographic approach to explore the dynamics of transnational and national identities along the Indonesia-Malaysia border, focusing on the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi community. This approach was chosen for its ability to delve deeply into the lived experiences, cultural practices, and strategies employed by the community to maintain their identities amidst political and geographical challenges. Data collection involved three primary techniques: document analysis, in-depth interviews, and participant observation. Document analysis encompassed a review of academic literature, local archives, and government reports relevant to the history and policies affecting border regions. This step provided a foundational understanding of the historical and social contexts underlying identity dynamics in the area (Dewantara & Budimansyah, 2024).

In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants selected purposively. These informants were members of the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi community with familial ties across national borders. The interviews explored their experiences in preserving cultural and artistic

identities and addressing political and administrative challenges posed by the national divide. Participant observation was carried out by engaging directly in the community's cultural and artistic activities, including traditional festivals, religious rituals, and artistic practices. This method allowed the researcher to gain firsthand insights into the symbolic meanings of these activities while fostering closer relationships with the community to collect authentic data.

All data were analyzed thematically to identify key patterns in the community's identity strategies. The analysis process involved transcribing interviews, coding data, and interpreting findings through the theoretical lens of transnationalism and borderland culture. Data validity was ensured through methodological triangulation and discussions with informants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. This methodology not only documents the challenges faced by the community but also highlights the pivotal role of art and culture as essential forces in strengthening cross-border identity and solidarity.

Result and Discussion

Cultural Dynamics in Transnational Communities

Culture is a cornerstone of identity, particularly for transnational communities like the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi, who inhabit the border regions of Indonesia and Malaysia. For these communities, cultural traditions transcend political and geographical boundaries, serving as a unifying force that sustains a shared sense of belonging. Despite being administratively divided into two nations, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi maintain strong cultural ties that bind their members together.

The Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi share a rich cultural heritage rooted in their common ancestry. Traditional rituals, festivals, and practices remain integral to their identity and are celebrated across borders (Efriani et al., 2020; Syam et al., 2024). These include harvest ceremonies, ancestral worship, and communal gatherings, which are central to their way of life. The rituals emphasize themes of unity, spirituality, and harmony with nature, reflecting the core values of the community. For the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi, these cultural expressions are not merely symbolic; they are active manifestations of their collective identity. They allow community members to reaffirm their connection to their ancestral heritage and to one another, even when divided by national boundaries. However, preserving this shared cultural identity is not without challenges. The establishment of national borders has introduced political and administrative barriers that complicate cultural continuity. Differences in policies between Indonesia and Malaysia can hinder cross-border participation in traditional practices. Furthermore, globalization and modern influences have begun to alter the cultural landscape of the region. Younger generations, exposed to global trends, often show declining interest in traditional customs. The gradual erosion of native languages, which are intrinsic to the community's oral traditions and cultural expressions, poses an additional threat to their heritage.

In response to these challenges, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi have developed strategies to safeguard their cultural identity. Cultural and artistic festivals play a critical role in these efforts. These events serve as platforms for the community to celebrate their traditions, share their artistic expressions, and strengthen bonds across borders. They provide a space for younger members to learn about and appreciate their heritage, ensuring that cultural knowledge is passed down to future generations. Such festivals often feature traditional

music, dance, storytelling, and culinary arts, showcasing the richness of the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi's cultural legacy.

Community leaders and cultural custodians also play a significant role in preserving their heritage. They act as mediators between generations, facilitating the transmission of knowledge and values through workshops, educational programs, and storytelling sessions. These efforts are often supported by collaborations with cultural organizations and academic institutions, which provide resources for documentation and promotion of their traditions (Konig, 2012).

Despite the difficulties imposed by political borders and modern influences, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi demonstrate resilience in preserving their cultural identity. Their ability to maintain cultural continuity across national lines highlights the enduring power of tradition as a unifying force. By prioritizing cultural preservation and leveraging the arts as a means of expression, the community continues to strengthen its identity and cohesion. This commitment to cultural heritage serves as an inspiring example of how transnational communities can navigate the complexities of modern life while honoring their ancestral roots. Through their ongoing efforts, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi not only sustain their cultural practices but also affirm the importance of culture as a bridge that connects people across borders. Their experience underscores the vital role of cultural identity in fostering unity, resilience, and a sense of belonging in transnational communities.

Artistic Expressions in Transnational Communities

Art serves as a powerful medium of expression and identity for transnational communities, such as the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi, who inhabit the Indonesia-Malaysia border region. For these communities, artistic practices transcend national boundaries and provide a crucial means of preserving and asserting their shared heritage. Traditional art forms—ranging from visual arts and crafts to music and performance—play an integral role in fostering cultural cohesion and continuity amidst political fragmentation.

The art of the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi reflects their deep connection to nature, spirituality, and communal values. Traditional crafts, such as intricate beadwork, wood carving, and weaving, are imbued with symbolic meanings tied to their cosmology and ancestral wisdom. These art forms often serve both functional and ceremonial purposes, reinforcing the community's cultural identity in daily life and sacred rituals. Musical traditions, including the use of gongs, drums, and indigenous wind instruments, are equally significant, providing a soundtrack to community gatherings, festivals, and ceremonies. The rhythm and melodies of these performances often narrate stories of their history, beliefs, and struggles, making art an archive of their collective memory.

One of the most distinctive art forms of the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi is *silotuang*, a traditional form of storytelling through performative dance and music. *Silotuang* combines elements of oral tradition, rhythmic movements, and melodic chanting to convey narratives that celebrate their history, ancestral lineage, and cultural philosophies. Typically performed during communal festivals or important ceremonies, *silotuang* serves as both entertainment and education, instilling a sense of pride and identity in the audience. The fluid yet structured movements of the performers, accompanied by traditional instruments, create a mesmerizing display that symbolizes unity and harmony.

Despite the richness of their artistic traditions, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi face challenges in sustaining their art forms. The imposition of national borders has disrupted the natural flow of cultural exchange between family members and artists residing in different countries. Moreover, economic pressures and the allure of modernity have led some younger generations to distance themselves from traditional artistic practices. The lack of formal support for preserving indigenous art—both in Indonesia and Malaysia—further compounds these difficulties, leaving artisans to rely on community-driven efforts for survival.

In response, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi have turned to collaborative strategies to protect and revitalize their artistic heritage. Cross-border cultural festivals are central to these efforts, serving as platforms for artists to showcase their work, share techniques, and celebrate their shared identity. These festivals not only provide visibility for traditional art but also encourage intergenerational engagement, ensuring that knowledge is passed down to younger members. *Silotuang* performances, in particular, have become a highlight of these festivals, attracting attention from both local and international audiences and revitalizing interest in this unique art form.

Education and documentation also play a vital role in sustaining artistic traditions. Community leaders and cultural advocates have initiated workshops and training programs to teach traditional art forms to younger generations. These programs often emphasize the cultural significance of the art, ensuring that participants understand its role in expressing and preserving their identity. Additionally, partnerships with academic institutions and cultural organizations have facilitated the documentation of traditional artistic practices, including detailed records of *silotuang* performances, providing a written and visual archive for future generations.

In the face of modern challenges, art has become a tool for empowerment and resilience for the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi. It serves not only as a means of cultural preservation but also as a way to assert their presence and identity in a rapidly changing world. By leveraging their artistic heritage, the community has found innovative ways to navigate the complexities of transnational life while maintaining their connection to their roots.

The experiences of the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi highlight the transformative power of art in bridging divides and fostering solidarity in transnational communities. Their dedication to sustaining their artistic traditions, particularly through practices like *silotuang*, underscores the importance of supporting indigenous art as a living expression of identity and a source of strength in the face of modern challenges. Through their art, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi continue to inspire and unite their members across borders, ensuring that their rich cultural legacy endures for generations to come.

Citizenship in Transnational Communities

The concept of citizenship takes on a unique dimension in transnational communities like the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi, who straddle the Indonesia-Malaysia border. For these communities, citizenship is not merely a legal status tied to a specific nation-state but a lived experience that encompasses multiple allegiances, responsibilities, and cultural identities. The coexistence of national borders and familial ties creates a complex interplay between formal citizenship and cultural belonging, influencing how these communities navigate their rights, duties, and sense of self (Olendo, 2020).

In practical terms, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi must contend with the differing policies and regulations of Indonesia and Malaysia. These policies affect their access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. For individuals with family members across the border, the challenge lies in maintaining connections while adhering to the legal constraints imposed by their respective governments. The existence of border checkpoints, visa requirements, and residency laws often disrupt traditional patterns of interaction, making it difficult to sustain familial and cultural bonds.

Despite these challenges, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi have developed adaptive strategies to assert their dual identities. Their sense of citizenship extends beyond the boundaries of nation-states, rooted instead in shared cultural practices, values, and heritage. For instance, participation in cross-border festivals and rituals reaffirms their belonging to a larger Dayak community, even as they remain politically divided. These events provide a space where individuals can celebrate their common ancestry and traditions, fostering unity despite the constraints of formal citizenship.

Another significant aspect of transnational citizenship is the community's role in advocating for their rights and cultural recognition. In both Indonesia and Malaysia, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi have sought to engage with local and national authorities to secure support for their cultural and economic needs. This includes efforts to gain recognition for their indigenous identity, access to resources for cultural preservation, and inclusion in development programs. By leveraging their shared identity and collective voice, the community has worked to navigate the political and bureaucratic systems of both nations.

Education and knowledge-sharing play a critical role in fostering a sense of transnational citizenship. Community leaders and cultural advocates often emphasize the importance of understanding and respecting the laws of both countries while maintaining a strong connection to their heritage. Programs and workshops focused on cultural education, cross-border collaboration, and indigenous rights help equip younger generations with the tools to navigate the complexities of their dual citizenship. The community's approach to citizenship also reflects a broader philosophy of coexistence and mutual respect. The Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi view their dual existence as an opportunity to build bridges rather than barriers. Through cultural exchange, they foster goodwill and understanding between the people of Indonesia and Malaysia. Their efforts to sustain their identity and unity serve as a model for how transnational communities can thrive amidst political fragmentation.

In conclusion, citizenship for transnational communities like the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi is a dynamic and multifaceted concept. It transcends legal definitions to encompass cultural, social, and emotional dimensions of belonging. Despite the challenges posed by national borders and political constraints, the community's resilience and adaptability highlight the importance of fostering inclusive policies and practices that respect the unique realities of transnational life. By embracing their shared heritage and actively engaging with both nations, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi demonstrate the potential of citizenship to unite rather than divide, preserving their identity and strengthening their community across borders.

Conclusion

The study of transnationalism and nationalism along the Indonesia-Malaysia border, particularly through the lens of the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi community, highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of identity and citizenship in border regions. For these communities,

cultural preservation and artistic expression serve as vital means of maintaining a shared sense of belonging across national divides. Despite political fragmentation and the constraints of formal citizenship, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi navigate the complexities of dual identities by fostering unity through cultural practices, particularly art and traditional festivals.

Art, such as the performance of *silotuang*, plays a significant role in reinforcing communal ties and passing down cultural knowledge, acting as both a form of resistance and resilience in the face of political boundaries. By embracing their traditions, the community has not only preserved their identity but has also adapted to the changing socio-political landscape through innovative strategies that emphasize cross-border collaboration. These cultural practices transcend national borders, reinforcing the notion that identity can be both fluid and rooted, allowing individuals to belong to multiple spheres at once. Moreover, the community's experience highlights the concept of citizenship as more than a legal affiliation with a nation-state. Citizenship for the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi is informed by their cultural ties, shared heritage, and collective rights, which exist independently of national boundaries. Their efforts to secure cultural recognition, advocate for indigenous rights, and engage with both Indonesian and Malaysian authorities exemplify how transnational communities assert their identity in a world increasingly defined by political divisions. In conclusion, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi's experience offers valuable insights into the dynamics of transnationalism in border regions, underscoring the importance of cultural preservation, artistic expression, and community solidarity in navigating the complexities of identity and citizenship. Their story is a testament to the power of art and culture in bridging divides, promoting understanding, and ensuring the continued vitality of transnational identities in an ever-globalizing world.

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Contact email: jagad@upi.edu

***Freedom of Speech? Coverage of Indonesia's "Information and Electronic Transactions"
Law in Indigenous Online News Media***

Sufri Eka Bhakti, University of Kent, United Kingdom

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Abstract

Since its enactment in 2008 and amendment in 2016, Indonesia's Information and Electronic Transaction law (ITE Law) has been problematic. Critics argue that the Defamation provision of ITE Law has vague interpretations and has been used disproportionately to threaten freedom of speech on the Internet (SAFEnet, 2021). In response to this controversial law, the Indonesian president called for revising the ITE Law in 2021, drawing considerable media attention. Given the crucial role of popular online news media in shaping the public's perceptions of the issue represented, this research explores how the media covered ITE Law revision as a public discourse, as they should be neutral and unbiased. This research employs a critical content analysis grounded in a critical discourse analysis approach to analyse the representation of ITE Law revision in Detik.com and Kompas.com, two of Indonesia's most popular news media (Reuters Institute, 2022), making them key sources of information for the Indonesian society. This research examined news sources from Detik.com and Kompas.com in 2021 and performed a qualitative data analysis of 203 news articles using NVivo to explore the differences in the discursive representation of ITE Law revision. The results show that Detik.com provides more robust coverage with a reasonable diversity of perspectives. In contrast, Kompas.com reports more conservatively, which may restrict public discourse. This research revealed how issues are framed, which voices are represented, and the openness to discussing powerful figures. This realisation should make Indonesian society all the more vigilant and discerning in their consumption of mainstream news.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Content Analysis, Freedom of Speech, Representation, Online News Media, Indonesia, ITE Law

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Introduction

The Indonesian government faced significant public backlash over the Information and Electronic Transactions law (henceforth ITE Law) in 2021, which stemmed mainly from the threat of abuse due to the law's vague interpretation. It has been criticised for over-criminalising civil disputes, with many defamation cases pursued as a criminal offence seen as disproportionate. The 2020 Digital Right Situation report from SAFEnet (a year-based report) recorded an increase in criminal cases related to the ITE Law, and there are at least 84 annually; this is four times as many or up from 2019 when only 24 cases were reported. It is interesting to note here that 64 of the 84 cases were under Articles 27, 28 and 29 based on the vague provisions in ITE Law (SAFEnet, 2021). This provoked allegations that the law was being weaponised to silence critical voices, with journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens regularly charged with expressing opinions online (Amnesty International Indonesia, 2020; SAFEnet, 2021). In response, President Joko Widodo addressed those concerns and began discussions to revisit the ITE Law, but doubts remained that meaningful revision would be enacted. Since the President's official statement in February 2021 about revising the ITE Law, indigenous online media reporting has been proliferation in Indonesia.

During the last few years, the role of news organisations in defining public perception in Indonesia has been examined within a broader context. Hill (2005) wrote about the historical context, pointing out that the internet was initially viewed as a counterweight to elite-controlled media, providing opportunities for marginalised voices shaping public debate. At the same time, as digital platforms have multiplied, so too has misinformation and polarising content that mirrors and exacerbates societal fracture. Tapsell (2017) notes how oligarch-controlled media ownership enables powerful elites to control public narratives to shape attitudes and understanding of political and social matters to meet their demographic purpose. In a forthcoming update, Aspinall and Mietzner (2019) develop this analysis further by explaining how the media can escalate illiberal narratives focusing on religious intolerance and ethnic prejudice in a way that helps to breed electoral competition. However, there remains a lack of academic publications focusing on how internet regulation, such as ITE Law, represents a public discourse in Indonesian online news media. Thus, this research seeks to address this gap by examining how the ITE Law is presented in Indonesia's most popular online news media and its effect on public discourse in a democratic society.

This research reports how Detik.com and Kompas.com, Indonesia's most popular online news media (Reuters Institute, University Oxford, 2022), constructed the news about ITE Law revision as public discourse from January to December 2021. It employs a methodological approach grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to scrutinise the representation of ITE Law revision between Detik.com and Kompas.com, especially their relationship to power, domination, and social inequality. In examining this issue, the researcher is guided by the discursive elements within the subset of the CDA theoretical lens (Fairclough, 2003 and Van Dijk, 2015) with the following question: How does the discourse analysis of ITE Law revision on online news media in Indonesia?

Methods

This research used a critical content analysis (Carvalho, 2008; Macnamara, 2005; Webster et al., 2020) of Indonesian online news media reporting on ITE Law revision. The research's position is to "understand, expose and ultimately challenge the social inequality" (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 466) of ITE Law as a public discourse between Detik.com and Kompas.com, as they

were Indonesia's most popular online news media. This research stresses that CDA as a theoretical framework is relevant to answering the research questions mainly because the notion of most CDA works focuses on discourse and power, more precisely, the social power of groups or institutions (among many studies, see Fairclough, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2015; Van Dijk, 1995). CDA is a central notion in this research, and power, domination, and social inequality (Van Dijk, 2015) become the primary focus of the analytical investigation. Because this research aimed to analyse power relations and the representation of ITE Law revision between Detik.com and Kompas.com, a qualitative approach grounded in CDA was the most appropriate choice.

This research approach employed the CDA framework offered by Fairclough's (2003) and Van Dijk's (2015). The CDA framework offered by Fairclough (2003) focuses on textual analysis through "looking at collocations, patterns of co-occurrence of words in texts" (p.131). Second, Van Dijk (2015) stresses that journalists control media discourse through "the argumentative structures of editorials or op-ed articles" (p. 473). Van Dijk (2015) offers some well-known discursive elements, specifically "how belief may thus be manipulated" (van Dijk, 2015) through (i) Main topic (i.e. controlling the big idea), (ii) presuppositions, (iii) metaphors, (iv) lexical expressions, and (v) nominalisations (van Dijk, 2015, pp. 473-474).

The analysis starts with collocations, as it counts the recurring themes using NVivo coding to some extent to determine key messages and the central idea within the content. The researcher can identify the core narratives driving the debate from these patterns. Moreover, media robustness is analysed by comparing viewpoints across different types of news, such as interview-based news, opinion news and investigative news, to produce a composite version of coverage; this is necessary to ensure that well-rounded and informed coverage reaches the public discourse. Metaphors are also explored to provide a further understanding of how media use language to project abstract ideas onto conventional expressions. Measuring lexical diversity—the range of words and sentiment—positive or negative, are other important facets for summarising the overall sentiment. The use of the passive voice is further critiqued by considering nominalisations, whether they identify social actors or are dominated by abstract concepts. This research examines news sources to help us understand who gets more voices in ITE Law stories.

This research focuses on online news, among Indonesia's most mainstream news sources, making them vital indicators of how the media engages with ITE Law stories. The Indigenous online news media, Detik.com and Kompas.com, were chosen as they are Indonesia's most popular and widely visited online news outlets (Reuters Institute, University Oxford, 2022). This research sets a critical content analysis (CCA) to provide various carefully curated online documents from January to December 2021, when Detik.com and Kompas.com bombarded the emergence of the ITE Law revision. Gibson & Brown (2009, p. 85) claim that news articles are potentially "valuable research resources" because journalists will often have access to part of society that academics and researchers do not have; thereby, mainstream news media are rapidly growing in producing and distributing information, knowledge, and opinion.

Findings

In 2021, there was a noticeable increase in media attention on the revision of the ITE Law, particularly in Indonesian most popular news media, such as Detik.com and Kompas.com

(see Figure 1). This research indicated that Detik.com had a higher initial focus than Kompas.com, but the coverage was not sustained.

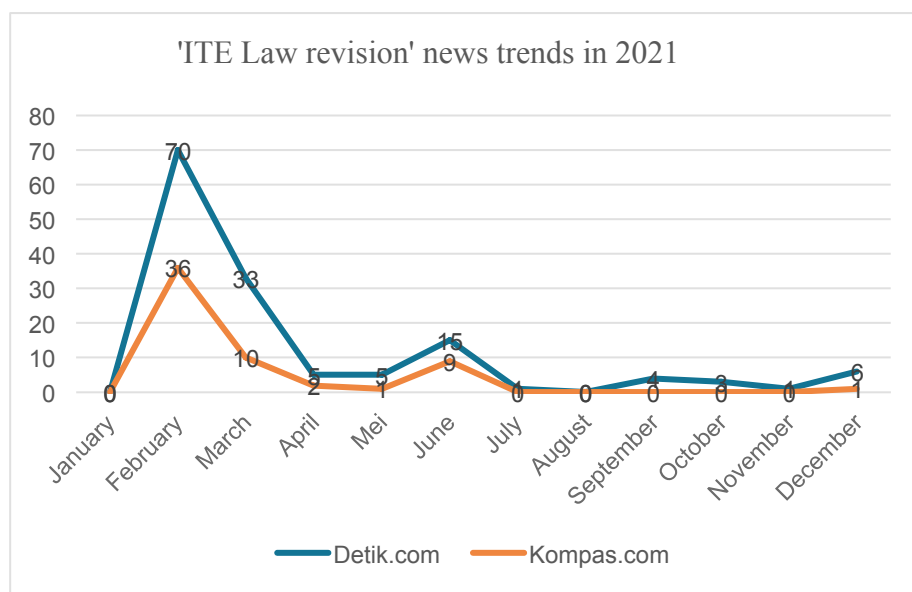


Figure 1: News Trends in Detik.com and Kompas.com in 2021

The two-word cloud comparison in Detik.com and Kompas.com (see Figures 2 and 3) reveals overlapping (and distinct) emphases in the ITE Law as public discourse. The word "revisi" (revision) dominates both word cloud analyses, strongly focusing on amending the law. These indicate a demand for legal reform and Indonesian people's dissatisfaction with this problematic internet regulation. Ambiguity in the ITE Law becomes a common narrative both in Detik.com and Kompas.com reporting, as reflected in terms such as "multitafsir" (multi-interpretation) and "karet" (rubber articles), which point to a vague provision in ITE Law that could potentially be misused to repress the legal expression on the internet and social media. Word clouds show a bigger presence of institutional actors, showing that the discourse over this episode is top-down with the initiatives led mostly by both legislative and executive powers, for instance, words such as "DPR" (House of Representatives) and "Jokowi" (Indonesian President) presences in Detik.com and Kompas.com. However, the frequent mention of "Kapolri" (chief of police) and "polri" (national police) in Detik.com emphasises the sceptical law enforcement dimensions that are notably absent from Kompas.com.



Figure 2: Word Cloud From Detik.com



Figure 3: Word Cloud From Kompas.com

Some excerpts of critical tones from Detik.com are presented below:

*Excerpt 1. Total revision of the ITE Law so that there are no more **victims** (D 03-03-2021)*

*Excerpt 2. The **victims** are the poor people (D 03-03-2021)*

Excerpts 1 and 2 in Detik.com tends to be neutral with more critical tones by utilising collocations such as "korban" (victims) and "masyarakat" (society), which express concern regarding the criminalisation of ITE Law. In contrast, Kompas.com is less critical and more concentrated only on the term "masyarakat" (society) without emphasising their cases and victims. In short, the discussion reflects institutional power dynamics, accountability, people's desire for clear facts (often at odds) and how the ITE Law reconciles with democracy and justice.

Table 1: Comparison of News Types Between Detik.com and Kompas.com

News Types	Description	Detik.com (N=143)	Kompas.com (N=59)
Interview-based news	interview-based news stories involve conversations with individuals with relevant expertise.	133 (93.0 %)	59 (24.5 %)
Opinion News	opinion-based news, also known as column, represents the viewpoints, beliefs, or arguments of the author.	8 (5.5 %)	-
Investigative News	involving in-depth research and analysis to uncover hidden information and expose issues of public interest.	2 (1.3 %)	-

The patterns in Table 1 reflect trends in Indigenous online news content that can be understood using a CDA lens, which looks at how legitimization through language, power and ideology forms the understanding of Indonesian society. Although Detik.com and Kompas.com predominantly publish interview-based news, Detik.com has included a small portion of opinion-based news that reflects robust media coverage with a reasonable diversity of opinions, which is entirely absent on Kompas.com. At the same time, Detik.com also publishes investigative news that ably exposes abuses of power, but not once on Kompas.com. The turn to interview-based reporting and a relative lack of opinion and investigative journalism points to a media ecology that privileges known authority over critical discourse that may subtly constrain the diversity of public discourse.

Table 2: Recurring Themes in Detik.com and Kompas.com

Category	Description	Detik.com (N=143)	Kompas.com (N=59)
Discourses	ITE Law; revisions; articles.	143 (100 %)	129 (53.75 %)
Government	member of parliament; Indonesian president; ministers.	49 (34.2 %)	52 (21.6 %)
Society	victims; cases.	16 (11.1 %)	-

As can be seen in Table 2, the two platforms heavily feature government-related content—however, Detik.com include societal perspectives compared to Kompas.com. For instance, the key themes in Detik.com also focus on society, such as the discourse on victims and cases, while Kompas.com is often oblivious. In discursive strategy, Detik.com's efforts have effectively established a more comprehensive scope of media organisations promoting more all-around diversity and have created a more inclusive range of media outlets, contributing to a more pluralistic media environment and reinforcing democratic practices in Indonesia.

Table 3: Metaphorical Usage in Detik.com and Kompas.com

Category	Description	Detik.com (N=82)	Kompas.com (N=40)
Emotional tone			
Uncertainty	Rubber refers to the ITE Law article, which can be stretched and elastic with multiple meanings, confusing and ambiguous.	75 (91.4 %)	38 (95 %)
Fear	The ITE Law is likened to a ghost and something scary because it is dangerous, vicious, and so on.	4 (4.8 %)	2 (5 %)
Optimism	There is hope and emphasis on the good parts of ITE Law revision.	2 (2.4 %)	1 (2.5 %)
Pessimism	Sceptical and doubtful about the future of ITE Law revision.	1 (1.2 %)	1 (2.5 %)
Social Issues			
Discrimination	The ITE Law is likened to a device or trap for catching people. ITE Law provision is described as a dangerous or unpleasant situation someone has got into and from which it is difficult or impossible to escape.	11 (13.4 %)	4 (10 %)
Injustice	The ITE Law enforcement is likened to a knife that is sharply downwards (to society) and bluntly upwards (to the government or power).	3 (3.6 %)	-

Metaphors are linguistic devices that enable the understanding of abstract ideas compared to solid terms. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) demonstrated how metaphorical language in free speech can easily control how public debate around issues is framed. This research uncovered that Detik.com employed more metaphors compared to Kompas.com (Table 3). Detik.com uses metaphors to make complex issues accessible and shape public understanding. Excerpts of metaphors in Detik.com are presented below:

Excerpt 3. The rubber articles of the ITE Law are like a frightening specter in society (D 27-03-2021)

Excerpt 4. Knife to kill freedom of expression, speech, and expression of thoughts and opinions (D 17-02-2021)

Excerpts 3 and 4 show that Detik.com played an influential part in shaping public understanding of complex issues by referring to ITE Law as "the rubber articles", "a frightening spectre", and "knife to kill". Detik.com's use of these metaphors in transforming many issues of ITE Law enforcement into much easier-to-digest information for the public became a crucial part of the public's understanding of priority issues. Using these imaginative languages in reporting makes the ITE Law stories more engaging and memorable.

Table 4: Lexical Expressions Between Detik.com and Kompas.com

Category	Description	Detik.com (N=138)	Kompas.com (N=54)
Loanwords			
English	such as: 'hoax'; 'restorative justice'; 'internet shutdown'; 'omnibus law' 'hate speech'.	62 (44.9 %)	11 (20.3 %)
Latin	such as: 'a quo'; 'resultante'.	11 (7.9 %)	-
Dutch	such as: 'beleid'; 'genus delict'; 'haatzai artikelen'; 'klacht'.	7 (5.0 %)	-
Polarity			
Negative Expression	such as: cases; defamation; multiple interpretation; hatred; violation; criminalisation; to silence.	121 (87.6 %)	47 (87.0 %)
Positive Expression	such as: justice; freedom of expression/speech/opinion; democracy; human rights; to protect; to guarantee/ensure.	108 (78.2 %)	47 (87.0 %)

Table 4 summarises the words or phrases regularly used to refer to specific topics from lexically coded expressions. Lexical expressions are a natural process of free discourse, frequently reflecting social shifts or priorities. In Table 5, Detik.com offers more diverse linguistic resources, including Dutch, Latin, and many English words, while Kompas.com is only based on English terms, so it does not contain Dutch or Latin references. Detik.com loan words from Dutch, such as 'beleid' and 'klatch', to describe how existing law in Indonesia adopts the Dutch legal system because Indonesia was a Dutch colonial colony, and Indonesia did not yet have laws originating from its traditions. Further, Detik also uses Latin words such as 'a quo' and 'lingua franca'. These loanwords significantly enlighten Detik.com's reader regarding ITE Law revision as a public discourse and contribute to their interconnectedness in a global context. The data also shows that negative expressions regarding polarity dominate both sources, and they saw similar results to what was written under "defamation, hatred, and criminalisation", including positive terms, like "justice, freedom of speech, and democracy", also play a good part. Through this balanced expression, online news media can enable the public to critically process complicated issues while preserving trust in democratic institutions and processes.

Table 5: Nominalisations Pattern in Detik.com and Kompas.com

Category	Description	Detik.com (N=47)	Kompas.com (N=15)
absent or hidden the agent			
Law enforcement officials	hidden or concealed law enforcement officials such as police institutions, prosecutors, and judges.	37 (78.7 %)	6 (40 %)
Power	hidden or concealed the actors from power such as the state or government.	13 (27.6 %)	4 (36.6 %)
present or expose the agent			
The State	exposed elements of the state apparatus are more specific, such as regional heads, ministers, attorney general, and police.	4 (8.5 %)	-
Police	exposed the 'police department' as the institution responsible for the implementation and law enforcement.	3 (6.3 %)	-
Ministry	exposed the names of ministers and executive actors who are hidden.	1 (2.1 %)	-
Power	expose the actors from power such government, businesspeople, and the police.	1 (2.1 %)	-
President	first and only, they exposed and mentioned the president's name.	1 (2.1 %)	-

Nominalisations can play a role in how ITE Law enforcement, as per the ITE Law process, and the public perceptions thereof are framed—see Table 65— which relates to free speech context. Both Detik.com and Kompas.com have a predisposition to hide or obscure major agents, especially law enforcement and power figures. However, Detik.com has also exposed the state apparatus, such as the names of ministers and executive actors who are hidden; even Detik.com was the only media to mention the president's name related to ITE Law enforcement cases and Kompas.com, but not once. The excerpts below demonstrate the present agent and expose the actors in Detik.com:

Excerpt 5. Jokowi to lose at the high administrative court in the Papua Internet shutdown case (D 16-02-2021)

Excerpt 6. For example, accusations of defamation against Moeldoko and Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan by several activists resulted in criminal complaints to the police (D 28-09-2021)

Excerpts 5 and 6 in Detik.com disclosed state actors explicitly, such as the president and the ministry, who have yet to be exposed on Kompas.com. Detik.com suggests that the transparency with which influential figures are discussed contributes to the degree of freedom of speech in a democratic society, while Kompas.com's reluctance to confront those powers.

Table 6: Comparison News Sources in Detik.com and Kompas.com

Category	Description	Detik.com (N=143)	Kompas.com (N=59)
Government	the system used for controlling a country.		
Executive Institutions	president, vice, ministers, presidential spokesperson, staff/office.	90 (62.9 %)	46 (77.9 %)
Legislature Institutions	member of parliament (DPR), legislative council (<i>Baleg</i>).	36 (25.1 %)	20 (33.8 %)
Political Party	ruling party and opposition.	24 (16.7 %)	12 (20.3 %)
Other Institutions	police department; constitutional court	26 (18.1 %)	3 (5.0 %)
Society	large group of people who live together in a country.		
Experts and Academia	professor, analyst, researcher, lawyer.	28 (19.5 %)	6 (10.1 %)
Non Government Organisations (NGOs)	Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SAFEnet).	24 (16.7 %)	23 (38.9 %)
Victims	someone who has been imprisoned because of the ITE Law.	19 (13.2 %)	6 (10.1 %)
Ordinary Citizens	civil society.	14 (9.7 %)	9 (15.2 %)

Dominant news sources can set the agenda for public debate and silence alternative perspectives, determining the formal exercise of freedom of speech, as Herman and Chomsky (2021) claim that mainstream news sources shape who gets to speak. The selection of sources from Detik.com and Kompas.com focuses on government and executive institutions. However, Detik.com has played a more significant role in promoting an informed and engaged citizen (commonly referred to as the citizen). For example, in Table 6, Detik.com focuses more on societal perspectives such as experts, academia, NGOs, victims, and citizens' expression by actively ensuring that a range of social voices are included and heard. Detik.com holds firm to its fundamental values of free speech, striving to create space for various workable opinions and critical discussions to thrive through the mediascape, which creates a more diverse ideas forum and encourages active citizenry. However, Kompas.com seems more conservative in its reporting, which is more aligned with government narratives, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives.

Limitations

This research may have needed to be more comprehensive to capture all ITE Law stories, as they involved perspectives and contexts, such as the government and societal representatives, to understand the complex interplay between the state, media, and society regarding the unintended consequences of ITE Law. The interpretation of content may be subjective, even if the NVivo coding scheme is well-defined. Another caveat is that different coders may interpret and code news content differently, which can impact the accuracy of the analysis. The method often quantifies the frequency of certain discursive elements, which might only partially capture the significance of all Indonesian online news media.

Conclusions

This research concludes that (i) while both focused on the government perspective, Detik.com takes a more critical position on the ITE Law revision by demonstrating potential problematic issues of "masyarakat"(society) and "korban" (victims) in their reporting of ITE Law revision. In contrast, Kompas.com tends to be a more legal-political lens without underscoring ITE Law's victims and their cases. However, both online news platforms note the threat of ambiguous understanding of ITE Law by using the metaphorical term 'karet' (rubber) in their reporting; (ii) Detik.com has a more robust reporting style featuring three article types: interview-based, opinion and investigation news, while Kompas.com only has one reporting style, interview-based news; (iii) the recurring themes of Detik.com news engage more in society, such as cases and victims, but Kompas.com is not concerned about cases and victims; (iv) the loanwords used in Detik.com news are more diverse than Kompas.com; (v) Detik.com exposes agents from government institutions such as the president, and minister; yet Kompas.com tends to hide agents and conceal social actors regarding ITE Law enforcement; (vi) While both platforms foregrounded on NGOs, Detik.com also constructed public political engagement by referencing societal voices and incorporating perspective from experts and academia, including some cases and victims experiences that remain overlooked in Kompas.com's reporting.

Detik.com has emerged as an online news media that facilitates a more comprehensive discussion by providing opinion-based and investigative news regarding ITE Law revision, which was absent on Kompas.com. Detik.com has also spotlighted the voiceless, such as victims and their cases of ITE Law, which often go unnoticed in Kompas.com's reporting. This research argues that Detik.com has a more robust coverage with a reasonable diversity of perspectives, which promotes a more critical media environment, while Kompas.com's conservative approach and cautious tactic may subtly limit it. The contrasting approaches imply that Indonesia's media remains essential to its democratic experience. However, there is a wide divergence in the extent to which platforms are willing to take on their watchdog function. This difference speaks to larger systemic issues of freedom of speech, especially political influence on Indonesia's media landscape. Democracy encompasses more than the political realm, and for Indonesia's democracy to thrive, it must also cultivate an ecosystem of media that embodies robust media coverage, such as diverse reporting approaches, interacts with society, and brings transparency to political coverage. This research emphasises the importance of being attentive to how media narratives are built, as they directly affect ontological understanding, political accountability and democratic consolidation in Indonesia.

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Contact email: ss2536@kent.ac.uk

***New Ways of Living the Domestic Environment:
An Analysis of Flexible Design With the Proposal of an Experimental Case Study***

Domenico Di Fuccia, University of Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli”, Italy
Giuseppe Sorvillo, University of Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli”, Italy
Federica Rivieccio, Iuav University of Venice, Italy

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Abstract

The 1972 exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, which explored constructed and domestic environments, marked a pivotal shift in the design vision, influenced by political, and cultural debates, and evolving social living of the time. This reflection focused on the relationship between humans and objects, a milestone of Italian design masters’ philosophy. Following this heritage, contemporary designers address modern living needs through flexible, multifunctional spaces equipped with modular and adaptable furniture. The paper examines Joe Colombo's design scenarios, viewing living spaces as “habitats” reflecting “social, political, technological evolution” (Vitta, 2011). Fluid living spaces have transformed home functions, attributing them new roles linked to different lifestyles. Today's design culture refers to the observation of behaviors within domestic spaces and the coexistence of activities in the same environment, which shape the appearance of homes (Molinari, 2020). Lauda (2012) reimagines living spaces as flexible, where the actions taking place affect the morphology of the environment with concealed objects that make the home not just a container of monofunctional areas, but empty spaces to be set up and adapted according to needs. Homes transform into multifunctional spaces for private life, work and socializing. The rise of smart-working, especially post-COVID-19, has blurred domestic and work space boundaries, emphasizing indoor quality (ventilation, lighting, soundproofing) and emotional well-being (psychophysical comfort). The paper describes the experimental case study *Metaforma*, a modular system of polyurethane foam elements that can be assembled in different configurations to suit the body, addressing adaptability for work and rest, enhancing customization, comfort and daily activity efficiency.

Keywords: Flexibility, Adaptability, Modularity, Space Optimization, Domestic Environment

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Introduction

In the last decades, the way people live and inhabit domestic spaces has undergone a radical transformation. The concept of the home has evolved from a static location to a dynamic space, adaptable to the ever-changing demands of contemporary life. This transformation has been influenced by economic, technological, and cultural factors, leading to emerging trends such as increasing flexibility in housing solutions.

These shifts in the concept of living are not confined to recent years; they have deeper roots. Since the 1970s, design has increasingly played a pivotal role in the evolution of living spaces. Italian design history reveals that it has not only responded to contemporary needs but also anticipated and shaped people's habits, influencing the spaces they inhabit. Reflections on living have benefited from various contributions, often ahead of their time, which have however anticipated current trends by addressing needs that have emerged in recent years.

Today, the boundary between private and public life is increasingly blurred, with work and recreational activities entering the domestic space. This context creates a need for contemporary design to develop solutions that allow domestic spaces to be flexible and reconfigurable, meeting the demands of increasingly mobile and interconnected lifestyles.

The Evolution of Living Spaces

Since the 1970s, design has assumed an increasingly central role in the evolution of living spaces, addressing the continuously changing needs of society. This period marks a crucial transition, as design moved beyond merely reflecting social changes to actively influencing them, transforming how people interact with domestic environments. This transformation impacted not only the aesthetic aspects of interiors but also how users perceive and use their homes.

A significant contribution to the evolution of living space design is represented by the exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, held in 1972 at MoMA in New York. This event presented alternative visions of domestic space, showcasing design as a political tool capable of influencing daily habits and behaviours, transcending mere decoration. Emilio Ambasz, the exhibition's curator, encouraged designers to create environments and furnishings that could stimulate new rituals and behaviours for every moment of the day. These spaces were intended to be flexible, incorporating objects that transformed in both form and function to symbolically represent the identity of a constantly evolving society (Gallanti, 2009). The installations featured at the exhibition envisioned a future where objects were no longer static and isolated but part of interactive and dynamic configurations, enabling new domestic rituals. To highlight the transformability of spaces, designers were invited to produce accompanying videos that emphasised the interactivity of their works (*Environments and Counter Environments*, n.d.; Museum of Modern Art, 1972). An emblematic example of this approach is represented by the work of Joe Colombo, who presented both objects, such as the *Tube Chair*, the *Multichair*, and the *Minikitchen*, and environments, such as the *Total Furnishing Unit*, reimagining the domestic space and its activities in unprecedented and revolutionary ways.

The exhibition installations challenged the inadequacy of traditional spaces while criticising the uniformity of industrial production and the false progress of consumer society. The exhibition marked the consolidation of radical design, with projects reflecting changes in

customs and living habits, often in a polemical stance against consumer society and middle-class culture (Colonetti et al., 2010, p. 28). Radical design groups such as Archizoom and Superstudio explored the potential of domestic spaces as sites for social interaction. In their utopian visions, space was no longer static but fluid and continuously evolving, allowing inhabitants to redefine their living experience.

A notable transformation in living spaces during this period was the increased flexibility of environments. Before the 1970s, homes were divided into rooms dedicated to specific functions: kitchens for cooking, living rooms for socialising, bedrooms for resting, and so on. With the evolution of design, these boundaries became less rigid, paving the way for multifunctional spaces that adapted to various needs. This change fostered new habits, enabling a more dynamic and flexible lifestyle.

By the late 1970s, criticism of rationalist design gained prominence in Italy. The message of the radical avant-garde was revived by design groups such as Studio Alchymia and Memphis, whose international composition underscored the necessity of extending design practice geographically (Vercelloni, 2014, p. 154). “In opposition to the values of sobriety and strict functionality celebrated by modern tradition, [the radical experiments developed by Alchymia and Memphis] aimed to shift design logic towards a different relationship with objects, based on affectivity, communication, and a sensory relationship with things” (Vitta, 2011). During this period, designers created environments that promoted greater personal expression, influencing lifestyles and living habits. The home was no longer merely functional but became a reflection of the inhabitants' personalities and lifestyles.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the emergence of working from home led to the creation of the home office and hybrid furniture that blurred the lines between office and home furnishings. The boundaries between home and work became increasingly indistinct, creating new domestic spaces for interaction while making offices more homely. This transformation redefined intimacy, as public spheres traditionally separate from private life began to expand within domestic walls (Vercelloni, 2014, p. 179). The globalisation of Italian design during the 1980s and its orientation towards international markets in the following decade faced the challenges of globalisation. During this period, design increasingly aligned with marketing and global trends, partly abandoning the ideological motivations of Italy's industrial boom and the utopian principles of 1970s avant-garde movements.

In the 1990s production sought new market opportunities, particularly in the furniture sector. Products became symbols of not only social status but also lifestyle choices, transforming consumer goods into emblems of individual preferences, much like fashion (Colonetti et al., 2010, p. 40). Globalisation and the orientation towards marketing have fostered the co-existence of eclectic styles, reflecting the personal inclinations of designers. Global complexity has given rise to different trends coexisting without obvious conflicts, and the designer has emerged as a reference point, with a design poetics that becomes the message itself (Branzi, 1999, p. 164). Despite the innovations in industrial techniques in the 1990s, the culture of living did not experience an equivalent transformation. Many so-called innovations, such as multifunctional or transformable furniture and deconstructed seatings, had already been introduced by the avant-garde of the 1970s. Similarly, the design of this period did not experience the same cultural revolution that had brought the introduction of plastics and the spread of household appliances in the 1960s. As there was no substantial transformation of everyday objects, the value of objects in this period often derived from their beauty, rarity, or eccentricity (Colonetti et al., 2010, pp. 40–41).

Designing for Flexibility

In recent decades, social, economic, and technological changes have further transformed lifestyles and living habits. Urbanisation and migration towards cities, driven by work opportunities and services, have increased the demand for urban housing, raising housing costs (European Commission, 2023; Eurostat, 2024c; Goujon et al., 2021). Concurrently, the average household size in Europe has decreased, with a significant rise in single-person households (Eurostat, 2024d). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated trends such as remote working, transforming homes into multifunctional spaces that combine work, social life, and rest (Eurostat, 2024b; 2024a). These developments have led to a general reduction in living space sizes, fostering solutions that optimise space in densely populated urban contexts. This reduction, combined with the need to accommodate new domestic functions, has redefined the home as a flexible and adaptable space.

Flexibility and adaptability are not merely practical responses but reflect a deeper shift in behaviour and expectations regarding living spaces. As Lauda (2012) highlights, “Living spaces must be conceived not only as containers of single-use areas but as empty spaces to be furnished and adapted according to needs,” emphasising that space should be seen as a dynamic entity capable of evolving with inhabitants' changing behaviours. This approach aligns with a spatial economy that creates a potential void, always free and not pre-designed, open to transformation. The void is thus not an absence but an image of readiness for change and a new economy of form and language (Lauda, n.d.; TEDx Talks, 2013). Flexible design addresses multiple needs: the contemporary home is no longer solely a space for rest or conviviality but also a workplace and a site of socialisation. This transformation necessitates spaces that can quickly change configuration without losing functionality. Modular furniture and reconfigurable environments are essential elements in meeting these new demands.

Today's design culture observes domestic behaviours and the coexistence of activities within the same space, shaping homes accordingly (Molinari, 2020). This trend relates to a broader concept of continuous adaptation, where the home is viewed as a system responding actively to external stimuli and inhabitants' needs. Modular furniture allows for environments that evolve alongside users' behaviours, turning space into an extension of human activity rather than a mere backdrop. This approach necessitates a design mindset that goes beyond the traditional conception of space as rigid and predefined. Contemporary designers are required to think in terms of use scenarios, anticipating changes and creating solutions that allow users to shape space according to their needs. In this context, flexibility extends beyond furniture to include the capacity of spaces to evolve and respond to new behaviours and habits emerging over time.

An application of this approach can be seen in contemporary design projects. Such as *Urban Nomad* by Hannabi, a modular, non-traditional sofa composed of two long rectangular cushions forming the base and a pair of triangular supports that can function as backrests. The absence of fasteners or legs allows the system to be easily arranged into two separate seating areas or stacked into a single unit with double the height, granting users the freedom to reconfigure the space.

In a different way, Geoffrey Pascal's *Grafeoiphobia* explores an innovative approach to furniture design. Designed for individuals who work or study in unconventional contexts, such as the bed, this collection addresses the challenges posed by limited spaces, promoting ergonomic and multifunctional solutions that enhance comfort and productivity. It consists of

three different types of seating with a wooden base and foam coverings of varying densities, enabling users to work in positions that mimic lying in bed while also supporting the body.

Moreover, an intriguing example is *Tou* by Sakura Adachi, a multifunctional, portable beanbag. It doubles as an informal pouf that unfolds into a futon mat complete with a pillow and blanket. When folded, it functions as a compact, lightweight beanbag chair that is easy to transport. The project embodies the concept of an object that adapts to different needs with simplicity and immediacy.

A similar concept of space optimisation is evident in the *Tiny Home Bed* by Yesul Jang, a bed with integrated storage space beneath the mattress, concealed by a fabric curtain. Designed for young people living in compact urban spaces, the bed features a lightweight wooden and fabric structure that is easy to assemble and transport.

Another example of innovation in furniture for small spaces is Seray Ozdemir's *Corridor Society* collection, which transforms apartment corridors into functional social spaces. The collection includes four pieces: a corner seat, a combined seat and coat rack, a stackable shelving unit, and wall-mounted cushions. Its objective is to create new spaces for social interaction, turning corridors into areas of connection in apartments lacking communal spaces.

This theoretical and project overview provides the conceptual foundation for exploring innovative solutions, highlighting how the combination of flexibility and multifunctionality can effectively address contemporary housing challenges.

Experimental Case Study: Metaforma

In this context, from the critical analysis of the examples given above, the experimental case study *Metaforma* emerges as an innovative response to the challenges of modern life, where the boundaries between domestic and workspaces are increasingly blurred. It is a modular system (Fig. 1) designed to adapt seamlessly to different daily needs, combining comfort, functionality, and a high degree of customisation. Whether used in a home office or a coworking environment, *Metaforma* envisions spaces as dynamic and transformable, evolving according to the activities and preferences of their occupants.



Figure 1: The Modular System *Metaforma*

The system consists of five polyurethane foam cushions, each with different dimensions, shapes, and densities, designed to provide ergonomic support and address emerging needs. This modularity enables users to combine the cushions as they prefer, accommodating their physical requirements or varying activities throughout the day. The three primary configurations, sitting, reclining, or lying down (Fig. 2 and 3), are designed to ensure maximum comfort and facilitate a smooth transition between work, relax, and rest. The true strength of the system, however, lies in its versatility: users can create new configurations, adapting the elements to their lifestyle and needs.



Figure 2: The Different Configuration of the System

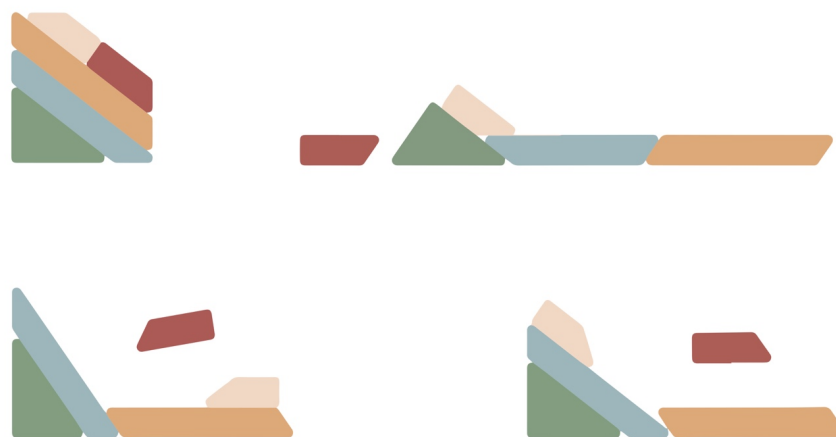


Figure 3: Functional Scheme of the System

Another innovative feature of *Metaforma* is its ability to transform into a compact sixty-centimetre cube when not in use, secured by two leather straps (Fig. 4), a solution ideal for small spaces and for those who seek to maintain a tidy, functional environment in an era where optimising space is essential.



Figure 4: The System in Its Closed Configuration

The project stems from an in-depth reflection on the relationship between the body and space, aiming to create an object that places flexibility at the core of the user experience. The choice of polyurethane foam is deliberate, ensuring comfort, lightness, and ease of transport. The project is not merely a piece of furniture but a design solution addressing the need for change in how we inhabit spaces. Its flexibility and adaptability make it a product that meets the diverse demands of contemporary life while looking to the future, contributing to a redefinition of our conception of space and living environments.

Conclusion

The increasing complexity of contemporary lifestyles, along with the integration of work and social activities into domestic spaces, have redefined how homes are conceived and designed. As discussed in this paper, flexibility and adaptability have become fundamental principles of home design, transforming domestic spaces into multifunctional environments capable of addressing a variety of changing needs. This transformation, although rooted in the experimentations of the past, reflects the urgencies and aspirations of contemporary society, highlighting a progressive break from the rigidity of traditional spaces.

It is evident that modularity, reconfigurability, and the observation of human behaviour are central elements for present and future home design. These approaches not only respond to practical needs for space optimisation but also promote psychological and physical well-being, efficiency, and personalisation. The concept of emptiness as potential for change emphasises the importance of spaces that do not merely contain but offer continuous opportunities for transformation. The *Metaforma* case study exemplifies how research can contribute to developing solutions that address contemporary needs, highlighting the potential of design as a catalyst for positive changes in everyday life.

Looking ahead, home design must continue to evolve in response to societal challenges and changes, without losing sight of its primary goal: to create spaces and furnishings that are functional, emotionally engaging, and capable of adapting to individual and collective needs. Ultimately, the home of the future will not be defined solely by its physical boundaries but by its ability to serve as a dynamic reflection of the life it hosts.

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Contact emails: domenico.difuccia@unicampania.it
giuseppe.sorvillo2@studenti.unicampania.it
federicarivieccio@stud.iuav.it

***Interweaving Forms: Chekhov's Narrative Techniques as a Lens for
Interpreting Tchaikovsky's Music***

Belinda X. Chen, Bilkent University, Türkiye

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Abstract

Composer Dmitri Shostakovich once famously observed that many of Anton Chekhov's short stories are written in sonata form, highlighting Chekhov's use of particular musical structures in his literary works. This paper examines Chekhov's incorporation of musical approaches to plot and character development, drawing comparisons between his play *The Cherry Orchard* and Pyotr Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony. While comparative literature scholars such as Rosamund Bartlett and Nikolai Fortunov have attempted foundational musical analysis of Chekhov's works, there are gaps in their understanding of musical forms, and their insights have not yet been applied to the performance interpretation of the musical works themselves. This paper aims to bridge this gap by providing a deeper musical analysis that complements the existing literary scholarship regarding musicality in Chekhov's works. The first part identifies the exact elements of sonata form in Chekhov's short story "The Black Monk" while the second part offers a cross-disciplinary analytical comparison of the formal structures in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* and Tchaikovsky's sixth symphony. By understanding the thematic parallels and structural similarities between literary and musical composition within their specific cultural context of late 19th-century Russia, musical performers can achieve more enlightened and inspired interpretations of Tchaikovsky's music. Conversely, a deep comprehension of musical form can enhance the appreciation of Chekhov's narrative techniques. This paper thus seeks to bridge the disciplines of literature and music, emphasizing the interwoven nature of narrative and musical form and offering fresh insights for performers and literary scholars alike.

Keywords: Music and Literature, Sonata Form, Anton Chekhov, Pyotr Tchaikovsky

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Introduction

Anton Chekhov (1860–1904) stands as one of the most influential writers in 19th-century Russian literature. His short stories are renowned for their realism, nuanced characterization, and for pushing the boundaries of the modern short story form. Beyond the literary realm, many scholars and musicians have noted a distinct "musicality" in Chekhov's works. For instance, Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich noted that Chekhov's short story "The Black Monk" was in sonata form, a concept explored by literary scholars such as Rosamund Bartlett and Nikolai Fortunov. Additionally, Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard* has been compared to Tchaikovsky's symphonies in its abstract qualities and emotional depth.

This paper investigates the intersections between music and literature, addressing the broader question: what does it mean for a work of literature to resemble a work of music? Can these parallels be grounded in concrete formal structures, or do they remain subjective interpretations? While previous analyses have highlighted the "musicality" in Chekhov's writing, they often lack a rigorous engagement with musical theory and form.

Building on these insights, this paper offers a more precise exploration of Chekhov's use of musical structures to deepen our understanding of his work. The first section examines the sonata-like qualities of "The Black Monk," engaging with Shostakovich's observations and applying musical theory to illuminate its narrative structure. The second section draws parallels between the formal architecture of *The Cherry Orchard* and Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, "Pathétique"*, uncovering how shared structural and emotional elements contribute to the evocative power of both works. By bridging these artistic forms, this study seeks to enrich literary and musical interpretation, demonstrating how musical analysis can offer fresh perspectives on Chekhov's art, and how his works can, in turn, inspire new dimensions in understanding music.

Sonata Form

A piece of music in sonata form is a musical composition typically structured in three main sections: exposition, development, and recapitulation. In the exposition, two contrasting musical themes are introduced, differing in character but linked by a specific key relationship. The exposition modulates to the dominant near the end, signifying an increase of tension and instability. After the closing theme of the exposition, the development section transforms the exposition's original two themes—they are fragmented, varied, and modulated, creating tension and complexity. The climax of the entire piece is the "pedal on the dominant," which represents the height of the sonata's tension. Finally, the recapitulation restates the original themes, now resolved within the initial key, bringing the composition to a cohesive conclusion. Smooth transitions between these sections, particularly from exposition to development and from development to recapitulation, are vital to the structural and emotional coherence of the sonata form.

While the technical intricacies of sonata form are vast, its most essential feature lies in the dynamic transformation of the two contrasting themes. This metamorphosis drives the sonata's narrative arc, unfolding like a musical story as it navigates through key changes and modulations, ultimately returning to the original key. It is this journey—rich with tension, resolution, and emotional depth—that defines the unique expressive power of the sonata form.

“The Black Monk”

Anton Chekhov's “The Black Monk” is a story about Andrei Kovrin, a university scholar plagued by anxiety. Seeking respite, Andrei visits the countryside to stay with his friend Tanya and her father. During his stay, he encounters a mysterious apparition—the Black Monk—and begins conversing with it. The monk convinces Andrei of his “genius,” which slowly consumes his mental state. Meanwhile, Andrei falls in love with and marries Tanya, but their marriage deteriorates as his madness escalates. The story concludes with Andrei returning to his former life as a scholar, estranged from Tanya and still haunted by the Black Monk, leading to his death.

The narrative structure of “The Black Monk” aligns remarkably well with the framework of sonata form, particularly in how its sections mirror the exposition, development, and recapitulation. In sonata form, the exposition introduces two contrasting themes and transitions to the dominant key, creating tension and setting the stage for development. Similarly, the first five sections of “The Black Monk” can be interpreted as the exposition. Andrei and Tanya represent the contrasting themes: Andrei, anxious and introspective, and Tanya, grounded and hopeful. Their relationship develops against the backdrop of the countryside, but the appearance of the Black Monk can mirror an exposition's “modulation to the dominant,” the part of a sonata's exposition that introduces instability and tension. The narrative reaches a seeming resolution when Andrei proposes to Tanya, a moment akin to the “false ending” of a sonata's closing theme—temporary closure within the dominant key, hinting at unresolved tensions.

In contrast to the hallucinogenic joy of the closing of Section 5, Sections 6–8 correspond to the development section, where themes introduced in the exposition are fragmented, transformed, and intensified. Here, the story darkens: Andrei's madness deepens, Tanya becomes increasingly distraught, and their marriage unravels. This mirrors how sonatas manipulate and destabilize themes in the development section. The climax occurs when Tanya discovers Andrei conversing with the monk, symbolizing the “pedal on the dominant,” the peak of tension in a sonata's development section before resolution. The narrative tension suggests that the marriage, like the themes in a sonata's development, cannot return to its original harmony.

In a sonata, after the “pedal on the dominant,” the sonata often abruptly returns to the exposition. This is called the recapitulation, and the beginning material of it is often a copy and paste of the beginning material of a sonata's exposition. Similarly, in Section 9, life seems to have returned to the way it was at the beginning of the story. Andrei is again a scholar at the university, and readers discover he is no longer married to Tanya. Just like the beginning of the story, he continues to suffer from anxiety. The letter from Tanya about her father's death and the ruined garden echoes the exposition's secondary theme, while the monk's final appearance recalls its earlier manifestation. The story ends as Andrei hears the monk's prophecy of his genius being too much for his frail body and dies—a resolution mirroring the structural and emotional closure of a sonata returning to the home key, the home key in this case being a lone Andrei.

This interpretation refines Rosamund Bartlett's analysis, which limits the exposition to Section 1 and identifies Sections 2–7 as the development. While Bartlett argues that the monk's introduction marks the start of the development, this interpretation misreads sonata form's conventions. In sonata form, the development typically manipulates existing themes

rather than introducing new ones. The exposition of “The Black Monk” includes all elements characteristic of this section: introduction of themes, modulation to the dominant, and a closing theme, but Bartlett limiting it to only Section 1 does not leave room for all these elements, as Section 1 only contains the introduction of Andrei. Likewise, its development, spanning Sections 6–8, transforms these themes to reflect escalating tension and fragmentation, culminating in a recapitulation that restores—and ultimately resolves—the story's initial conflicts.

Table 1: Author’s Analysis of “The Black Monk”

Exposition Sections 1-5	Development Sections 6-8	Recapitulation Section 9
Primary Theme: Andrei	Modulation and fragmentation: an engaged Tanya and Andrei emotionally unstable, eventually landing in an unhappy marriage	Primary theme: Andrei, again single and working at the university
Secondary Theme: Tanya	Pedal on the dominant: Tanya discovers Andrei talking to the black monk, the state of their marriage collapses...	Secondary theme: letter from Tanya
Modulation to the Dominant: Introduction of the Black Monk		Reappearance of the Black Monk
Closing theme: Andrei proposes to Tanya		Andrei’s death

Table 2: Rosamund Bartlett’s Analysis of “The Black Monk”

Exposition Section 1	Development Sections 2-7	Recapitulation Sections 8-9
Primary Theme: Andrei	Andrei arrives to the countryside	Tanya and Andrei travel back to the countryside in an attempt to reconcile their marriage
Secondary Theme: Andrei travels to the countryside to see Tanya	Andrei sees the black monk	End of marriage, death of Andrei
	Unhappiness of married life	

Sonata form is not merely about the existence of two contrasting themes—it is about the journey these themes undertake and the transformation they experience through tension, development, and resolution. Similarly, “The Black Monk” is not just a story about Andrei and Tanya as isolated characters; it is a story of how their lives intersect and profoundly shape each other. Andrei, consumed by ambition and madness, and Tanya, grounded yet ultimately destabilized by their relationship, are not static entities. Their trajectories intertwine, evolve, and fracture, reflecting the emotional and structural arc of sonata form.

The beauty of sonata form lies in its ability to convey transformation—not only of musical motifs but of emotions and ideas. Chekhov’s narrative mirrors this principle, using its

structure to reflect the emotional development of its characters. The exposition establishes the initial states of Andrei and Tanya, their relationship, and the seeds of conflict. The development section intensifies and fragments these elements, pushing them to their emotional and narrative limits. Finally, the recapitulation brings the story full circle, offering resolution while highlighting how profoundly the characters—and their circumstances—have changed.

Chekhov and Tchaikovsky

Since the analysis of sonata form in *The Black Monk* illustrates Chekhov's essentially musical way of thinking, it makes sense that analytical parallels can be found between his works and those of his musical contemporaries, such as Pyotr Tchaikovsky. In the literature pertaining to Tchaikovsky, the view that "mastery of form persistently eluded him" is often restated (Jackson, 1999, p. 22). However, careful analysis of Tchaikovsky's symphonies reveal that in contrast, Tchaikovsky's music exhibits "remarkable innovation, freedom, and imagination in its treatment of form" (Jackson, 1999, p. 22). Just like Chekhov pushed his readers by re-defining what is possible within the structure of the short story, Tchaikovsky pushed his listeners by doing the same thing in his symphonies. The rest of this paper will be dedicated to exploring the formal links between the works of Tchaikovsky and Chekhov, namely, in Chekhov's final play *The Cherry Orchard* and Tchaikovsky's final work, the *Pathétique Symphony*.

Premiered in 1904, *The Cherry Orchard* intertwines elements of tragedy and farce, chronicling the dispossession of an aristocratic family from their cherished estate. While Chekhov called the play a "comedy," its overarching focus on loss and decline gives it a profoundly tragic undertone (Brustein, 1964, p. xxii). The narrative begins in the nursery of Lyubov Andreyevna Ranevskaya's ancestral estate, where she returns after years abroad, accompanied by her daughter Anya. Clueless about the severity of her debts and unwilling to act on viable solutions, Lyubov allows the estate to be auctioned off to the son of a former serf. By the play's end, the family is forced to leave their home, accompanied by the haunting sound of the cherry trees being cut down.

Structurally, *The Cherry Orchard* reflects elements of sonata form. Both the exposition and recapitulation occur in the nursery of Lyubov's estate, framing the play with a sense of circularity. The exposition introduces the characters and the central conflict—Lyubov's mounting debts and the threat of losing her home—while the recapitulation mirrors this setup, showing the family leaving the estate in defeat. However, the true weight of the story lies in its development section, which constitutes the bulk of the play. Here, the plot diverges into side stories, including love triangles and comedic interludes, yet the unresolved tension of the central conflict looms over these distractions. This delayed resolution and eventual non-resolution add an abstract, fragmented quality to the play, aligning it with the structural innovations found in Tchaikovsky's works, particularly the *Pathétique Symphony*.

Premiered in 1893, Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique Symphony* is described by Walter Frisch as a "unique fusion of technique and expression" (Frisch, 2012, p. 196). The final movement, *Adagio lamentoso*, is one of the most "psychologically devastating" movements in the entire Western repertoire, because of the stepwise descents, a figure associated with the lament ever since the Baroque period. Timothy L. Jackson argues *Pathétique* steps away from a normative symphony in that it doesn't adhere to the typical form of "*perasperad ostra* (through adversity to the stars)" (Jackson, 1999, p. 24). The third movement tricks listeners

into thinking that they have reached the triumphant end, but instead, they are met with the tragic *Adagio lamentoso* finale, which, like the first movement, features a down-ward descent.

The first movement of *Pathétique* further reflects the structural similarities between Tchaikovsky and Chekhov. Just like *The Cherry Orchard*, the first movement of *Pathétique* features a relatively short exposition, (lasting from measures 19-89) and recapitulation (measures 245-301), with the majority of the movement featuring a “scherzando-fantasy” development section lasting through measures 89-245 (Jackson, 1999, p. 30). This imbalance is comparable to *The Cherry Orchard*, where Chekhov devotes much of the play to the comedic misadventures of minor characters, delaying the inevitable tragedy. In *Pathétique*, even after such a lengthy development, there is not a proper resolution, as the first tonic chord of the recapitulation is in the first inversion instead of root position, which is the expectation according to the rules of music theory (Jackson, 1999, p. 116). Therefore, the recapitulation serves not as a resolution, but as a “passing through” to the movement’s final descent. Similarly, in *The Cherry Orchard*, the development section serves as a series of diversions from the looming tragedy, while the recapitulation merely transitions into the final sounds of the cherry trees being cut down—a symbolic representation of irreparable loss.

Conclusion

This analysis highlights the inherently musical qualities in Chekhov’s works. By drawing parallels between *The Cherry Orchard* and Tchaikovsky’s *Pathétique Symphony*, it becomes evident that musicians interpreting Tchaikovsky’s compositions can gain valuable insights by engaging with Chekhov’s literature. The shared emotional depth and structural nuances between the two artists enrich an understanding of both. Similarly, literary scholars studying Chekhov can deepen their appreciation of his masterful short stories and plays by exploring the musical forms and traditions of his time.

These connections underscore a broader truth: artistic expression does not exist in isolation. Performing music is not merely about mastering notes; it is about understanding the cultural and artistic context from which the work emerges. By delving into interconnected art forms of a shared historical moment, musicians and literary scholars alike can achieve a more profound and holistic understanding of their respective disciplines.

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***Exploring Inter-island Cultural Narratives: Transcending Boundaries With
Resident-Based Performances and Authentic Storytelling***

Meng-Chin Lin, National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan
Hui-Wen Lin, National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan

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Abstract

Matsu Island served as a frontline for Taiwan and was under military administration from 1956 to 1992. After the end of military control, the island gained local autonomy and began developing its tourism industry and public infrastructure to attract visitors. More importantly, Matsu Island has actively promoted cultural development through art and culture-driven policies and activities to establish its identity and preserve its heritage. The Matsu Biennial is a key event that not only introduces the general public to Matsu Island but also strengthens local engagement. This study explores the Drinking, Seven Cups of Wine (DSCW) project in Matsu as a resident-based community theatre initiative during the Matsu Biennial. It examines how the project delivers cultural narratives from a bottom-up perspective, breaking inter-island boundaries by overcoming environmental and local resource limitations. The research employs qualitative methods, including participant observation and in-depth interviews, to provide an overview of the DSCW project and the cultural narratives it conveys, which are deeply rooted in the island's characteristics and personal stories. The findings highlight the fluid inter-island and bottom-up influences in this case and the critical role of local residents in the Biennial, allowing them to share their authentic stories.

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Introduction

Matsu—an island preparing to take flight as an island of art.

Matsu Island, an offshore island of Taiwan located near Mainland China, has been actively involved in the Biennial since its second session in 2022. The island is developing new avenues for culture-driven initiatives to engage the public, shifting away from traditional package tours that lack innovation. In the past, Matsu Island has struggled to define its identity, evolving from its historical battlefield image to the natural phenomenon of sea sparkle and now to the Matsu Biennial. This small island, shaped by multiple historical periods, has cultivated a rich cultural landscape.



Figure 1: Map of Taiwan
(Source: BBC, 2015)

Historical Context

Before 1956, Matsu Island thrived as a seasonal fishing hub, attracting fishermen from various regions of Mainland China who temporarily resided on the island before returning home to sell their catch. This practice continued for centuries until the outbreak of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, when the Kuomintang (KMT) retreated to Taiwan, and Matsu Island became a military frontline. From 1956 to 1992, the island was under strict military administration, restricting movement and prioritizing military needs over civilian life. During this period, approximately 30,000 soldiers were stationed on Matsu Island, constructing military infrastructure such as bunkers, strongholds, tunnels, and ports. The military presence generated economic activity for villages near army bases but disrupted traditional fishing industries. Fishermen were unable to ship their catch back to Mainland China, and the lack of refrigeration technology meant unsold fish quickly spoiled, leading to significant waste. This is part of lifestyle in Matsu Island in military administration era (Wel-Ping, 2021).

After military rule ended in 1992, Matsu Island began to redefine its future. The initial focus was on tourism, inspired by the similar historical background of Kinmen Island, another former military frontline. However, despite years of development, tourism remained moderate until the sea sparkle phenomenon gained online popularity around 2014, boosting visitor numbers. Yet, this reliance on a single attraction was unsustainable, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. As tourism declined, the government shifted its focus from

tourism-driven policies to cultural governance, leading to the establishment of the Matsu Biennial.

In these years Matsu Island is strength the identity by dedicate to cultural event and festival, meanwhile, research to the heritage from military administration in order to transform for revival preservative.

Regarding the context elaborated above, it can be seen Matsu Island experienced variable eras and remains diverse in culture, such as fishing culture, frontline culture, and Mindong culture, and its rich foundation for performance art to creation.



Figure 2: The Map Between Matsu Island and Taiwan

(Source: <https://www.lamigo.com.tw/products/group/mold/LZN5F>, generated by author)

Matsu Biennial and the DSCW Project

In these years, Matsu Island has strengthened its identity by dedicating itself to cultural events and festivals while simultaneously researching its military heritage to preserve and transform it. The Drinking, Seven Cups of Wine (DSCW) project emerged in this context, expanding Matsu's cultural landscape. Before DSCW, Matsu Island had years of experience with community theatre. Since 2014, the Taipei Philharmonic Foundation for Culture and Education has supported local theatre groups, fostering growth and collaboration. The foundation works with the community to create a drama every two years. By 2023, director Hsieh Shu-Ching conceptualized the DSCW project as a series of community theatre performances, following up on the second session of the Matsu Biennial theme, Ruby Red of Summer.

DSCW spans across four townships, engaging local community theatre groups with diverse performance styles and integrating a wide range of human resources. (謝淑靖, 2023). The project focuses on immersive cultural experience theatre, incorporating sensory elements such as the fermentation of old wine and performances in the Mindong dialect. The experience is intimate, real-time, and warm, breaking the boundary between performance and audience. DSCW expands cultural fields inter-island and increases the number of performances and audience members.

Furthermore, it concentrated the keywords as perspectives to explore DSCW project. The first one is the resident-based community theatre, they are a performance group of local people, and who perform in important activities or festival occasions also none of them had professional training initially, however, they are a bunch of residents passionate about performing local culture and story, eventually, they become official performance group and register an organization, dedicating themselves in performance art in Matsu Island. The second keyword is cultural narrative, through introduction could be seen that Matsu Island has a unique cultural context full of diverse aspects, however, the fundamental of the resident-based community theatre is cultural narrative in order to share value and culture in Matsu through them as the media and medium, influence their community identity and personal identity. Finally, authentic storytelling is when resident-based community theatre has a strong identity as context to share cultural narrative, the action is playing performance art with authentic storytelling, the more authentic it is, the more touched and resonated performed in the show.

Besides, inter-island is a special case to conduct performance art due to the unique geography, and most importantly, each island is a small unit and independently, in DSCW projects gathering four small islands and working inter-island and delivery of the culture, overall, it is sparking light and reason for exploring DSCW project.

Literature Review

According to island studies, islands are small compared to continents. Their unique characteristics stem from their isolation, which allows them to serve as independent research units. (Grydehøj, 2017) Lately, island study or claimed “Islandness” are booming in social science field, it shown as visual art, poem... etc., those creativity approach become narrative why to address story and value in the humanities (James, 2021).

Language is a key component to evolve or reinforce sense of place and identity in small island.(James, 2021) and its connect into island society, culture, politic... etc. aspects to shown the deeply influence for language in an island, moreover to developing sense of place, there are many research have been dedicated.

In some research and artist who are dedicated into island study, they emphasis that island not only limited geography as land but also including sea, the boundary doesn't identify by land (Marian Crawford, 2020; Kacaw, 2023) especially doing art and create driven, every island has their own story intertwine with land and sea. Owing to multiple content and type of the artwork have been contributed to island, it's a medium resonate to re-contextualize or regeneration by explore the un-known or artist's perspectives.

As this research had been inquiring the power of art in community, in Asia, it must t research to the famous cases in Japan. According to literature by many of research contribute into cases such as The Setouchi International Art Festival to strengthen multiples point of view. Conducting art festival as an approach, investigate the beauty of the rural by artists and designer those diverse roles in creative industries in order to place an authentic festival and highlight the local characteristic to attract tourist and reinforce local sense of belonging, moreover booming local economy development and support the youth settle down (Qu, 2019).

Regarding to literature reviews, the DSCW project is the case to explore the performance art conduct in inter-island through resident-based community theatre and deliver cultural narrative by authentic storytelling, the resident are the main roles to tell their story and speak Mindong language in Matsu Biennial. It's cultural study in islandness field.

Method

This study has utilized qualitative method which including participants observation and in-depth interview with project's director and the leader in one of community theatre group in Baigan township in Matsu Island. During the Matsu Biennial, DSWC perform seven-time inter-island of Matsu. Owing the character in DSWC, these performances operated by specific community theatre, every once time are uniqueness and nature. Regarding to the aim of the research, dedicate participant observation is a method to approach and be part of the site and collect the wider data relevant to the context they made moreover, to observe the interaction between community theatre and audiences in order to investigate the narrative they delivered (Guest et al., 2013). In additional, to understand the initial idea and preparation process, the study conduct in-depth interview with director of the program and one head of the community theatre in order to gain more detail about the meaning for DSWC and the core value has been delivered, on the other hand, the head of community theatre share her experience to being a local actress in the beginning until now, the meaning for her to be part of it.

The data from participant observation and in-depth interviews have been shown as video materials and fieldnotes as the rough data in an effort to collect the performance with full sensory and the chemistry between community theatre and audiences. The fieldnotes would be the researcher's perspective from the observation on the site.

Finding

The findings indicate that the DSCW project successfully transcends multiple boundaries, engaging inter-island communities and enhancing cultural storytelling through local participation.

Yet the authentic storytelling is a key reason that makes the DSCW project outstanding in Matsu Biennial, every performance represents one section of Matsu Island, such as the fishing industry in the past, the tourism industry, postpartum care culture, farewell culture, cuisine, wedding, faith, etc. Furthermore, each one has the key person in the main storyline's section performer personal story. The reason made the performance with a sincerely warm vibe and authenticity, and it elicited audience emotion directly. For the local audience, it triggers its memory from themselves or people they know; on the other hand, for the audience who are not in the same background context, it creates a highly engaged environment together and is a significant experience to feel authentic culture in Matsu Island. Every piece of content in each performance is co-created with every resident-based community theatre and DSCW team; it shows the power of bottom-up to speak up their story authenticity and become a big picture of cultural narrative. The content was touched; local people demonstrated its authenticity; besides, each island under Matsu Island has its own distinctive story owing to different backgrounds.

In the diagram has shown every performance including which group and located in host in which island and theme was going to convey to public. It had shown the diversity of this

project and break multiples boundaries for contribute art in Matsu Island and it's very difficult owing to integrated massive of recourse together not only overcome geographically changing inter-islands both human resources and environment resource but also collocate with stakeholders from bottom to top such as community, organization, the representative in village, each community theatre, governors from multiple department, Matus Biennial operating group, the supporter from Taiwan, music production house form Taiwan, and performance equipment supporter...etc. It requires significant adaptability and integrability in order to create the authentic performance with inter-island scope, even many members are work more than one performance in DSCW project, it broke a recorded performance in Matsu Island.

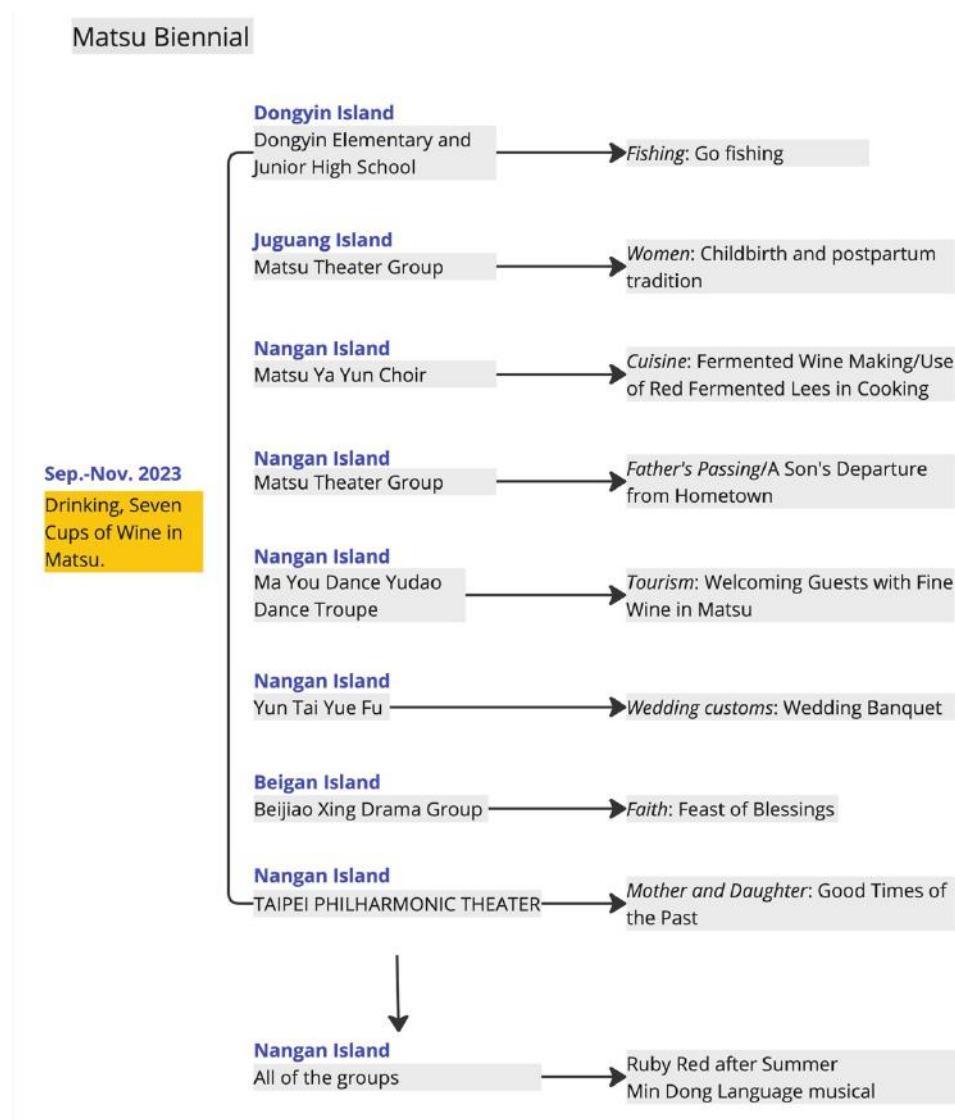


Figure 3: The Flow and Introduction to the DSCW Project
(Source: Designed by author)

The DSCW project highlighted the following key areas of boundary-breaking within the Biennia.

Talent Integration Across Islands

Generally, a performance generate is make script first then find appropriately actors for prepare the show, however Director. Hsieh has mentioned that it's repetitive in members and always the same group of people engage to it, this time extend the scope for people including onstage, backstage and behind the scenes. Due to Matsu Arts Center is going to be done, it can be seen that the necessity the local talents contribute to performance art industry.



Figure 4: The Picture From *Ruby Red After Summer* Performance
(Source: photo taken by the author)

Authentic Inter-island Narratives

In DSCW every performance is tailored due to the background of each island and community theatre in order to elicit maximum effect. It's essential to understand their distinctive and should have strong foundation with local and knowledge for the context, because each online stockholder and recourse are different.

Fishing: go fishing is collaborate to Dongyin Elementary school students and art teacher Ms. Chen, the content based on the picture book *The legend of golden island*, describe the glorious golden time- yellow croaker season! Every elder have many of personal story during the time and how prosperity it was. Due to the pandemic, Ms. Chen has designed marine ecosystem picture book course with high-grade students. From the context and visual are co-creation between Mr. Chen and students, those meaning not only support students to explore the family story and trigger creativity but also being a part of the people contributed to island for recorded more valuable history and will going inherit to the next generation. At the point, the first DSCW performance has designed start from Dongyin island, the stage utilized the place where has been redesign by local youth design group as a part of Matsu Biennial as design intervention case. Meanwhile, the performance story based on *the legend of golden island*, the students work with two professional dancers co-create and bring the story in picture book into reality show, besides, students spoke line in Mindong language, acted as fisherman and yellow croaker in drama style. The performance attracted not only local people but also tourists.



Figure 5: The Picture From *Fishing: go fishing*
(Source: photo taken by the author)



Figure 6: The Picture From *Fishing: go fishing*
(Source: photo taken by the author)

In addition, the one highlight is *Father's Passing*. The performance is designed to run in multiple scenarios outdoor shown perspectives in multi-level in order to create the storyline for the son received father pass away and going to take flight, however the flight is cancelled, sadly transfer to take ferry carry on anxiety and desperate emotion. The storyline is based on the actor his family story recently, the performance is a way to say goodbye with father, moreover interpreter Matsu local people faced family members who pass away and stuck in another place far away with Taiwan Strait. The highlight is not only the actor affectively acting by touched himself but also sing the original Mindong song "Father Farewell", due to the power of the song create sad with tears in eyes atmosphere now and make the performance into the next dramatic level. The performance also adds on Matsu ritual ceremony in the end for the performance for bring good luck for audiences. This performance

has taken people by storm by the whole process, the actor, even “Father Farewell” as well. This time is the actor Mr. Liu start show in performance art; however, his sincere performing gets everyone’s thumbs up.

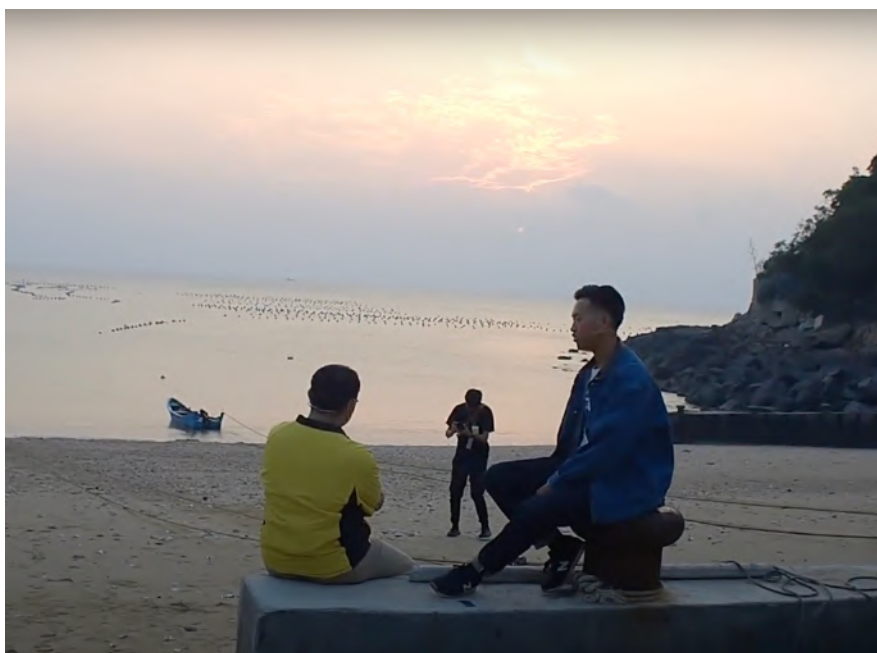


Figure 7: The Picture From *Father's Passing*
(Source: photo taken by the author)

Cross-Genre Performance

Each community theatre has plentiful type of performance such as drama, musicals, choir, environmental theatre, dance, comedy duo, meanwhile developing diverse performance art in Matsu Island and foster community theatre dedicate to convey content with diversity.



Figure 8: The Picture From *Cuisine*
(Source: photo taken by the author)

Overcoming Environmental Challenges

Matsu Island is far away from Taiwan 210 kilometer roughly, its a weakness for develop performance art owing the main resources is in Taiwan, ever more, Matsu Island has four township and it's very difficult to educate talent and reinforce art appreciation ability in local people inter-island even host in every township. It's not hard to image that most of performance would be host in most powerful island which is Nangan township and it's also county government has located and have highest population inter-island. As the point, DSCW is one of kind project to integrated everything and also run performance into four townships in order to get close to the audience with locals and tourist.

On the other hand, regarding to each performance's characteristic by type of the performance and the environment, many of the performance are setting in outdoor interacting to natural at the same time, how to choose appropriate place and enough space and designed the flow also considering the level of sounds and distance with audiences. It's challenging operate team's adaptability and creativity.



Figure 9: The Picture From *Wedding Customs*
(Source: photo taken by the author)



Figure 10: The Picture From *Fishing*
(Source: photo taken by the author)



Figure 11: The Picture From *Woman*
(Source: photo taken by the author)

Bridging Intergenerational Memory

According to interview with a head in community theatre, there is one key message taken from her is, they are part time performer without professional train in the beginning, however, they delivery themselves in performance type of way, being themselves which means the content with authenticity and the story might be familiar in their generation even from someone they know. By time to time, they have been performance for many years and had experienced to convey culture to audience trigger their emotional touched and received joyful at the same time as a two-way gift by the community theatre performance. Besides, when the group getting build up, new members comes naturally and it's a good intergeneration experience to deliver culture for the young generation or even new resident who just move into Matsu Island. Not only they deliver culture and history to audience, but also during the performance from backstage to frontstage they are also creating and be part of it.

The DSCW project fosters intercultural exchange by incorporating both seasoned and new performers, ensuring that cultural knowledge and skills are passed down in a structured, experiential format.



Figure 12: The Picture From *Faith*
(Source: photo taken by the author)

Discussion

The findings indicate that resident-based community theatre can play a significant role in preserving and sharing authentic cultural narratives across inter-island settings. Through the DSCW project, participants not only shared cultural stories but also gained experience and skills that deepened their engagement. For the Biennial's operating team, strong community relationships and an understanding of local heritage and natural settings were crucial for managing the unique challenges of an inter-island project. Their expertise in performance art and community theatre contributed to the project's overall impact, including training local people to be part of the performance art in diverse roles in performance art and organizing the ability to work inter-island. On the other hand, through performance to unite local people's relationships and confidence to do cultural deliver.

This study demonstrates that resident-based community theatre effectively bridges various levels of community involvement—from local performers and officials to the Biennial's organizing team and key stakeholders. As seen in DSCW, such projects can overcome geographical barriers, empowering local voices in the cultural conversation. Besides, authentic storytelling is the valuable content for this performance art to convey cultural diversity.

Conclusion

This study underscores the importance of authentic storytelling as a central method of conveying cultural narratives within the Matsu Biennale. Through the Drinking, Seven Cups of Wine (DSCW) project, residents successfully overcame the challenges of inter-island collaboration, ensuring that their personal stories became a defining highlight of the Biennale's cultural expression. These performances enriched the event by emphasizing resident perspectives, ultimately strengthening the bonds between islands and reinforcing the community's identity.

Despite these valuable insights, the study faces certain limitations. First, the focus on a single case in a small island context—together with limited prior research on resident-based community theatre in similar settings—restricts the broader applicability of the findings. Second, participant observation is inherently qualitative and subjective: variations in performance duration, logistical constraints, and overlapping performers across community theatre groups sometimes made it difficult to gather uniformly comprehensive data. Additionally, Matsu's unique geographical and cultural conditions influenced both the depth of observation and the availability of performance-related resources.

Nevertheless, the DSCW project demonstrates how a bottom-up approach to storytelling can transcend inter-island barriers and showcase the richness of local voices. Future studies may consider exploring comparable community theatre initiatives in other island or rural areas to further understand how resident-led cultural narratives contribute to both cultural preservation and innovative cultural development.

Future researchers examining similar resident-based community theatre initiatives in island or rural contexts may benefit from adopting a multi-sited participant observation approach to capture the nuances of performances across various locations. Establishing trust and strong relationships with local collaborators is essential to gaining deeper insight into the cultural narratives presented. Additionally, conducting comparative studies across multiple cases can

highlight shared challenges and successful practices, offering a clearer understanding of how storytelling can continue to strengthen and preserve local culture in these unique settings.

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Aesthetics and Sustainability in Textile Design

Chiara Garofalo, Università di Genova, Italy
Camilla Giulia Barale, Università di Genova, Italy
Luca Parodi, Università di Genova, Italy

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Abstract

Since the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987, which defines sustainability as the capacity to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, sustainable development has increasingly focused on achieving a balance between the human environment and nature. Sustainable design plays a critical role in reinforcing this relationship. Recently, the concept of aesthetic sustainability has gained prominence, integrating aesthetic considerations into sustainable design to address the challenges of the circular economy and ethical business practices. Rooted in the Greek term “*aisthesis*” (*sensation*), aesthetic sustainability leverages sensory experiences to convey well-being through design. In textile design, this involves promoting sustainable supply chains, eco-friendly materials, and responsible production methods. Examples of innovative practices include the use of recycled fibers from plastic waste and biologically-based materials such as Orange Fiber (derived from citrus waste) and Kvadrat’s Really collection, which transforms textile waste into high-quality materials for interiors. This study examines the integration of aesthetics and sustainability in textile design, focusing on the role of innovative materials and methods in promoting environmental responsibility and social equity. Utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research methods, it explores the impact of aesthetic sustainability on consumer preferences and its broader environmental and societal benefits. The research highlights the inseparable link between tactile and visual properties in design, where sensory feedback enhances material communication. Additionally, it addresses challenges such as balancing aesthetic appeal with sustainability and the economic feasibility of sustainable practices within the textile industry.

Keywords: Textile Design, Sustainability, Sensory Experience

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Introduction

In recent years, the growing awareness of environmental issues has brought sustainability to the forefront of global concerns, significantly influencing the textile design industry.

As Fletcher (2014) argues in his comprehensive study on sustainable fashion, sustainability extends beyond merely reducing environmental impact; it necessitates the development of a new culture of responsible consumption that encompasses the entire lifecycle of textile products. This broader view of sustainability includes not only the ecological footprint of production but also the social and economic implications of the textile supply chain, encouraging a shift towards more sustainable consumption patterns. In response to this need, various tools and methodologies for eco-design have emerged, aimed at streamlining the creation of environmentally friendly products. These tools, ranging from lifecycle assessments to eco-labeling standards, are designed to assist designers and manufacturers in making informed decisions about materials, processes, and end-of-life management. Despite the rapid proliferation of eco-design principles within the textile sector, translating these concepts into actionable and widespread practices remains a considerable challenge.

The textile industry continues to encounter significant barriers in fully implementing sustainable solutions, including issues such as the cost of eco-friendly materials, the complexity of redesigning manufacturing processes, and the need for greater consumer awareness and engagement. The global economic crisis and the growing scarcity of natural resources have catalyzed a shift in mindset within the industry, prompting a reconsideration of both production processes and consumption patterns. This paradigm shift has highlighted the importance of not only addressing the environmental impact of textile products but also re-evaluating how products are consumed and discarded in the global market. A key aspect of this transformation is the re-evaluation of product aesthetics and durability through the lens of sustainability. The concept of *emotional durability*, as described by Chapman (2005), underscores the importance of fostering emotional connections between users and products. This approach moves beyond the traditional focus on functionality and beauty, emphasizing the role of long-term emotional engagement as a means of reducing consumption and waste. By designing products that evoke lasting emotional responses, the textile industry can transition from a model of disposable fashion to one based on enduring value, thus encouraging responsible consumption practices. Although sustainability efforts in the textile sector have often prioritized environmental efficiency - especially in terms of reducing waste and energy consumption - there is a growing recognition that aesthetic considerations need not be sacrificed for ecological performance.

On the contrary, recent advancements in sustainable materials and techniques demonstrate that it is possible to integrate both sophistication and environmental responsibility.

Innovations such as biodegradable fabrics, waterless dyeing techniques, and circular production systems reveal that sustainability and aesthetics can coexist without compromise. The real challenge, however, lies in the effective integration of technological innovation with aesthetic principles, ensuring that the pursuit of sustainability does not undermine the artistic and sensory qualities that define textile products. As the textile industry continues to evolve, technological innovations in materials and production methods are enhancing the quality and performance of sustainable textiles, making it increasingly feasible to adopt eco-friendly practices without sacrificing product aesthetics. For the textile sector to thrive in this environmentally conscious landscape, it is crucial to integrate these technological advancements into production processes, fostering a synergy between innovation,

sustainability, and design. A holistic approach - one that considers not only environmental impact but also the aesthetic and emotional value of textiles - offers a pathway toward a more responsible and mindful future. By embracing this integrated approach, the textile industry can move towards a model where sustainability and aesthetic sensitivity are not opposing forces but complementary components of a more sustainable and human-centered design philosophy.

Sustainable Textile Design: Aesthetics and Environmental Responsibility

The concept of sustainability in design extends far beyond simply minimizing environmental harm. It encompasses the improvement of both the quality of life and the environment, a principle that is particularly relevant within the realm of sustainable textile design.

This multifaceted approach necessitates a meticulous evaluation of both the materials selected and the production processes employed. At the core of sustainable textile design is the role of aesthetics, which not only concerns visual appeal but also encompasses the overall quality and sensory experiences of the materials. As textile products are increasingly developed with a dual focus on environmental responsibility and aesthetic value, it becomes evident that sustainability is not merely a technical issue but a deeply creative one as well. Aesthetics play a pivotal role in this process, emerging wherever qualitative processes of reception, production, pleasure, and creation intersect. This is especially true for textiles that meet stringent aesthetic criteria while being environmentally responsible, such as those made from eco-sustainable or bio-based fibers. These materials, once considered secondary to their functional counterparts, are now at the forefront of textile design, offering an exciting fusion of environmental stewardship and beauty. The concept of aesthetic sustainability is broadening its scope, extending beyond traditional fashion into interior design and other domains where textiles play a crucial role. As aesthetic standards in textile design evolve, so too does the understanding of how materials can serve both visual and functional purposes. A crucial aspect of this is the social dimension of aesthetics. Materials that reflect local cultural and environmental values, such as organic cotton or recycled fabrics, provide a means of creating a visual language that speaks to sustainability in all its forms. This fosters a deeper connection between the user, the material, and the culture from which it originates, thereby contributing to the broader societal understanding of sustainable living. In this context, the model of the transitioning textile designer, as proposed by Pauli (2020), reflects the evolving nature of sustainable design.

The model delineates three levels of practice, moving from the traditional sustainable textile designer to the design facilitator. This progression underscores the importance of collaboration and cross-disciplinary thinking in the realization of truly sustainable design solutions. Pauli's framework positions ecodesign as a critical methodology in sustainable textile design. It emphasizes the importance of textile waste management and material waste reduction, alongside efforts to minimize environmental impact through responsible design practices.

The core objective of ecodesign is to minimize negative environmental effects without compromising the product's aesthetic qualities or durability. This principle is particularly significant in the textile industry, where there is a consistent demand for products that are both functional and visually appealing. A key characteristic of sustainable textile design is its commitment to "*future-proof*" design solutions. These products are designed to withstand the test of time, both in terms of their physical durability and their relevance in a rapidly changing world. As Pauli (2020) notes, ecodesign is grounded in three fundamental principles: the environment, sustainable economy, and culture. These principles are interwoven throughout the design process, aiming to create products that not only minimize environmental harm but

also integrate social and economic sustainability into the very structure of the design. Special emphasis is placed on the use of renewable, biodegradable, or recycled materials, which further enhances the products' sustainability credentials. However, as Pauli (2020) highlights, ensuring the aesthetic quality of these materials is equally essential for their acceptance by both designers and consumers. In addition to the practical aspects of sustainability, visual communication plays a crucial role in fostering a greater understanding of sustainable textiles within the industry. As Maurice (2003) aptly describes, visual perception can be thought of as a form of *"touching with the gaze."* This sensory approach enables consumers and industry professionals alike to engage with textile materials on a deeper, more tactile level.

By emphasizing sensory qualities such as texture, drape, and durability, designers can highlight the unique benefits of sustainable materials, fostering a more holistic appreciation of these products. In this way, concepts such as *"feel"* and *"touch"* become integral to the development of effective visual communication strategies aimed at promoting sustainable textiles. These strategies are essential for raising awareness among designers, manufacturers, and consumers about the benefits of these materials, ultimately encouraging more informed and responsible choices in the design and purchase of textile products. Furthermore, a variety of tools and operational strategies for sustainable development in the textile sector have been devised to guide projects toward a shared, more sustainable future. These include the development of digital archives, which enable the seamless exchange of information about sustainable materials and processes, as well as renewable raw materials and shared resources that promote innovation and collaboration in textile design (Figure 1). These resources serve as incubators for research and innovation, providing designers with new ways to incorporate sustainability into their creative processes. Ongoing research into alternative fibers, sustainable dyeing techniques, and eco-friendly production processes attests to the potential of these tools to transform the textile industry into one that not only prioritizes environmental responsibility but also fosters creativity and aesthetic excellence. In conclusion, sustainable textile design stands at the intersection of aesthetics, functionality, and environmental stewardship. By integrating ecological considerations into every stage of the design process, from material selection to production methods, the textile industry can progress toward a more responsible, future-facing paradigm where sustainability and aesthetics coexist harmoniously.



Figure 1: Photo Image, Generate With AI, of a Series of Different Textile Material

Aesthetics, Sustainability and Meaning: A Journey Through Form, Function, and Culture

The reflection on aesthetics in design, as articulated by Andrea Mecacci, offers a profound exploration of how aesthetic sustainability in textile design intersects with broader cultural and environmental values. Contemporary design, moving beyond mere functional needs, has increasingly become a discipline that shapes user experiences and conveys deep cultural messages. This intersection is particularly evident in the use of sustainable materials, which not only meet ecological criteria but also carry symbolic meanings. These materials act as vessels of an aesthetic that transcends beauty; they serve as tools for education and as vehicles for raising awareness about environmental issues. In this context, the aesthetic choices made in textile design function as a powerful means of communication, educating consumers and encouraging them to make more informed, responsible decisions. Mecacci's notion of the "semiotic object" is particularly relevant in this context, as it translates directly into the realm of textile design. A "*semiotic object*" communicates not only through its beauty and tactile qualities but also through its ethical commitment and environmental respect. This concept is evident in textiles that narrate stories about sustainability, culture, and social responsibility. The shift towards eco-design practices in the textile industry mirrors the broader trend of integrating social, economic, and environmental values, aligning with Mecacci's description of the aestheticization of everyday life in industrial design. In this paradigm, aesthetics are no longer a superficial layer but become a form of social responsibility. How a material appears and feels is intertwined with how it is perceived and used by consumers, influencing their behavior and promoting more conscious consumption patterns. This evolving perspective on aesthetics in design extends beyond traditional concerns with visual appeal, encompassing the emotional and cultural dimensions of objects. According to Mecacci,

The beautiful is therefore neither an external decoration added to the object, nor a property inherent to the object itself. Beauty, then, is not a quality of the work itself, but an effect it produces, encompassing various elements both external and internal to the object to which we attribute the predicate of beauty. (Semper G. in Mecacci A., 2012, p. 45)

This quote, referencing the influential ideas of Gottfried Semper, provides a crucial foundation for understanding the relationship between form and function in design. Semper's work challenges the purely functional view of design, arguing that an object's form is deeply influenced not only by its practical purpose but also by the materials and cultural processes used in its creation. His theory of "*material transformation*" ("*Stoffwechsel*"), as Mecacci points out, underscores that the origins of form are not merely functional but are inseparable from the cultural and technical context of the materials used. Semper contends, "*form is always the result of technical work; beauty lies in the harmony between the materials used and the purpose to be achieved*" (Semper G. in Mecacci A., 2012). This perspective emphasizes that beauty is not simply a visual quality but a product of the relationship between materials, technique, and purpose, where the form is shaped by a dynamic interplay of cultural, symbolic, and practical factors. Semper's emphasis on the cultural and technical dimensions of design stands in contrast to the modernist critique of ornamentation, notably expressed by Adolf Loos, who famously dismissed decoration as a crime. Loos viewed ornamentation as unnecessary and superfluous, while Semper saw it as integral to the cultural and historical context of the object. In his view, "*Ornament is never purely decorative but reflects the cultural and historical context in which it emerges*" (Semper G. in Mecacci A., 2012). This concept of ornament as a carrier of meaning aligns closely with the ideas of sustainable design, where the

materials and processes employed in textile production carry a wealth of cultural significance. Rather than merely serving decorative functions, the materials and techniques used in contemporary sustainable design can carry deep historical, social, and ecological meanings. Mecacci, drawing on Semper's theories, reflects on how modern design seeks to balance respect for traditional materials with technological innovation. This approach resonates with Semper's idea that form should emerge from a process of transformation that respects both the resources available and the cultural context in which they are used. In the case of sustainable textile design, this transformative process might involve the use of recycled or bio-based materials that not only reduce environmental impact but also echo the principles of traditional craftsmanship.

These materials, rather than being discarded or considered outdated, are reimagined in ways that respect both their origins and their potential for future use. The concept of sustainability, then, can be seen as a return to Semper's ideals, where design is not just a technical act but also a cultural practice, grounded in the responsible and meaningful use of materials.

In conclusion, the intersection of aesthetics, sustainability, and cultural values in textile design offers a rich field of exploration that is deeply rooted in both theory and practice.

By incorporating the ideas of Mecacci and Semper, contemporary textile designers can create objects that are not only environmentally responsible but also rich in cultural and symbolic significance. These designs invite users to engage with the materials and processes behind the objects, fostering a deeper understanding of sustainability and encouraging more thoughtful and responsible consumption. As the textile industry continues to evolve, the integration of aesthetic sustainability will be key to shaping a future in which design and environmental stewardship are seamlessly aligned.

Technological Advancements and Eco-Friendly Practices: Shaping the Future of Textile Design

Recent innovations in the textile industry illustrate a significant shift towards sustainability, driven by both technological advancements and eco-friendly practices that address a range of environmental and social concerns. This transformation reflects a growing recognition of the necessity to balance industrial production with ecological responsibility and social equity. Technological progress, in particular, has had a profound impact on the industry, enabling the development and implementation of more sustainable production methods. One of the key innovations is the introduction of new materials, such as recycled fibers derived from plastic waste and textile scraps, which help reduce the industry's reliance on virgin materials and decrease its environmental footprint. Prominent companies like Kvadrat and Orange Fiber are at the forefront of this shift, incorporating recycled and bio-based materials into their production processes. For instance, Orange Fiber utilizes citrus peel waste, a by-product of the agro-food industry, to create textiles. This process not only reduces waste but also offers significant social and economic benefits by addressing the environmental challenges faced by the food industry. Similarly, Kvadrat has committed to integrating sustainable materials such as recycled wool and polyester into its designs, proving that high-quality, aesthetically pleasing textiles can be created with minimal environmental impact. These initiatives underscore the potential for the textile industry not only to reduce its ecological footprint but also to generate social value through innovation. In addition to the adoption of innovative materials, the implementation of more energy-efficient and environmentally responsible production processes has been another significant development in the textile industry. Technological

advancements that reduce water and energy consumption are reshaping the sector, particularly in areas like dyeing and finishing. Traditional textile production methods are notorious for their high water usage and energy consumption; however, recent innovations have introduced machines and processes that minimize these impacts. For example, waterless dyeing technologies have emerged as a critical solution, significantly reducing the consumption of natural resources while also minimizing pollution. By eliminating the need for large volumes of water, these technologies reduce the industry's overall environmental impact. As Magni and Noè (2020) note, waterless dyeing represents a critical example of how the textile industry is evolving toward more sustainable practices, with the added benefit of reducing harmful discharges into water systems. Another promising technological development in sustainable textile production is the use of 3D printing. This innovative approach allows designers to create customized textile models with minimal material waste, offering a more sustainable alternative to traditional manufacturing processes. By producing only the material needed for each design, 3D printing helps reduce waste and optimize material usage, contributing to a more sustainable production cycle. The flexibility of 3D printing also allows for the creation of intricate, lightweight textiles that would be difficult or impossible to achieve using conventional methods, thus expanding the possibilities for sustainable design within the textile industry. Eco-friendly practices are becoming more widespread within the textile sector as part of a broader effort to address the pressing environmental challenges facing the world today. One key aspect of this shift is the growing emphasis on recycling and reusing materials, which has become integral to sustainable textile design. Technologies focused on the regeneration of fibers and textiles are enabling the recycling of materials previously considered waste. This approach not only helps reduce waste but also conserves valuable resources, as it eliminates the need for new raw materials. Magni and Noè (2020) emphasize how companies are increasingly adopting textile recovery and reuse technologies, which allow old garments and fabrics to be repurposed for new uses, thereby giving them a second life rather than discarding them. The rise of circular fashion represents a particularly significant development in this context. Circular fashion promotes a consumption model in which products are designed to be disassembled and recycled at the end of their life cycle. This system contrasts sharply with the traditional linear model of production, where products are made, used, and discarded. By encouraging the recovery and reuse of materials, circular fashion helps extend the lifespan of products and reduces the volume of textile waste sent to landfills. This approach not only minimizes waste but also fosters a culture of responsibility and sustainability within the fashion industry, aligning with broader global efforts to reduce consumption and promote resource efficiency. While the environmental impact of the textile industry is a major focus, social issues are also being addressed through innovation in textile design. Ethical labor practices are gaining increasing importance, with many companies prioritizing fair and safe working conditions for their employees. The adoption of policies ensuring the respect of human rights throughout the supply chain has become an essential standard in the industry. As consumers become more aware of the social and environmental implications of their purchasing decisions, companies are responding by implementing transparent and ethical practices that promote accountability and fairness. Moreover, the rise of responsible consumption is increasingly becoming a focal point in the textile sector. As sustainability moves to the forefront of the public consciousness, educating consumers about the importance of making sustainable choices is gaining prominence. Raising awareness about the environmental and social impact of purchases is now central to marketing campaigns within the textile industry, with many brands emphasizing their commitment to sustainability as a key selling point. By promoting responsible consumption, companies aim to encourage consumers to make more informed decisions, thereby supporting the transition toward a more sustainable and mindful global economy. In this evolving landscape, the role of design is crucial. Textile products must not only meet aesthetic and

functional criteria but also play an educational role, guiding consumers toward more informed, long-term choices. The design of textiles, with their potential to communicate cultural values and environmental responsibility, offers a unique opportunity to influence consumer behavior. By integrating sustainability into both the form and the function of textile products, designers can help shape a more sustainable future for the industry, one where environmental and social considerations are embedded into the very fabric of the design process. As Magni and Noè (2020) suggest, the increasing adoption of eco-design principles, combined with innovative production technologies, can drive the industry toward a more responsible and sustainable future, where the ethical, social, and environmental impacts of design are carefully considered at every stage of production.

Conclusions

The textile industry is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by the integration of advanced technological innovations and eco-sustainable practices that address pressing environmental and social challenges. Emerging technologies enable the development of recycled and organic materials, thereby reducing dependence on virgin natural resources and promoting circular production models. These technological shifts extend beyond mere material innovation, influencing the design culture, which is undergoing a process of radical renewal aimed at discovering new pathways for design, encompassing not only aesthetics and functionality but also sustainability. Two major factors have accelerated this transformation: the global economic crisis of 2007, which reshaped consumer behavior, leading to a shift towards more accessible and essential products, and the onset of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which has driven unprecedented innovation in the sector. These shifts have necessitated a rethinking of design practices, considering not only economic aspects but also the social and environmental impacts of industrial activities (Gambardella, 2020).

Key innovations, such as waterless dyeing and 3D printing, are reshaping the textile production landscape. These technologies significantly reduce resource consumption and optimize waste management, advancing both efficiency and sustainability. Concurrently, there is an increasing emphasis on ethical practices throughout the supply chain, particularly concerning human rights and working conditions. This holistic approach aims to balance aesthetics, functionality, and sustainability, laying the foundation for a more responsible and conscientious future for the textile industry. Consumer education is critical in fostering conscious choices, and design plays a central role in this process. Contemporary designers are now tasked with not only focusing on aesthetics or functionality but also considering the broader socio-environmental context. Strategic thinking must precede practical execution (Bassi, 2017). The growing convergence of aesthetics and sustainability demonstrates that technological innovation can coexist with ecological principles, creating products that meet functional needs without compromising quality or environmental impact. Investment in ecodesign and the search for virtuous aesthetic and functional solutions are driving significant changes within the textile sector, transforming both the market and design practices. In this context, the role of the designer is becoming increasingly multifaceted. Designers must navigate between technological innovation and local tradition, combining creativity with technical and cultural expertise. In an era of global transformations, designers face complex challenges, and their decisions are pivotal for the future of sustainable design. Design, in this sense, not only reflects current demands but also serves as a vehicle for collective memory, shaping the framework for future generations (Bettini, 2016). Through their design choices, designers are central to defining a long-term vision that coherently integrates innovation, sustainability, and cultural identity.

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***Forum Theatre as a Tool for Peacebuilding:
Participatory Approaches to Conflict Resolution in Jos Metropolis***

Aliyu Yakubu Abdulkadir, Federal University of Kashere, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study explores the application of Forum Theatre as a participatory tool for peacebuilding in Jos Metropolis, a part of Nigeria deeply affected by religious and ethnic conflict. Drawing from Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, the research employed Forum Theatre to engage Christian and Muslim communities in co-creating and performing an "anti-model" – a dramatized scenario of violence that reflects the tensions between these groups. Through interactive performances, community members assumed the roles of spect-actors, interrupting and re-enacting scenes to suggest non-violent alternatives to conflict escalation. The study found that Forum Theatre facilitated critical reflection, encouraged dialogue, and enabled participants to collectively explore solutions to their shared challenges. Furthermore, the research highlighted the potential of theatre as a medium for conscientization, empowering participants to critically evaluate the underlying causes of conflict and their roles in perpetuating or resolving it. The study concludes that Forum Theatre holds significant promise as a tool for community-driven peacebuilding, offering an inclusive space for dialogue, emotional release, and collaborative problem-solving in conflict-prone environments.

Keywords: Forum Theatre, Peacebuilding, Conflict Resolution, Participatory Theatre, Jos Metropolis

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Introduction

Background and Context

Jos Metropolis, located in Nigeria's Plateau State, has experienced recurring violent conflicts since the early 2000s, primarily driven by ethnic and religious divisions. The tensions between Christian and Muslim communities have resulted in cycles of violence, property destruction, and loss of lives, making Jos one of the epicenters of Nigeria's inter-religious conflicts (Egwu, 2001). The historical roots of this conflict are multifaceted, involving struggles over land, indigeneity rights, and political control, often exacerbated by economic disparities and social exclusion (Best & Rakodi, 2011). Over the years, Jos has become a city divided by physical and socio-cultural boundaries, with neighborhoods segregated along religious lines, further entrenching the divisions between its Christian and Muslim residents.

The socio-cultural dimensions of the conflict are profound, affecting everyday interactions between people of different religious affiliations. There is a significant erosion of trust between the two communities, which has made peacebuilding efforts more challenging. Misinformation, rumor-mongering, and the spread of hate speech through social media often escalate tensions, sometimes triggering violent outbreaks (Krause, 2011). Amid these recurring conflicts, government-led interventions, including peace committees and security deployments, have achieved limited success in addressing the underlying causes of violence and fostering lasting reconciliation.

In response to these challenges, there has been increasing recognition of the need for grassroots-level, participatory approaches to peacebuilding that actively engage local communities. Such approaches are essential for addressing the socio-cultural dimensions of the conflict and for creating a sense of ownership among community members in the peace process. One such approach is Forum Theatre, which offers an innovative, participatory method of addressing conflict through performance and dialogue. This study seeks to explore how Forum Theatre, as a form of participatory theatre, can be employed as a tool for peacebuilding in Jos Metropolis.

Problem Statement

In conflict zones such as Jos Metropolis, peacebuilding efforts must go beyond top-down interventions to actively engage local communities in dialogue and conflict resolution. Traditional approaches, including government policies and external mediation, often fail to address the complex socio-cultural and psychological dimensions of conflict, leaving deep-seated grievances unaddressed. Moreover, they seldom provide avenues for ordinary community members to participate in shaping the peace process.

Participatory approaches, which include the voices and perspectives of those most affected by the conflict, are crucial for fostering sustainable peace. Forum Theatre, developed by Augusto Boal (1992) as part of his Theatre of the Oppressed framework, is one such participatory approach. It transforms spectators into active participants, or "spect-actors," allowing them to intervene in the performance and propose solutions to conflict situations. This method has proven effective in various conflict-affected contexts worldwide, yet its application in Jos, where socio-religious tensions dominate, has not been fully explored.

The need for innovative, community-driven approaches to peacebuilding is critical in Jos, where repeated cycles of violence have left a legacy of mistrust and division. By involving community members in the performance and resolution of conflict scenarios, Forum Theatre has the potential to foster dialogue, empathy, and mutual understanding between Christian and Muslim communities, thereby contributing to the peacebuilding process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the use of Forum Theatre as a tool for peacebuilding in Jos Metropolis, focusing on how this participatory method can engage Christian and Muslim communities in conflict resolution. Specifically, the study seeks to explore how Forum Theatre can:

- i. Raise awareness about the importance of peaceful coexistence.
- ii. Encourage dialogue and critical reflection among community members.
- iii. Provide an alternative platform for conflict resolution that involves the active participation of those directly affected by the conflict.

By investigating the application of Forum Theatre in Jos, this study aims to demonstrate its potential as a transformative tool for peacebuilding, particularly in regions where traditional peacebuilding efforts have struggled to produce long-lasting results.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following key research questions:

- i. How can Forum Theatre be used to raise awareness about conflict resolution in Jos Metropolis?
- ii. What role does community participation play in the effectiveness of Forum Theatre for peacebuilding?
- iii. How does the use of Forum Theatre alter existing conflict narratives and contribute to dialogue between Christian and Muslim communities in Jos Metropolis?

These questions are designed to assess both the theoretical and practical aspects of using participatory theatre as a tool for conflict resolution and to gauge the impact of Forum Theatre on the communities involved.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the growing body of literature on the use of applied theatre, particularly Forum Theatre, as a tool for social change and conflict resolution. While Forum Theatre has been successfully employed in other conflict contexts, such as post-apartheid South Africa and Colombia (Prentki & Preston, 2009), its potential in the context of religious and ethnic conflict in Nigeria has not been extensively explored. This research fills a critical gap by examining how Forum Theatre can foster peacebuilding in Jos Metropolis.

Second, the study highlights the importance of community participation in peacebuilding efforts. Traditional conflict resolution methods often exclude local voices, particularly those of marginalized groups. Forum Theatre, by contrast, empowers participants to engage directly with the issues affecting their communities and to propose alternative solutions. This

participatory approach is particularly relevant in the Jos context, where mutual distrust between Christian and Muslim communities has hindered open dialogue.

Finally, the research demonstrates the potential for Forum Theatre to serve as a bridge between divided communities, fostering empathy and understanding through performance. By allowing participants to re-enact conflict situations and explore non-violent alternatives, Forum Theatre can help challenge entrenched narratives and promote peaceful coexistence. The findings of this study may have broader implications for peacebuilding efforts in other conflict-prone regions, both within Nigeria and globally, where religious and ethnic tensions persist.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Forum Theatre and the Theatre of the Oppressed

Forum Theatre is part of Augusto Boal's broader framework, Theatre of the Oppressed, which was first developed in the early 1970s as a tool for promoting social and political change. Boal (1992) envisioned theatre as a means of empowerment, where participants could actively engage in the resolution of conflicts by stepping into roles traditionally reserved for actors. Central to Boal's methodology is the idea of transforming passive spectators into "spect-actors," who not only witness the drama but intervene in it, thereby practicing real-world problem-solving in a simulated environment.

Boal's Forum Theatre specifically encourages this active participation by presenting an unresolved situation of oppression or conflict. The spectators are invited to suggest and act out alternative actions the protagonists might take to overcome the oppression. According to Boal, the goal of Forum Theatre is not to provide solutions but to provoke dialogue and foster critical thinking about possible resolutions (Boal, 1992). This approach aligns with Paulo Freire's concept of conscientization, where marginalized or oppressed individuals become critically aware of their conditions and are empowered to take transformative action (Freire, 2005).

In the context of this study, Forum Theatre serves as a participatory platform where communities in Jos Metropolis can engage with real-life conflict scenarios. It allows participants to rehearse non-violent ways of addressing grievances and promoting coexistence, making it an ideal tool for addressing the deep-rooted socio-religious divisions that have plagued the city.

Forum Theatre and Conflict Resolution: Past Applications in Various Conflict Zones

Forum Theatre has been widely applied in diverse conflict zones worldwide, where it has demonstrated potential as a tool for conflict transformation and peacebuilding. For example, in Colombia, Forum Theatre has been used to address the deep-seated violence arising from decades of civil war. In such contexts, Forum Theatre has provided a platform for victims and ex-combatants to reimagine relationships and explore pathways to reconciliation (Aguilar, 2019). By allowing participants to intervene and alter the course of conflict scenarios, Forum Theatre helps individuals process trauma, understand the perspectives of others, and test peaceful alternatives to violence.

In post-apartheid South Africa, Forum Theatre was used to engage communities affected by racial divisions and legacies of violence. As Kafewo (2010) notes, it allowed for a communal space where participants could collectively reflect on past injustices and explore avenues for

healing. Similarly, in Northern Ireland, Forum Theatre has been employed to engage communities affected by sectarian violence, creating dialogues between Protestant and Catholic communities to build trust and mutual understanding (Breed, 2009).

In the African context, Forum Theatre has been successfully utilized in countries such as Kenya and Rwanda to facilitate discussions on ethnic violence and post-genocide reconciliation, respectively (Burns et al., 2015). In Kenya, Forum Theatre interventions targeted youth groups to foster critical thinking about the dangers of ethnic violence, emphasizing the role of young people in preventing future conflicts. In Rwanda, Forum Theatre has helped survivors and perpetrators of genocide engage in difficult conversations, paving the way for restorative justice processes.

However, while these cases demonstrate the effectiveness of Forum Theatre in various conflict zones, its application in religious conflicts, particularly in West Africa, has been relatively limited. The present study contributes to filling this gap by applying Forum Theatre in Jos Metropolis, a region where religious identity plays a pivotal role in sustaining and aggravating conflicts.

Participatory Theatre in Peacebuilding: Fostering Dialogue, Empathy, and Social Cohesion

Participatory theatre, and specifically Forum Theatre, holds significant potential for fostering dialogue and social cohesion in conflict settings. Unlike traditional forms of conflict resolution, where external mediators or authorities are expected to provide solutions, participatory theatre empowers local communities to address their own conflicts. As Nicholson (2005) argues, theatre can humanize complex social issues, offering participants a space to reflect on their experiences and engage in dialogue without the immediate pressures of real-life consequences.

Empathy, a critical component of peacebuilding, is often fostered through theatre. By assuming the roles of others, participants in Forum Theatre are encouraged to understand the motivations, emotions, and challenges faced by opposing parties. This process of role reversal and experimentation in Forum Theatre enables participants to walk in the shoes of their adversaries, thereby reducing the psychological distance between conflicting groups (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009). It is this fostering of empathy that can help break cycles of revenge and retaliation, which are common in contexts like Jos.

Furthermore, as Haseman and Winston (2010) suggest, participatory theatre serves as a social laboratory where participants can safely experiment with alternative conflict resolution strategies. In doing so, it allows communities to rehearse for real-life change. When theatre is used as a peacebuilding tool, it not only provides a mirror for society to see itself but also a rehearsal for transformation, making it a powerful medium for communities seeking sustainable peace.

Conflict Dynamics in Jos Metropolis: Historical and Socio-Political Background

Jos Metropolis has a long history of ethnic and religious coexistence, but the eruption of violence in 2001 marked a turning point in its socio-political landscape. Historically, the indigenous ethnic groups, predominantly Christian, and Hausa-Fulani settlers, who are mostly Muslim, coexisted peacefully. However, as political competition and the question of indigeneity became more pronounced, these cleavages deepened, leading to tensions and

periodic outbreaks of violence (Egwu, 2011). Issues of land ownership, political representation, and economic disenfranchisement are intertwined with religious identities, making the conflict in Jos both a socio-political and religious one.

The Jos conflict is often framed as a Christian-Muslim confrontation, but it is crucial to recognize that it is also driven by broader economic and political forces. In many cases, violence has been sparked by political actors seeking to exploit religious divisions for electoral gain, particularly in contests for local government control (Ambe-Uva, 2010). As Krause (2011) notes, the manipulation of religious identities by political elites has further entrenched divisions, making reconciliation difficult.

Moreover, the spatial segregation of communities along religious lines has become more pronounced over the years, with entire neighborhoods being defined as Christian or Muslim. This physical segregation mirrors the deep social and psychological divide between the two communities. It is within this context that Forum Theatre seeks to intervene, providing a platform for both communities to come together and engage in critical dialogue about their shared challenges.

By presenting real-life conflict scenarios that resonate with the lived experiences of residents in Jos, Forum Theatre allows participants to reflect on the root causes of violence, examine their own roles in perpetuating conflict, and explore alternative ways of engaging with one another. Through this participatory approach, the study aims to contribute to ongoing peacebuilding efforts in the region by fostering understanding, empathy, and social cohesion.

Methodology

Research Design: Qualitative Research and Participatory Action Research

This study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically framed within the paradigm of participatory action research (PAR). Qualitative research is particularly well-suited to exploring the nuances of human experiences, social interactions, and the complexities of conflict, making it ideal for the Jos context. Participatory action research, on the other hand, goes beyond merely observing or recording data; it actively involves participants in the research process with the goal of effecting change (Creswell, 2014).

In this study, PAR was employed to engage community members directly in the creation and enactment of Forum Theatre performances. Participants were not only subjects of the research but co-creators of the content. This collaborative approach is essential in conflict zones, where the lived experiences of those directly impacted by the violence are critical in shaping relevant and meaningful interventions. The goal was not just to collect data but to empower participants to take ownership of peacebuilding processes in their communities. As Boal (1992) emphasized, Forum Theatre serves as a rehearsal for reality, allowing communities to explore non-violent conflict resolutions through active participation.

Study Participants

The study involved a diverse group of participants, reflecting the multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition of Jos Metropolis. Participants included community members from various religious backgrounds (Christian and Muslim), traditional leaders, religious leaders, and youth representatives. The inclusion of these different groups ensured a holistic

understanding of the conflict dynamics in the city. The involvement of youth, in particular, was crucial, as they are often the most affected by violence and are also key actors in perpetuating or resolving conflicts.

Community members were selected from neighborhoods that had experienced significant violence in the past, including Dadin Kowa, Anguwan Rogo, and Congo Russia. Religious leaders were invited based on their roles in mediating disputes within their congregations and communities. Youth representatives were selected to reflect the diversity of the population, with participants from both Christian and Muslim communities. This inclusion was vital, as the youth are often central to the cycles of violence but also hold the potential to lead reconciliation efforts.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection process was multi-faceted, utilizing the interactive and participatory nature of Forum Theatre to gather insights from the participants. The main methods of data collection included:

1. Forum Theatre Workshops and Performances

A series of Forum Theatre workshops were conducted over a period of four weeks in different parts of Jos Metropolis. These workshops provided participants with an opportunity to engage directly with the methodology of Forum Theatre. They worked collaboratively to create and perform short scenes that depicted common conflict scenarios in Jos, such as rumors of violence, religious confrontations, and misunderstandings in community interactions.

During the performances, which were attended by community members and leaders, the audience was invited to intervene at any point to change the course of the action. This method allowed participants to propose and act out alternative strategies for resolving conflicts peacefully. By stepping into the roles of actors, participants became spect-actors, actively engaging in the creative problem-solving process. This dynamic interaction provided rich data about the different perspectives within the community, as well as the preferred pathways to peace.

2. Audience Feedback and Interaction

The Forum Theatre methodology relies heavily on audience interaction and feedback. After each performance, audience members were encouraged to discuss what they had witnessed, suggest improvements, and share their reflections on the conflict scenarios presented. This feedback process was integral to understanding how different groups within the community perceived the causes and consequences of conflict, as well as their ideas for resolution.

Audience members were also invited to physically intervene in the scenes by taking on the roles of characters. This form of role reversal allowed participants to test alternative solutions and provided insights into how individuals from different religious or social backgrounds might respond to similar situations. These interactions were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

3. Focus Group Discussions and Interviews

Following the Forum Theatre performances, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with selected participants. These groups included a mix of community members, religious leaders, and youths. The FGDs allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the issues raised during the performances and provided a platform for participants to reflect on the experience of participating in Forum Theatre.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with key stakeholders, such as religious leaders and community elders, to gain further insights into the socio-cultural and religious dimensions of the conflict in Jos. These interviews focused on understanding how these leaders perceived the role of theatre in conflict resolution and what additional efforts were needed to promote peace in the region.

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

The data collected through Forum Theatre performances, audience interactions, FGDs, and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method is appropriate for qualitative research that seeks to identify patterns and themes within textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis involves coding the data and organizing it into key themes that emerge from the participants' responses and interactions during the research process.

The performances and discussions were recorded, transcribed, and then coded to identify recurring themes related to conflict causes, proposed resolutions, and the emotional or psychological responses of participants to the scenarios presented. Themes such as "miscommunication between religious groups," "economic competition," and "rumor-mongering" were central to understanding the conflict dynamics in Jos. Similarly, themes of "collaborative problem-solving" and "empathy building" were crucial to identifying how Forum Theatre could contribute to peacebuilding.

Thematic analysis was also used to evaluate how different groups—youths, religious leaders, and community elders—responded to the interventions. This comparative analysis allowed for a nuanced understanding of how different demographics engage with conflict and peace processes.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the conflict in Jos Metropolis, ethical considerations were paramount in the design and implementation of this study. The following measures were taken to ensure the ethical integrity of the research:

Informed Consent: All participants were fully informed about the purpose and scope of the research before consenting to participate.

Confidentiality: To protect the identities of participants, especially in a highly polarized and volatile environment, all personal information was anonymized.

Sensitivity to Conflict Context: The research team was aware of the potential risks involved in discussing sensitive topics related to religion and conflict. Facilitators were trained to

navigate these discussions carefully, ensuring that participants felt safe and respected throughout the process.

Avoiding Harm: Adequate care was taken to ensure that the scenarios presented in the anti-model did not reinforce stereotypes or incite hostility between religious or ethnic groups.

Findings

The findings of this study are presented based on the data collected through the Forum Theatre workshops, performances, audience feedback, focus group discussions (FGDs), and interviews. The thematic analysis of this data revealed several key insights into the nature of the conflict in Jos Metropolis, the perceptions of participants regarding peacebuilding, and the efficacy of Forum Theatre as a participatory tool for conflict resolution. The findings are organized into the following themes:

Root Causes of Conflict in Jos

One of the primary goals of the Forum Theatre process was to explore the participants' understanding of the root causes of conflict in Jos. Through the interactive performances and audience discussions, several recurring themes emerged as the underlying drivers of tension and violence in the metropolis. These included:

Religious Tensions

Participants highlighted religious differences as a major source of conflict in Jos. The Christian-Muslim divide was often seen as exacerbating existing tensions, with both sides perceiving the other as a threat. During the Forum Theatre performances, scenarios depicting misunderstandings between individuals of different faiths often triggered strong reactions from the audience, demonstrating how deeply religious identities are entrenched in the conflict.

Miscommunication and Rumor-Mongering

Another key theme was the role of miscommunication and the spread of rumors in fueling violence. Participants frequently referred to situations where false information had been spread, leading to escalations in violence. One of the Forum Theatre scenes, for example, portrayed a young man inciting violence based on a false rumor about attacks on his community. Audience members intervened to highlight the importance of verifying information before acting on it, emphasizing the destructive power of unchecked rumors.

Economic Competition

Economic hardship and competition for resources were also identified as significant contributors to the conflict. Both Christian and Muslim participants pointed out that economic inequality and the lack of employment opportunities for youth created fertile ground for violence. The Forum Theatre process allowed participants to reflect on how economic marginalization heightened tensions between different groups, particularly among young people, who felt disenfranchised.

Residential Segregation

Another factor contributing to the conflict is the residential segregation between religious and ethnic groups. Participants noted that certain neighborhoods in Jos are predominantly Christian or Muslim, which has led to increased isolation and mistrust. Forum Theatre scenes that depicted characters crossing into neighborhoods of different faiths or ethnicities often sparked heated debates among the audience, with many reflecting on the fear and mistrust that these physical and social divisions have created.

The Role of Youth in Conflict and Peacebuilding

The study found that youth played a dual role in the conflict dynamics of Jos. On the one hand, young people were often seen as both perpetrators and victims of violence. On the other hand, they were also identified as having the potential to lead peacebuilding efforts.

Youth as Perpetrators and Victims

The Forum Theatre scenes frequently portrayed youth characters as those who were easily swayed into participating in violence. Participants highlighted factors such as peer pressure, unemployment, and a lack of positive role models as reasons why young people were drawn into violent behavior. However, the audience interventions revealed a strong awareness among participants that youth could also be manipulated by political and religious leaders to carry out violent acts, pointing to a broader systemic issue.

Youth as Agents of Change

Conversely, the youth who participated in the Forum Theatre process demonstrated a desire to be part of the solution to the conflict. In one particularly poignant scene, a young man who had initially been portrayed as inciting violence was replaced by an audience member, who re-enacted the scene to show how the character could have used his influence to promote dialogue instead of violence. This intervention revealed a strong belief among the participants that young people, if properly supported and guided, could become key actors in promoting peace and reconciliation in Jos.

Efficacy of Forum Theatre in Peacebuilding

A key objective of this study was to assess how Forum Theatre could be used as an effective tool for peacebuilding in Jos. The findings suggest that the interactive, participatory nature of Forum Theatre made it a powerful medium for fostering dialogue and encouraging reflection on conflict resolution.

Empathy and Perspective-Taking

One of the most significant impacts of Forum Theatre was its ability to foster empathy among participants. By stepping into the roles of characters from different religious or social backgrounds, participants were able to experience conflicts from multiple perspectives. This was particularly evident in scenes where Christian participants played Muslim characters and vice versa. Audience members often commented on how this role reversal allowed them to see the humanity in the "other," breaking down stereotypes and reducing animosity.

Collaborative Problem-Solving

Forum Theatre also encouraged collaborative problem-solving. During the audience interventions, participants frequently offered alternative solutions to the conflicts presented in the scenes. This collective brainstorming process allowed for a wide range of perspectives to be heard and incorporated into the discussion. It also provided a safe space for participants to experiment with non-violent solutions to the conflicts they faced in their daily lives. For example, in one scene, participants suggested that a character should report a potential conflict to community leaders instead of resorting to violence, demonstrating the community's desire for more structured mechanisms for conflict resolution.

Engagement With Religious Leaders

The involvement of religious leaders in the Forum Theatre process was another key factor in its success. By participating in the workshops and discussions, religious leaders were able to engage directly with their congregants and offer guidance on how to navigate conflicts. Their presence lent legitimacy to the process and helped to bridge the gap between religious teachings and practical peacebuilding efforts. Several participants noted that seeing their religious leaders participate in the Forum Theatre workshops encouraged them to take the peacebuilding process more seriously.

Sparking Community Dialogue

Finally, the Forum Theatre performances helped to spark broader community dialogue about the ongoing conflict in Jos. The interactive nature of the performances allowed participants to express their frustrations, fears, and hopes in a constructive manner. The performances also attracted attention from other community members, who were not directly involved in the workshops but were curious about the process. This broader engagement highlighted the potential for Forum Theatre to serve as a catalyst for wider discussions about peacebuilding and conflict resolution within the community.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite the positive outcomes, the study also identified several challenges in implementing Forum Theatre as a peacebuilding tool in Jos.

Logistical Challenges

Organizing and conducting the Forum Theatre workshops required significant logistical coordination, particularly in a conflict-prone environment. Issues such as ensuring the safety of participants, securing venues, and managing transportation for participants from different neighborhoods were persistent challenges. The presence of security concerns also limited the participation of some community members, particularly those who lived in areas where violence was more frequent.

Cultural Sensitivities

While Forum Theatre provided a platform for open discussion, it also brought to light deeply entrenched cultural and religious sensitivities. Some participants were hesitant to engage in discussions that they felt might be interpreted as criticizing their religious or ethnic group. This

tension was especially pronounced when dealing with sensitive topics such as land ownership or accusations of religious intolerance. The facilitation team had to navigate these issues carefully to ensure that the discussions remained respectful and productive.

Sustaining Engagement

A final challenge was sustaining the momentum generated by the Forum Theatre performances. While participants expressed enthusiasm and commitment during the workshops, there were concerns about how to maintain this level of engagement once the workshops concluded. Participants and facilitators alike acknowledged that while Forum Theatre was a powerful tool for initiating dialogue, sustained peacebuilding efforts would require ongoing support from community leaders, NGOs, and government agencies.

Discussion

This section evaluates the outcomes of the Forum Theatre initiative in Jos Metropolis, examining its effectiveness as a tool for peacebuilding and its capacity as a conflict resolution tool, comparing it with other peacebuilding strategies, and considers the limitations encountered during the study.

Effectiveness of Forum Theatre in Peacebuilding

The findings from this study suggest that Forum Theatre was highly effective in engaging participants and fostering dialogue around peacebuilding in Jos Metropolis. The interactive nature of the theatre performances encouraged active participation, enabling community members to reflect on the causes of the conflict and consider alternative solutions to violence. One of the most significant outcomes was the platform Forum Theatre provided for dialogue, allowing participants from different religious and ethnic backgrounds to share their experiences and perspectives.

Forum Theatre facilitated open discussion in a non-threatening environment where sensitive issues like religious tensions and miscommunication could be explored without fear of retaliation. The ability of participants to "step into the shoes" of characters from opposing sides allowed them to develop empathy and a deeper understanding of how violence and conflict are perpetuated by misunderstanding and misinformation. This experiential form of learning, in which participants are not passive spectators but active "spect-actors," deepened the peacebuilding process beyond mere discussion.

Additionally, the immediacy of the feedback and the ability to interrupt and modify the anti-model (the conflict-driven narrative) empowered participants to propose their own non-violent solutions. For example, audience members frequently intervened to de-escalate tense scenarios, suggesting peaceful alternatives to the violent reactions presented in the original scenes. This dynamic allowed participants to practice conflict resolution in real-time, thereby bridging the gap between theoretical understanding and practical action.

Overall, Forum Theatre proved to be an effective peacebuilding tool by:

- Engaging participants emotionally and intellectually.
- Fostering a sense of ownership over the conflict resolution process.
- Providing a platform for marginalized voices to contribute to dialogue.
- Promoting empathy and perspective-taking.

Forum Theatre as a Conflict Resolution Tool

When compared to other peacebuilding strategies, Forum Theatre offers unique contributions to conflict resolution in Jos Metropolis. Traditional approaches to peacebuilding, such as top-down interventions by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and religious institutions, often focus on policy-making, security interventions, and structured dialogue sessions. While these methods are important, they sometimes lack the grassroots engagement necessary to foster lasting change at the community level.

Forum Theatre, in contrast, prioritizes community-driven solutions. It engages directly with the individuals affected by conflict, allowing them to reflect on their lived experiences and experiment with different approaches to peace. This method aligns with participatory action research principles, which emphasize the importance of involving the community in the research process as active participants rather than passive subjects. As a result, Forum Theatre can uncover local solutions to conflict that might not emerge in more formal, structured settings.

Another advantage of Forum Theatre is its flexibility and adaptability. The performative nature of the intervention allows it to address a wide range of conflict dynamics, from economic competition to religious tensions. It can be adapted to suit different cultural contexts and is accessible to diverse audiences, regardless of literacy levels or prior experience with peacebuilding efforts.

However, while Forum Theatre is effective in promoting dialogue and empathy, it is not a panacea for all forms of conflict resolution. Its impact is largely dependent on the willingness of the community to engage in the process and on the sustained involvement of local leaders and institutions. Additionally, Forum Theatre's focus on short-term interventions may not always lead to long-term peace unless supplemented with ongoing efforts, such as policy reforms, economic development programs, and community policing initiatives.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the promising findings, this study faced several limitations that should be acknowledged:

Challenges in Data Collection

Conducting research in a conflict-prone environment like Jos Metropolis presented logistical and security challenges. Ensuring the safety of participants and facilitators required careful planning and coordination. Some participants were reluctant to engage fully in discussions out of fear of retaliation or due to lingering mistrust between different religious or ethnic groups. This limitation may have affected the depth of data collected during the workshops and focus group discussions.

Participant Bias

Another limitation was the potential for participant bias. Since Forum Theatre requires participants to take an active role in conflict resolution scenarios, some participants may have presented idealized versions of their responses to conflict in order to align with socially desirable behaviors. For instance, participants may have advocated for peaceful solutions

during the performances, even if their real-life reactions to conflict situations might differ. This form of social desirability bias can limit the accuracy of the data collected regarding actual conflict behaviors.

Short-Term Nature of the Project

Finally, the short-term nature of the project limited the study's ability to assess the long-term impact of Forum Theatre on peacebuilding in Jos. While the immediate effects of the performances were encouraging, it remains to be seen whether the insights and behaviors developed during the workshops will translate into sustained peacebuilding efforts within the community. Future research should include longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of Forum Theatre interventions on community dynamics and conflict resolution.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for future implementations of Forum Theatre in Jos or similar conflict-prone environments:

Engagement With Local Authorities and NGOs: Future Forum Theatre initiatives should seek closer collaboration with local authorities, NGOs, and other stakeholders to provide ongoing support for peacebuilding efforts and to help sustain the momentum created by the workshops.

Follow-Up Workshops: Regular follow-up workshops should be organized to ensure that participants have continued opportunities to engage in peacebuilding activities. These workshops could focus on specific issues raised during the initial sessions, such as economic challenges or youth unemployment.

Increased Youth Involvement: Given the central role of youth in both the perpetuation and resolution of conflict, future initiatives should prioritize youth participation and leadership in peacebuilding activities. Training programs for youth leaders in conflict resolution and non-violent communication could help amplify the impact of these initiatives.

Long-Term Monitoring and Evaluation: To assess the long-term impact of Forum Theatre on peacebuilding, future studies should incorporate mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. This could include tracking changes in community dynamics, levels of violence, and perceptions of peace over time.

Conclusion

The findings from this study highlight the significant potential of Forum Theatre as a participatory tool for peacebuilding in conflict zones such as Jos Metropolis. By fostering empathy, encouraging collaborative problem-solving, and sparking community dialogue, Forum Theatre provides a platform for affected communities to explore alternative solutions to conflict. While challenges remain, particularly in terms of logistics, cultural sensitivities, and sustaining engagement, the overall impact of the project demonstrates the value of using creative, participatory approaches to address complex social issues.

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Hop, Step, and Jump: The Art, Craft, and Music of Transforming Traditional Education in the North Rift Region of Kenya

David Nyaberi, Lincoln University of Missouri, United States
Naomi Chemursoi, Egerton University, Kenya

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Abstract

Education for promoting ethnic and social cohesion can be challenging in a multicultural country like Kenya, where strong traditional beliefs and practices form the core of an individual culture's social norms. One such practice is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), a traditional initiation rite of passage for girls that the Kenya Government outlawed in 2011. Despite its illegality, some rural communities still practice it as part of their emphasis on traditional education. Community-based programs through various non-profit organizations have tried to root out the practice. However, in some communities in the North Rift Region of Kenya, the progress has been a hop and a step, but sometimes there has been no jump. As part of ongoing research that began in December 2020, this paper presents findings from studying the Tugen people, a subgroup of the Kalenjin, who occupy the Baringo County of Kenya. The findings show that even though some Tugen girls still undergo FGM, the most robust programs put in place by the non-profit groups focus on art, craft, and music as alternatives to the traditional initiation rites. Such programs have made significant contributions to reducing the number of girls undergoing FGM in the Tugen community and thereby improving their access to formal education.

Keywords: Female Genital Mutilation, Culture, Alternative Rites of Passage, Tugen, Kenya

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Introduction

Even though in 2011, the Kenyan Parliament enacted the law to prohibit female genital mutilation (FGM), the practice is still prevalent among various ethnicities in Kenya because of differences between modern and traditional views on the subject. FGM, a traditional education practice in many Kenyan communities, is often in violation of the fundamental rights of women and girls, including the right to education and the highest attainable standard of health (Chesang et al., 2022). Despite the legislation to protect girls from FGM, secrecy and deeply rooted cultural and religious beliefs continue to drive the practice in different communities in Kenya (Loloju et al., 2024).

As part of research that began in December 2020, this paper presents the findings from the Tugen people, a subgroup of the Kalenjin community in Kenya, on the alternative programs put in place by non-profit groups to contain FGM prevalence. The paper begins with an appreciation of the legislative and policy frameworks the Government of Kenya has put in place and proceeds to highlight the indispensable role of alternatives to FGM using a case study of the Tugen community.

Anti-FGM Legal and Policy Framework in Kenya

FGM is a serious violation of the rights of girls in Kenya, as it is in many parts of the world (Kandala, et al., 2019). Kenya has taken significant legal and policy measures to combat FGM, although the practice still exists. Article 2(4) of the *Constitution of Kenya, 2010* states that any law, including customary law, inconsistent with the Constitution is void, and any act or omission in contravention of the Constitution is invalid. These rights are also mentioned in various international treaties and covenants that are part of Kenya's laws under Articles 2(5) and 2(6) of the Constitution. Some of the relevant instruments that call for the elimination of harmful practices include the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the 1979 Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 1981 African Charter on Human and People's Rights, and the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). Since FGM in Kenya is primarily based on customary or cultural practices that negatively affect the fundamental rights of women and girls—such as the right to life, health, dignity, education, and physical integrity—it is inconsistent with the Constitution and, therefore, void.

The primary legislation on FGM in Kenya is the *Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act of 2011*. This Act prohibits the practice of FGM to safeguard against the violation of a girl's and woman's mental or physical integrity. The Act prescribes penalties for those who perform or aid in the procedure. It classifies FGM into three types: clitoridectomy (Type I), excision (Type II), and infibulation (Type III). This classification omits Type IV of FGM, which includes procedures such as genital pricking, cosmetic surgeries, piercing with tongs or scissors including razor blades, labiaplasty, and incising and stretching of the clitoris or labia, among others not classified by the World Health Organization. The *Children Act of 2022* includes provisions for the protection of children from harmful cultural practices, including FGM. Thus, any practice that endangers the health and well-being of children, including FGM, is prohibited. Under section 144, a child needs care and protection if the child has been or is likely to be subjected to FGM, intersex genital mutilation, child marriage, or other customs and practices prejudicial to the child's life, education, or health, among others.

The *National Policy for the Eradication of Female Genital Mutilation* (Sessional Paper No. 3 of 2019) is a revision of the National Policy on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation of 2010 adopted before Kenya's Constitution 2010. The revised policy seeks to enhance initiatives to eliminate FGM in Kenya. The Key policy strategies for achieving this include intergovernmental coordination, strengthened multi-sectoral interventions, partnerships and community participation, empowerment of girls and women, research, and information/ knowledge management on FGM. In addition, the *National Policy on Gender and Development* (Sessional Paper No. 02 of 2019) addresses gender issues broadly and includes components aimed at combating harmful traditional practices such as FGM. It emphasizes gender equality and the protection of women and girls from violence.

Genital Mutilation Act Mutilation Board, established under the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, is the main government agency that enforces anti-FGM measures in Kenya. The Board has formulated a national policy and strategy for eradicating FGM, conducted a situational analysis of the practice, which informed the inclusion of FGM in the competence-based curriculum, and continues to create awareness and engagement among the various stakeholders on FGM. Other key players are the National Gender and Equality Commission (whose mandate includes protecting the rights of women, youth, and children, among others), judicial and enforcement bodies involved in investigating and prosecuting FGM cases, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) efforts through awareness campaigns and education programs aimed at changing attitudes and behaviors related to FGM. For example, the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation No. 14 of 1990 considers FGM as a form of discrimination against women and girls. It urges states to take all necessary measures to eliminate this harmful practice, including legal measures, educational programs, and community engagement.

The Alternatives Rites of Passage

Since FGM was banned in Kenya, the country has made headway in its efforts to combat the practice. There has been a downward trend in the rate of FGM, largely attributed to the robust legal and policy measures, goodwill in all political spheres, and anti-FGM advocacy by non-profit organizations. Such efforts have made it possible for many girls in the historically FGM hotspots to access formal education and be champions of alternatives to FGM.

Despite the robust legislative efforts, challenges to fully eradicating FGM in Kenya remain primarily because of the strong traditional beliefs and practices that form the core of some communities (Mukadi, 2017). The Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) data for 2022 estimates the prevalence of FGM at 15% among women aged 15-49 years. This rate, though still high, is slightly lower than the 21% and 38% rates recorded in 2014 and 1998, respectively (Thomsen & Nilofer, 2023; Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2014) – meaning that the country has been on the right trajectory in combating FGM. However, this progress is not uniform across the country as there has been a hop and step, particularly in northeastern and coastal Kenya, where communities continue to practice FGM at higher rates (United Nations Children's Fund, 2020). Many such areas are affected by severe drought, which hinders anti-FGM efforts (Thomsen & Nilofer, 2023). Rural women and girls with less education and poor livelihoods tend to have a greater risk of FGM. Others do it secretly as a private family affair to avoid stigma, ridicule, and exclusion of families and men who marry uncircumcised girls from important cultural activities. Some have shifted the period of performing FGM, for instance, from December holidays to April and August holidays, to evade law enforcers (Anti-FGM Board, 2019). There is also a marked trend where girls are

being mutilated at young ages (between 5-9 years) to conceal the practice (Anti-FGM Board, 2019). Some perpetrators also disguise themselves under section 19 of the Prohibition of FGM Act by engaging health professionals in the conduct of FGM either at home or in public or private clinics (KOGS, 2023). It is noted, for instance, that 19.7% of girls (0-14 years) and 15% of women (15-49) living with FGM were cut by a medical professional (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2014). This trend, also known as medicalization, is a major threat to anti-FGM efforts (COVAW, 2024).

In addition, the FGM framework is weak and poorly coordinated, especially in the education, health, legal, and economic segments. While the law provides for victim support, ensuring that FGM survivors have access to comprehensive medical and psychological support remains a critical challenge (Sheikh et al., 2023). Enforcement and anti-FGM initiatives have also been hampered by a lack of robust mechanisms for reporting and investigating FGM cases, inadequate resources, inadequate capacity, inadequate FGM data to inform policy programming, and resistance by communities that claim encroachment of their cultural and religious identity. In some regions, there is still a lack of awareness about the legal prohibitions against FGM and associated health risks. The greatest reduction in FGM is seen in western Kenya as well as in the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities (United Nations Children's Fund, 2020). This reduction has been possible because of multifaceted approaches ranging from community engagement, education, empowerment, and support for victims to alternative rites of passage. Thus, as much as anti-FGM progress has been a hop and step in some places, there has been no jump in other areas where alternatives to FGM are increasingly being embraced.

Case Study of the Tugen Traditional Education and FGM

The Tugen is a Kalenjin subtribe that occupies Baringo County and some parts of Nakuru and Elgeyo Marakwet counties in the Rift Valley region of Kenya. They speak the Tugen language, which is Nilotic. Historically and culturally, and as a Kalenjin subgroup, the Tugen are related to the Pokot, Nandi, Terik, Marakwet, Kipsigis, Sabaot, Ogiek, and Keiyo subtribes. There are two subgroups of Tugen: the highland Tugens (also known as Sammor), who practice pastoralism and agriculture, and the North Tugen (also known as Arror), who are nomadic pastoralists.

The Tugens are skilled craftsmen specializing in poisonous arrows, which they sell to neighboring communities such as the Nandi. Tugen traditional homes are circular huts with a cedar post at the center, which is considered sacred as a place for ancestors. Tugen culture is rich in traditions and customs handed down through generations. Traditional activities include farming, pastoralism, and various ceremonies related to rites of passage and community gatherings. One such rite of passage is FGM, which has traditionally been ingrained in the community based on strong customs. Other rites of passage are traditional naming, male circumcision, initiation ceremonies, and burial rites. The Tugen system of education was traditionally a lifelong learning journey that spans from birth to death, involving several stages of growth (Kiptala, 2017). This system, common in African traditional societies, focuses on passing down tribal knowledge, skills, and values from elders to children through oral teachings and hands-on activities. Instructors, chosen from within the family or clan, impart this education informally through stories, legends, riddles, and songs and by demonstrating tasks for the young to imitate. Emphasizing practical learning, the system involves children actively participating in and performing skills such as carving, masonry, clay working, cloth making, cooking, and home management.

The traditional education system aims to prepare boys and girls with skills suited to their gender roles. Girls were historically educated to be proficient mothers and manage their households. At the same time, boys were trained for roles such as warriors, farmers, heads of families, and other male-centric jobs. This system was centered on preparing children for adult roles through systematic socialization into societal norms, religions, and moral values. The community viewed education as vital for ensuring that children grew into knowledgeable and disciplined adults, with education primarily occurring within the family home. Parents were responsible for properly educating their children in tribal customs, and failure to do so could lead to the family's disgrace. Education involves both formal and informal methods. Children learned through hands-on experiences with skilled craftsmen and apprenticeships, acquiring trades like blacksmithing or herbal medicine. This process included direct teaching and practical involvement, such as working with blacksmiths (like *Kiptombul* from *Tirimionin*) to learn toolmaking or with herbalists (like *Chepkerichin* and *Chepsakitin*) to understand medicinal practices (Kiptala, 2017).

Children also received instruction through constant corrections, warnings, and participation in household chores, with boys learning from their fathers and girls from their mothers. Girls assisted their mothers with tasks such as caring for their younger brothers and sisters, weaving grass baskets, grinding grain, and making small clay pots. Children gathered in the evenings before their parents, grandparents, or elders to learn about their ancestry, tribal origins, customs, and traditions (Kiptala, 2017). This education aimed to support the children's physical development, build endurance, and enhance their memory. Initiation rites, including ear-piercing and tooth removal, marked stages of development and transition from childhood to adolescence. These rites included formal lessons integral to the community's educational system (Kiptala, 2017). At puberty (12-15 years), circumcision was a crucial rite of passage, signaling full community membership. This rite involved rigorous training in endurance, respect, and social responsibilities. Boys and girls learned to handle pain, respect elders, and fulfill societal roles. The training aimed to instill community values, ethics, and personal responsibility, preparing them for adult life and responsibilities within their family and society.

Overall, Tugen education blends practical skills, social norms, and moral teachings to prepare children for their future roles, ensuring they develop the necessary qualities for contributing effectively to their community. It includes listening to and imitating riddles, myths, proverbs, and folk tales, which helped introduce children to their traditions. The community constitution (*Kigirei*), established by elders' councils, is crucial for maintaining order, with severe penalties for violations. Oral literature, which includes myths and folk tales, teaches ethical values and social norms. Proverbs (*kalewenaniik*) are employed in conversations to impart moral lessons and guidance on behavior. Health education for children involves teaching safety practices and hygiene.

FGM and the Tugen Traditional Education

As various studies indicate, FGM is a deeply ingrained cultural practice within the traditions of the Tugen people. Traditionally, FGM was carried out by a traditional practitioner using rudimentary tools without anesthesia. Despite the efforts of different anti-FGM campaigners and the Kenyan government, eliminating the practice has proven difficult in the Tugen community. According to Mukadi et al. (2015), the Tugen men's participation in household and community socioeconomic development is greatly influenced by the marriage of circumcised or uncircumcised women. Most of them prefer to marry circumcised women due

to the cultural belief that they would be respected members of the community (Mukadi et al., 2015). As barbaric as this tradition seems, historically, a circumcised Tugen woman is considered more respectable and more likely to be assigned leadership roles than the uncircumcised one.

The decision to mutilate a Tugen girl involves significant input from both family and community members, with immediate family—particularly the girl, her mother, her father, and peer groups—playing a crucial role, and fathers ultimately making the final decision (Mukadi et al., 2015). The reasons given by the community for FGM are varied and context-specific. The practice holds substantial social and economic importance at multiple levels for the Tugen. At the community level, FGM is viewed as a crucial rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood, instilling values and training and preparing girls for future responsibilities, thereby maintaining family stability. At the individual level, FGM is believed to protect girls, secure their social acceptance and respect, enhance marriage prospects, ensure cleanliness, and curb sexual promiscuity by diminishing sexual sensitivity. It is also thought to prevent excessive clitoral growth and preserve virginity. At the household level, FGM can be seen as a means of generating wealth through high bride prices, achieving social acceptance, and gaining honor and recognition.

Alternatives to the Tugen Traditional Initiation Rites

Whether social or economic, the Tugen justifications for FGM sustain the practice and contribute to its continuation (Mukadi et al., 2015). However, the Tugen people have started embracing alternative rites of passage initiated by non-profit organizations in the region. The alternative programs employed in the Tugen region to mark the transition to adulthood involve a combination of local advocacy, education, ceremonies, and support efforts tailored to the unique cultural and social dynamics of the Tugen people. They seek to maintain the cultural practice of initiating girls to adulthood without FGM. Various alternative rites of passage (ARP) programs are encouraged by NGOs such as AMREF Health Africa, The Girl Generation, So They Can, and community-based organizations (CBOs) like the Tugen Women Network.

Transition Ceremonies and Music: Music plays a central role in the various Tugen ceremonies and festivals that mark the transition to adulthood. They involve traditional songs and dances (with musical instruments) and display the traditional Tugen wares, feasts, and community gatherings, which replace the traditional FGM ceremony. The songs enhance memory, discipline, self-expression, and communication. The girls are educated about their cultural values and the beauty of the Tugen people during such ceremonies. Through the traditional songs, the girls are guided on how they should prepare for marriage, seek out responsible husbands, and gain respect as mothers. For instance, Dandelion Africa, a Kenyan NGO, has been organizing and funding ARP ceremonies in Nakuru, Baringo, Kajiado, and Narok counties, where girls are secluded in seminars and imparted with positive cultural values while being encouraged to reject FGM (Ngugi & Rasto, 2024).

Art, Craft, and Education Workshops: Week-long workshops are held to educate girls about the immediate and long-term health risks of FGM, positive norms and values, self-esteem, life skills, girls' sexual and reproductive rights, and their empowerment. The workshops, often mixed with dances, pottery, or arts and crafts activities, culminate in a symbolic celebration of the girl's transition into adulthood with blessings from cultural elders and leaders. The art and craft sessions include, for instance, making traditional cowhide thong

(*Riguita*) for tethering cows, anklets, necklaces made of beads (preferably from the *Kipungeiwa* tree) and sisal strings (*kilembele*), among others. Sometimes, the workshops involve public denouncement of FGM. For instance, in November 2023, So They Can facilitated a three-day awareness workshop for students and community elders from various places in Baringo (including the Tugen community) (So They Can, 2024). About 105 children from local primary schools were engaged in the workshop. They were educated about child rights, the dangers of FGM, drug and substance abuse, leadership skills, and upholding good values in the community, among other critical aspects.

Community Engagement and the Role of Elders: Some NGOs have facilitated dialogue with the Tugen community with assistance from the traditional elders, especially when they want to educate the community about ARP. The elders are instrumental in mobilizing community resources and supporting the NGO initiatives, collaborating with them to end the practice. Although the strong cultural dynamics still hinder progress, there has been significant change because of the support provided by the elders. Dandelion Africa, for example, has been training youth and women as trainers of trainers (ToTs) for anti-FGM crusades (Ngugi & Rasto, 2024). The ToTs, in turn, hold community and campus dialogues with youth, community elders, and religious leaders about ARP. Through such programs, some conservative members of the communities have begun to appreciate that FGM is a violation of human rights and that it is time to say no to such practice. Through grassroots advocacy, boys are empowered to change the cultural attitudes and beliefs around gender roles and norms and protect their sisters from FGM.

Conclusion

FGM continues to be a big challenge in communities like Tugen, where there are deeply ingrained cultural practices. To effectively encourage the abandonment of FGM, a supportive environment must be created. This requires a strong commitment from the stakeholders to implement appropriate social measures, alternative rites of passage, robust legislation, and effective advocacy, education, and awareness efforts. Effective enforcement of the legislation requires adequate resources and human capacity, as well as robust mechanisms for reporting and investigating cases of FGM. However, as this paper indicates, alternative rites of passage focusing on traditional music, arts and crafts, and community engagement are critical for eradicating or reducing FGM, especially in communities that still hold onto this outdated cultural practice. The lessons from the Tugen show the need for communities to embrace such alternatives without necessarily completely abandoning their culture but recognizing the importance of aligning with the human rights of girls and women. There needs to be a firm policy action to promote such alternatives among the Tugen people, gender equality, and equal rights for both boys and girls, as well as for women and men.

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***Traditional Knowledge, Culture and Ecology of the Kajang Custom Area:
An Ecossemiotics Study***

Supriadi, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia
Aceng Ruhendi Saifullah, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia
Eri Kurniawan, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia
Muhammad Hasyim, Universitas Hasanuddin, Indonesia
Tadjuddin Maknun, Universitas Hasanuddin, Indonesia

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Abstract

The modernization of society may corrode and influence the culture prevalent in general, but it will not have the same effect on the culture of the Kajang traditional community. The urgency of this inquiry is prompted by the fact that Kajang remains unaffected by the passage of time. This research aims to explain (1) the philosophy of life of the Kajang traditional community, Bulukumba Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, and (2) the relationship between traditional communities and the area's ecology. To address these three issues, we employ the semiotic trichotomy technique proposed by Peirce (1966) and the dialectal language ecology framework developed by Bang and Door (1993). Both are explained according to the realm of study between the culture inherent in indigenous communities and the language used by their speakers. The data collection methods used in this research are field observation, documentation, interviews and recording. Data was analyzed qualitatively. The results of the study show that the philosophy of life of the Kajang traditional community is to live very simply, have enough, preserve the surrounding nature, preserve culture, curb lust, and maintain morality. These are all based on the concept of *tallasak kamase-mase*, living simply. With *tallasak kamase-mase*, the community protects traditional areas (forests, gardens) because the relationship between traditional communities is not only with the creator but also with humans and those who have died. Furthermore, the house structure of the Kajang traditional community is unique and full of symbols.

Keywords: Ecology Language, Ecossemiotics, Culture of Kajang

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Introduction

Traditional knowledge is born from the habits of society in a way of survival, of course, the experiences and past of their predecessors. From that experience, knowledge is created that can be applied by treating humans with other humans, treating forests in the Customary Area and the relationship between humans and the creator. The Kajang customary community is in a forest area called the Kajang Ammatoa customary area. The forest, for the Kajang customary community, has a special meaning. They believe the forest is where human spirits descend from heaven to earth and vice versa. In the area, there is a customary leader called Ammatoa and other structural ministers. The community believes Ammatoa was the first human to descend from heaven to earth. The area is believed to be Tana Toa, which the world recognizes as a customary area in Bulukumba Regency. It has been awarded the best forest guard in South Sulawesi.

This belief makes them harmonious between leaders and their communities, communities within the customary environment and outside the customary area, and even harmonious relations between forests and humans, humans and the creator. Because by considering that the forest is a sacred area full of supernatural powers that can bring prosperity and disaster if the forest is not preserved according to the philosophy of life (philosophy) of the Kajang indigenous community. In addition, another uniqueness displayed by the Ammatoa Community in Kajang, Bulumba Regency, is that it is unique compared to other community groups in Bulukumba. Its uniqueness is indicated by always dressing in black, such as shirts, sarongs, knee-length pants, headbands for men, and headscarves for women. Therefore, this research is considered urgent to be discussed at an international conference and published in international proceedings as a treasure trove of knowledge for foreign countries. Indonesia is rich in language, art, and culture and has traditional knowledge that still exists today.

The Used Theory

Various theories are born about the relationship between humans and their environment. Research on ecological discussions across disciplines is being updated and used as a research topic due to human needs and natural phenomena. In basic understanding, ecology is knowledge about managing and knowing the conditions or portraits of nature, specifically those of humans and animals. The relationship between species such as fish in the estuary and butterflies on land and the reciprocal relationship between components that form an environment. From here arises an understanding of the meaning of the joints of life. However, with the development of technology and the increasing age of geography, humans feel the difference in the environment, so collaborative science is needed from one field to another field of science. Ecology language emerged in the discussion of language related to the environment, which ultimately gave rise to a cross-disciplinary theory, namely ecolinguistics. Furthermore, ecosemiotics are used because of the relationship between the environment and the concept of natural signs, as research (Maran and Kull, 2014), *Ecosemiotics: Main Principles and Current Developments*.

Ecolinguistics and ecology of language are two names that have the same meaning, depending on field experience, culture, and perspective when seeing something observed. The term ecology was first introduced by a German biologist, Ernest Haeckel (1834). At that time, he had not realized the connection between the environment and language. Then, in 1970, the idea of language ecology emerged, initiated by an expert named Einar Haugen.

This expert tried to focus his study on the relationship between ecology and language as an interdisciplinary study.

Furthermore, Muhlhausler, in his writing entitled *Ecolinguistics in The University* (2002: 2), explains that:

Ecology is the study of functional interrelationships. The two parameters we wish to interrelate are language and the environment/ecology. Depending on whose perspective one takes, one will get either ecology of language or language of ecology. Combined, they constitute the field of ecolinguistics. Ecology of language studies the support systems languages require for their continued wellbeing and the factors that have affected the habitat of many languages in recent times.

Related to this, there are three ecolinguistic parameters, namely (1) the existence of interrelationships, interactions and interdependence; (2) the existence of a certain environment; and (3) the existence of diversity in a certain environment can be used as a guide in dissecting language and the environment (Fill and Muhlhausler, 2001: 1). Meanwhile, to approach the object of study in the realm of signs in Indigenous Peoples, a semiotic approach is needed.

Semiotics is a science that studies signs in human life (Noth, 1990: 3; Maras, 2002: 115; Hoed, 2008: 3). This means that everything present in our lives is seen as a sign, something that we must give meaning to. According to the followers of structuralist de Saussure, a sign is a meeting between form (reflected in a person's cognition) and meaning or content (understood by humans who use the sign). Furthermore, the relationship between form and meaning is not personal but social, based on social "agreements/conventions" (Noth, 1990: 59-60). There are conventions among indigenous peoples that form as habits and become culture. One form of culture that can be observed is the use of the philosophy of life of the Kajang indigenous people as traditional knowledge that must be recognized and preserved.

Method

The data collection method used in this study is participatory observation. This method is carried out by actively participating or being directly involved in the socio-cultural activities of the Kajang community. In addition to conducting participatory observation, the Traditional Leader was also interviewed to obtain socio-cultural background data on the perception of whites and blacks and continued to the core discussion of the interview, namely the life guidelines that can make the community exist until now, of course, in the Kajang community. Recording was carried out using audiovisual equipment to help ensure that the interview results were not scattered and quickly forgotten. Interviewing the Traditional Leader was also accompanied by audiovisual recording techniques and note-taking techniques. The data were analyzed qualitatively-interpretively.

Literature of Journal

From the results of literature searches or library studies, several writings were found in journal articles and proceedings articles, which have discussed the Ammatoa community in Kajang, Bulukumba Regency. These writings can be seen as follows.

1. The practice of local wisdom of kajang people to save forests and biodiversity: A cultural-Based Analysis (Rahman et al., 2019)
2. The function and meaning of tope'le'leng in the death ritual of the kajang tribe, south Sulawesi (Juniati, 2022)
3. A cognitive linguistics study to reveal the conceot of death of Indonesia indigenous tribe (Ma'rud & Rita, 2021)
4. Reflection of the pasang ri kajang in settlements traditional communities kajang bulukumba regency (Erawati et al., 2022)

Literature of Book

1. Hasanuddin, et al. entitled "Spectrum of Cultural History and Bulukumba Tradition" (2007). This book has discussed the early history of the emergence of the Ammatoa community, ritual events, and the diversity of grave forms and types of tombstones and house morphology). This article only mentions that black is the identity colour of the Ammatoa community.
2. Akib, "Ammatoa: The Black-Clothed Community" (2008). This article discusses the Kajang community generally from the aspect of social and cultural anthropology (belief systems, settlement patterns, and the role of Ammatoa). The mention of the colour black in this article only refers to identity.
3. Palammai and Mappasomba entitled "History of the Existence of the Five Karaeng Tallua Custom in Kajang" (2012) can be said to generally discuss the Kajang community from the aspects of social and cultural anthropology (mythology of the Kajang community, leadership of the Kajang community, the current situation of the young generation of the Kajang indigenous community).
4. Darmapoetra entitled "Kajang: Lovers of Togetherness and Conservation of Nature" (2014). This book can be said to discuss the Kajang community generally from the aspect of cultural anthropology (religious system and ritual of andingingi 'cooling', in this case meaning 'cooling nature').

Ontologically, the eight writings have the same material object, namely the Ammatoa community in Kajang, Bulukumba Regency, South Sulawesi. However, seen from the aspect of its formal object or the element of the material object, the four journals and the four books are different, so their epistemological basis is also different. Thus, the methods and results of the discussion are also different from each other.

This study also chooses the same material object, namely the Ammatoa community in Kajang, Bulukumba Regency, South Sulawesi. But with a different formal object, namely seen from the side of traditional knowledge, culture and ecology in the life of the Ammatoa community. This problem has not been discussed in the eight writings mentioned above. This study uses semiotic and ecolinguistic theories with qualitative and interpretative methods.



Picture 1: Tradisional Knowledge (Showing Identity)
Documentation Source: Imyen Talas

The Kajang indigenous community highly sanctifies the area where they live and believes that the world and its contents have supernatural powers, such as living trees, life, and objects that are given power. In the andingingi (cooling) ritual, several activities, one of which is burning a crowbar, are seen in the photo above. The following refers to the three parts that are meant by traditional knowledge: culture and the Kajang culture in the Customary Area.

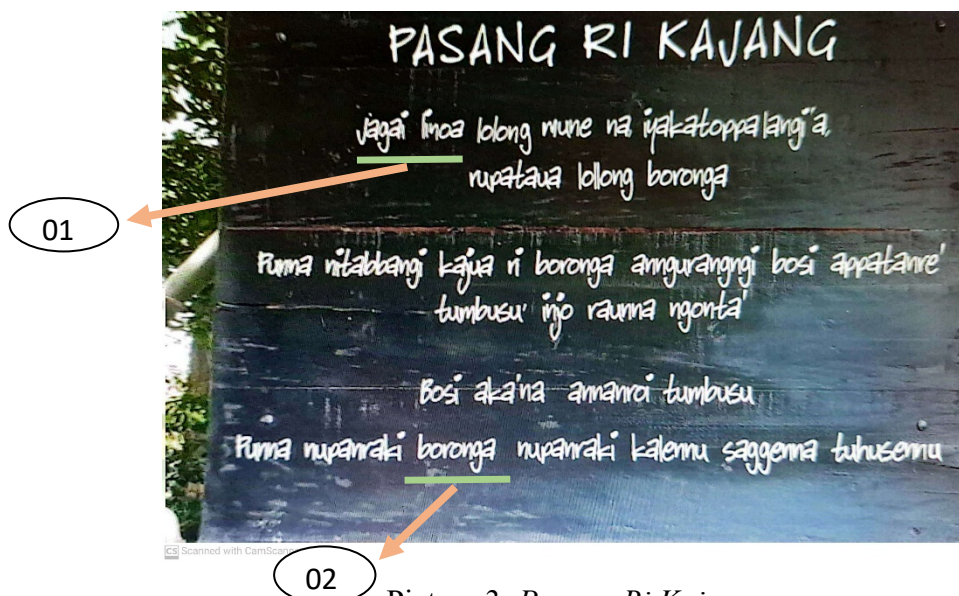


Picture 2¹: Field Data Designation Analysis

Ancestors or people before them (Kajang society), spirits, and supernatural powers are believed to exist, and their existence is actual. The traditional leaders and their community strongly feel this belief. They want to maintain the balance with several natural phenomena, namely andingingi or cooling the earth. This community is Muslim with traditional Islam, which they call patuntung, which firmly adheres to the messages of their ancestors to their predecessors. The patuntung beliefs collected in Pasang consist of four ideas. The ideas/elements in question are: 1) Elements related to God or supernatural beings and

¹ Please note that previously everyone could visit or enter the traditional area, by wearing black clothes and removing footwear and could document everything that visitors were interested in photographing, one of which was taking pictures with the community and others. However, currently taking documentation inside the area is strictly prohibited!

including supernatural powers; 2) The element of spirit is closely related to the last concept (Allo Anjoregang), namely the existence of heaven and hell and so on (Erawati, 2022).



Picture 3: *Pasang Ri Kajang*

(Excerpt from the Life Guidance of the Kajang Indigenous Community)

The messages above, one phrase and one word that can be analyzed by representing the contents of the sentence above and adjusted to the image displayed in this study:

	Local	Meaning
Phrase	<i>Jagai linoa</i>	Take care of the earth
Word	<i>boronga</i>	forest

a. Boronga/Forest

Forest is a home, a place to live, a container, and a path (Indigenous people's perspective).

From the ecological perspective, with the presence of their predecessors, they are present and alive. With them living, they must hold fast to their ancestors' message; with their ancestors' message, they exist until now. With their existence, they have received the UNESCO award for being the best forest guardian in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. There is the involvement of spirits with the presence of tree containers because trees are believed to be the path of the rise and fall of ancestors to communicate with customary leaders in the customary area.

b. Jagai lino/ Take Care of the Earth

Meanwhile, to protect the earth or in the local language of the community, "jagai linoa" was done by the Indigenous community before the entry of the Islamic religion into the area. Researchers can say that this message or call is purely one of the traditional knowledge from the many other conventional knowledge possessed by the community. Similar holy books of Muslim communities can be found, and recommendations to protect and care for the earth open the world with the creation of a caliph/leader (Qur'an 35:39, Qur'an 6:165). Furthermore, Qur'an 7:56 reads, "And do not cause corruption on the earth after Allah has

made it good." Continued Qur'an 30:41, which reads, "Damage has appeared on land and in the sea due to the deeds of human hands" This is related to the *andingi lino* ritual, which is held every year to maintain the balance of the earth and its contents (Shihab, 2002). Because with this ritual, there is a contaminated relationship between humans and their God, humans and fellow humans, humans and supernatural beings and humans and the surrounding nature. Then, ²the Qur'an 17:26 sounds, "And do not waste (your wealth) excessively". In terms of the sign in this verse from the perspective of sign semiotics, the Kajang community understands the concept of Islam very well, which calls for not being wasteful in spending wealth or ownership in the idea of *tallasa kamase-masea* for the Kajang people or living with complete simplicity. So, it can be interpreted that these are all messages from their ancestors that serve as the guidelines for the lives of their community.

Conclusion

The results of the research show that the philosophy of life of the Kajang traditional community is to live very simply, have enough, preserve the surrounding nature, preserve culture, curb lust, and maintain morality. These are all based on the '*tallasak kamase-mase*' concept, living simply. With '*tallasak kamase-mase*', the community protects traditional areas (forests, gardens) because the relationship between traditional communities is not only with the creator but also with humans and those who have died. Furthermore, the house structure of the Kajang traditional community is unique and full of symbols. The front view does not have a 'paladang' or terrace because all guests are considered important and God's guests, as a form of importance that can be discussed in the house.

Furthermore, the kitchen of the Kajang traditional house is located at the front. This means that all guests being entertained can see the process of making the banquet, including both drinks and food. Lastly, the houses of the Kajang traditional community have a roof shape that resembles a boat, and every house in the traditional area faces west.

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² Messy, M., & Charles, C. (2022). Character Education in the Qur'an Surah Al-Isra Verses 23-30 According to Tafsir Al-Azhar. *Innovative: Journal Of Social Science Research*, 2(1), 472-482.

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Contact email: daengrhopu259@gmail.com

Inclusive AI-Based Chatbots for Public Services in Finland: Potential of Constructivism

Zahra Hosseini, University of Helsinki, Finland
Aaro Tupasela, University of Helsinki, Finland

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Abstract

Despite innovative initiatives, digital gaps persist, necessitating optimal solutions for both customers and service providers, especially for multicultural societies. Grounded on the fundamental premise that every user of public services engages in ongoing digital literacy and cultural inclusion, this study advocates integrating constructivism learning theory and its principles into inclusive chatbot design for public services. Further, this paper proposes a paradigm shift in the role of chatbots, advocating for their evolution from mere autoresponders to mentors. Rather than merely retrieving information based on keywords, chatbots can proactively guide users through their digital journeys by employing findings from constructivism, a fundamental learning theory. Integrating principles of constructivism in chatbot design improves users' digital literacy by actively engaging them in the learning process. It ensures that the content and interactions are personalized, culturally sensitive, and flexible. A constructivist environment enables AI-based chatbots to evolve and adapt through user interactions. This approach is fundamental to the development of inclusive chatbots that cater to the diverse needs of all users. In essence, this paper offers actionable insights for practitioners and policymakers alike, emphasizing the importance of collaboration across disciplines to meet the diverse needs of users.

Keywords: AI-Based Chatbots, LLM, Inclusive Design, Migration, Constructivism, Public Services

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Introduction

During the past few decades, almost all countries have begun to adopt some type of digitalization strategy concerning public services. These strategies are seen by their proponents to provide numerous public benefits including, improvements to sustainability (Randall, 2017), improved and more communicative governance structures (Rackwitz & Palaric, 2024), and improvements in higher education (Haase & Buus, 2020). Despite such visions, studies also indicate that digitalization strategies can serve as a form of exclusion, particularly with migrants and older people (Buchert et al., 2023). Digital inequality increasingly concerns adopting ever more prevalent digitalization strategies (Helsper, 2021). Most recently, interest in the role of artificial intelligence, both as a national policy preoccupation and technology has taken center stage in these discussions (Lutz, 2019; Sartori & Theodorou, 2022). Within this domain, chatbots have played an important role in fostering inclusion and creating new forms of exclusion.

Chatbots are computer programs that emulate and interact with users using natural language processing (NLP), as well as pre-defined dialogues (Androutsopoulou et al., 2019; Shawa & Atwell, 2007). Chatbots, also called conversational agents (Lester et al., 2004) are used to understand the user's intent so that an answer can be provided based on a specific domain of knowledge. Although chatbots have been around for decades, the use of chatbots has become increasingly commonplace in both public and private service sectors, providing one avenue through which customers can seek relevant information to their queries. Public services see chatbots as one way of reducing the burden of service requirements concerning simple and repetitive questions. In this sense, they are seen as a cost-saving tool.

Accordingly, this paper investigated the opportunities and challenges of using chatbots in public services, with a focus on migrant users in Finland. Using examples from running public service chatbots in the City of Helsinki, we provide examples of how developing more inclusive methodologies can better account for user diversity and needs and thus help inform the design and implementation of chatbots based on LLM.

Methods and Material

The material for this paper is based on a research project entitled "Creating trustworthy and accessible digital public services for migrants" (Trust-M) funded by the Strategic Research Council (SRC) of Finland (2022–2028). Our goal is to explore how natural language processing can help migrant women better integrate through digital public services in Finland. In collaboration with the City of Espoo, we identified chatbots as a key tool for municipalities to provide information. While Espoo does not currently use chatbots, our research focuses on their potential, given their growing role in public and private services (Makasi et al., 2020; van Noordt & Misuraca, 2019). The City of Helsinki, for example, maintains and updates an AI registry that contains information on all the AI systems that the city has in use (<https://ai.hel.fi/en/ai-register/>). The register also contains anonymized information on data sets, such as conversation logs, which are used to train the models. This information can be used to train new models using LLM for example.

To explore the challenges and opportunities that chatbots provide we conducted two separate, but related sets of interviews. The first group of interviews, which consisted of 10 interviews, focused on how migrants interact with digital public services in Finland. The second set of interviews, which consisted of 9 interviews, were conducted with public administration

officials in the city of Helsinki, which is adjacent to Espoo and Finland's largest city. In these interviews, we sought to better understand some of the issues that cities face when operating a chatbot-based service. Given the rapid development of natural language processing, we see that there is unmet potential in the use of chatbots in public services (cf. Larsen & Følstad, 2024). Our research questions focused on the daily operation of chatbots in the city of Helsinki and the possibilities and challenges that they afforded in terms of delivering digital public services.

In addition to semi-structured interviews with experts in the city of Helsinki, we have collected public documents and reports on the development, implementation, and use of chatbots in public services, especially in Finland. In our analysis, we thematically coded the interviews into broader categories and identified issues that had relevance in the implementation of speech-based natural language processing. Our analysis was further informed by principles derived from inclusive digital design and constructivism to help identify areas where mentoring through such a platform could help create a more productive and effective dialogue between migrant women and the chatbot.

Research Context

Our initial approach and entry into looking at chatbot use in Helsinki was supposed to be through the maternity services chatbot NeRo. We chose NeRo since it was an important gateway through which the city maternity services are able to reach all mothers, including migrant mothers in providing maternity guidance and services. During the early stages of our research project, however, the City of Helsinki decided to merge NeRo with the larger social and healthcare service chatbot Hester (City of Helsinki, 2024). This move was justified by the city as wanting to develop “one voice” for their social and healthcare chatbot services and simplify the way information could be found through the city’s digital services.

The city of Helsinki chatbots are based on IBM’s Watsonx Assistant and were launched in early 2021 (IBM, 2024). When launched the city had numerous separate chatbots or virtual assistants as they call them. Over the years, however, it has merged several chatbots into a multi-chatbot, which covers numerous sectors in the social and healthcare services. Currently, the city maintains 8 different chatbot services.

As mentioned, in order to ensure that the chatbot is providing correct answers, the city employs chatbot whisperers, who oversee the log files to make sure that correct responses are being provided. According to the City of Helsinki:

The system records the questions asked and the answers given during the chat session in a log file. The log is regularly analysed by the service development team to see how the service has responded to customer questions. The analysis will identify areas of content where the training material and the answers provided by the service need to be improved. After the analysis, the training material is defined and more sample questions can be added or, for example, new discussion paths can be created to improve the user experience of the service. Customer feedback can also be used to define answers and add more information. (<https://ai.hel.fi/en/sotebotti-hester-en/>)

Each chatbot whisperer has specific domain knowledge, such as maternity clinic knowledge, but who are then trained to understand how chatbots operate and make necessary updates to the system or to the dialogues in order to resolve inaccuracies that the chatbot may encounter

when trying to respond to queries? In this sense, the correction of mistakes is made post hoc and since the city does not collect any identifying information on users, the whisperers cannot re-contact individuals who have been provided with inaccurate information.

Opportunities and Challenges in Chatbot Development for Public Services

Most of the public services in Finland use traditional chatbots. Chatbots are seen as only one service pathway among many, which include face-to-face contact, online information, as well as live-chat options. There are, however, numerous disadvantages to existing written-text-based chatbot models. The models operate usually with a limited set of languages. The chatbots are sensitive to spelling mistakes, and the models are only able to handle simple questions. For users, such as migrants coming to a new country, the lack of necessary language or technical skills may significantly hamper their ability to find useful information for their integration into everyday life in a new country. Consequently, they may also miss out on important information and resources that may be available to them in helping to find their place in a new culture.

In addition to the technical challenges of traditional chatbots, public authorities such as cities, municipalities, and tax authorities are legally mandated to ensure that the information that they provide to customers is accurate and up to date. With traditional chatbots, this has been addressed through using chatbot whisperers. Therefore, the challenge of LLM “hallucinations” must be taken seriously by public authorities if they are to properly use new technologies (Hannigan et al., 2024; Salamin et al., 2023). In addition, public authorities are required to take into consideration the privacy concerns of users, ensuring that personal information does not ‘leak’ out or become available to non-authorized parties.

In our research and interviews, we identified five areas related to the use of chatbots that could benefit from a constructivism approach. These are multilingual support, user-friendly design, cultural sensitivity (inclusiveness), 24/7 availability, and privacy and security. We identified these issues as relevant based on the responses of our research participants, as well as being identified in the literature as being important considerations when developing technologies for migrants. We also see these domains as important areas for development using the approach that we outline above in developing chatbots from being mere autoresponders to mentors.

Multilingual Support

In our interviews with both city administrators and migrants, language support was an issue that was raised numerous times. In the City of Helsinki chatbot services, the languages that are supported include Finnish, Swedish, and sometimes English. For migrants moving to Finland, Finnish and Swedish are usually very difficult options since almost no one outside of these countries speaks these languages. Interviews with immigrants revealed that chatbots operating exclusively in Finnish posed a barrier for those who, even after living in Finland for an extended period, were not confident in their Finnish language skills. The use of English is commonplace and provides a much better medium through which to use chatbots. For many migrants, however, the use of English may also provide challenges since it may not be their mother tongue.

An important issue related to language support relates to correct spelling. Several chatbot whisperers noted that the chatbot is not good at correcting or accounting for spelling mistakes

and consequently is not able to ascertain the correct response that it should provide. As a result, users are often not able to get the necessary information that they are seeking.

User-Friendly Design

A second issue of concern that arose in the interviews and research relates to design. Almost all chatbots that are in use today follow a similar design logic: they are small boxes that pop up at the bottom of the right-hand side of your screen. In most cases, they are only able to facilitate very simple questions. For example, the chatbot for the International House Helsinki (IHH) which serves as a gateway for people moving to Finland and seeking information maintains a chatbot, that provides the following prompt when started: “I’m still learning and understand best if you ask about one topic at a time. How may I help you?” (<https://ihhelsinki.fi/>).

The results revealed that most migrants who participated in the study preferred face-to-face communication over conversational chatbots, as they found the automated systems difficult to engage with and often abandoned the chat upon realizing it was not user-friendly. A migrant questioned the necessity of using an automated chatbot for queries, considering her proficiency in navigating web pages. Notably, none of the participants had prior experience using AI conversational chatbots for public sector services, further highlighting the gap in accessibility.

Cultural Sensitivity (Inclusiveness)

A third issue that emerged from our research is cultural sensitivity. The role of digitalization in Finland has been a central element in the development of public services for decades. Yet for many migrants, the use of such services may not be self-evident.

For migrants moving to Finland, questions related to relocation are often quite complex and require the expertise of a multitude of experts. Although chatbots are not expected to provide support for this, the design limits may result in increased forms of exclusion. Since chatbots are also specific to services, questions related to migration and residency may require the chatbot to refer users to other chatbots, such as the Kamu chatbot, which is maintained by the Finnish Immigration Services. Interview with migrants indicated that the Finnish Immigration Service's chatbot, Kamu, was found useful for providing general guidance on immigration processes, particularly for tracking application status.

In this sense, the development of chatbots over the years has not included a particular interest in using inclusiveness as a parameter for design choices but rather design and development have focused on technical solutions and the accuracy of the information that is being provided as opposed to taking into account the needs of specific user groups, such as minorities or migrant communities. A better understanding of different cultural norms and expectations regarding interaction and communication with public authorities can help in facilitating a more inclusive approach to design.

24/7 Availability

One of the main benefits that chatbots provide in terms of public services relates to them being available 24/7. The results highlighted the convenience of a chatbot due to its flexibility in time and location. This is a significant improvement over the availability of

human services and support, which are limited to working hours. Many chatbots are able to provide links to human support services such as live chat, but this feature does not work after usual working hours. This is a challenge for individuals who may be working during the day and not be able to readily take time off of work to find relevant information. This feature of chatbots provides a significant improvement in terms of making services available.

Privacy and Security

The final concern which was raised by public service managers related to privacy and security. Many of the chatbot whisperers that we interviewed noted that the logs that they review regularly contain specific and very personal information that is sensitive in nature.

Within the context of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), public service providers need to pay close attention to where data is processed and stored and how anonymization is ensured to protect users from unwanted violations of privacy. Luckily, these issues have garnered increased attention during the past years.

The compartmentalization of service information by public authorities may further complicate the process of finding relevant information. The sharing of personal information and interacting with authorities may entail significant risk and concern for some individuals, especially some asylum seekers. Furthermore, the expectation that information should be gleaned from chatbots as opposed to humans may seem inappropriate or even cumbersome for some.

A common challenge that is highlighted throughout these five issues we have discussed above relates to a difficulty that users face in terms of not knowing what and how to interact with chatbots. In other words, users still don't know what to ask. Many questions may be complex and require expertise from numerous different service fields, so users may not be aware of how chatbots operate. Therefore, chatbots need to provide prompts to users about how to interact with them. This is evidenced by IHH chatbots which prompt users to only ask simple questions. The difficulty of understanding, for example, how city services work and how they are organized is not a feature that is made readily available through current implementations of chatbots.

From an educational perspective, the interaction between a chatbot and a user involves a learning process. We see the use of a constructive approach in implementing large language models, for example, as one way to address this knowledge gap since it would help and provide a structure through which users can be taught to better understand the knowledge field that they are engaging with. Further, with the growth of multiculturalism, inclusiveness has defined an important goal to enhance justice in society. Therefore, this paper presents the potential of AI-based chatbots to enhance inclusiveness and how utilizing assumptions, strategies, and methods of constructivism guides us to develop constructivist chatbots.

AI-Based Chatbot to Enhance Inclusiveness

With the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence, chatbots have undergone significant transformation, leading to the development of AI-powered large language models (LLMs). These innovations have given rise to a new generation of intelligent chatbots, like ChatGPT and Gemini that are more sophisticated and widely used. They offer new possibilities for finding relevant information on more complex topics. AI-based chatbots use machine

learning to understand characters, words, and sentences, distinguishing between pieces of content without human intervention. Through natural language processing (NLP), a machine-learning algorithm enables chatbots to understand, analyze, and replicate human language (Tuturbot, 2021). AI-based chatbots can be trained using large and complex data sets, including programming languages. These chatbots can be customized and personalized for various goals and content, such as public services. Unlike static websites, the content in an AI-based chatbot is dynamic and evolves through user input. Grounded in the fundamental premise that every user of public services has a right to access information and receive available services, AI-based chatbots are equipped to serve multicultural users while respecting inclusive values.

The term inclusive values are adopted from educational settings, appreciating diversity, equality, participation, community, sustainability, etc. (Mergler et al., 2016; Stepanova et al., 2020). Inclusiveness has been expanded to design concerning concepts of fairness, justice, and equality among different users in a community in both materials and accessibility (Harris et al., 2023; Heylighen & Bianchin, 2018). Accordingly, inclusive design integrates several key principles and techniques to ensure usability and accessibility for diverse users. Figure 1 demonstrates how inclusive values serve as the foundation for developing inclusive design principles, which are applied to create chatbots catering to diverse user needs.

As shown in Figure 1, fairness, justice, and equity are keys that ensure that chatbots provide equal treatment to all users, regardless of background. In this process, some inclusive design principles are followed such as accessibility, cultural and linguistic diversity, trust and transparency, feedback, and user-centered design focus on making the technology usable for everyone, including individuals with different abilities and language proficiencies. To achieve each of these principles specific design features are implemented.

Accessibility is paramount, aiming to make chatbots usable by individuals with varying cognitive, sensory, and physical abilities. This can be achieved through features such as screen reader compatibility, voice command options, and keyboard navigation. An inclusive chatbot must support multiple languages and provide relevant responses without cultural biases. Clear, concise, and jargon-free language, along with explanations for technical terms, enhances comprehension. User-centered design involves understanding the diverse needs of the target audience. An inclusive user-centered design must support multimodal interaction modes (text, voice, visual aids), and offer personalization and contextual awareness by tailoring responses based on user preferences and history. Trust and transparency are vital, ensuring user confidence in privacy and security measures and offering options to escalate to human agents when necessary. Feedback mechanisms are also critical, allowing for continuous improvement by identifying and addressing barriers to accessibility and inclusiveness (Fig 1).

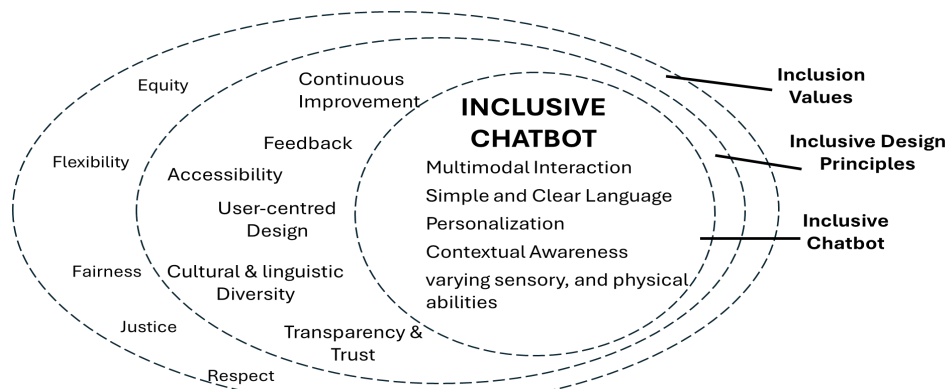


Figure 1: Inclusive Chatbot Design

By integrating these elements, inclusive chatbots can offer more equitable, fair, justified, and respectful services.

We see that more refined and dedicated attention to service design can lead to higher trust in services that use AI in different ways (Aoki, 2020). Concerning migrants, especially those who try to navigate a new and often complex public service environment, we see this as an important element of developing inclusive digital public services.

Despite innovative initiatives, digital gaps persist, necessitating optimal solutions for both customers and service providers, especially for multicultural societies. Accordingly, in this paper, we propose a paradigm shift in the role of chatbots, advocating for their evolution from mere autoresponders to mentors. Rather than merely retrieving information based on keywords, chatbots can proactively guide users through their digital journeys by employing findings from constructivism as a fundamental pedagogical theory. Respecting the premise that every user of public services engages in ongoing digital literacy and cultural integration, this study advocates integrating constructivism as a learning theory, into service design practices.

Constructivist AI-Based Chatbots

Constructivism is a theory in education and cognitive science. Constructivist chatbot Refers to a chatbot that is designed to facilitate learning or interaction by helping users build knowledge through experiences and active engagement, rather than passively providing information. It offers valuable insights for designing conversational chatbots as Intelligent Tutors (Patchava & Jonnalagadda, 2020; Sánchez-Díaz et al., 2018).

This section explores the potential of fundamental assumptions of constructivism including a) *active learning* and b) *prior knowledge and experiences*, to design a constructive chatbot (Fig. 1). It further examines different strategies and methods of some principles of constructivism, such as interaction and feedback, and social interactions and pre-assessments and to elaborate strategies and methods which can be applied in designing chatbots.

Active Learning

Active learning, as a pivotal assumption of constructivism, encompasses strategies aimed at maintaining user engagement with content through interactions, feedback, and reflections. Interaction is crucial for sustaining user engagement and facilitating deeper understanding

often implemented through interactive user-centric design, real-world scenarios, problem-solving, and hands-on activities schemes (Fig 2).

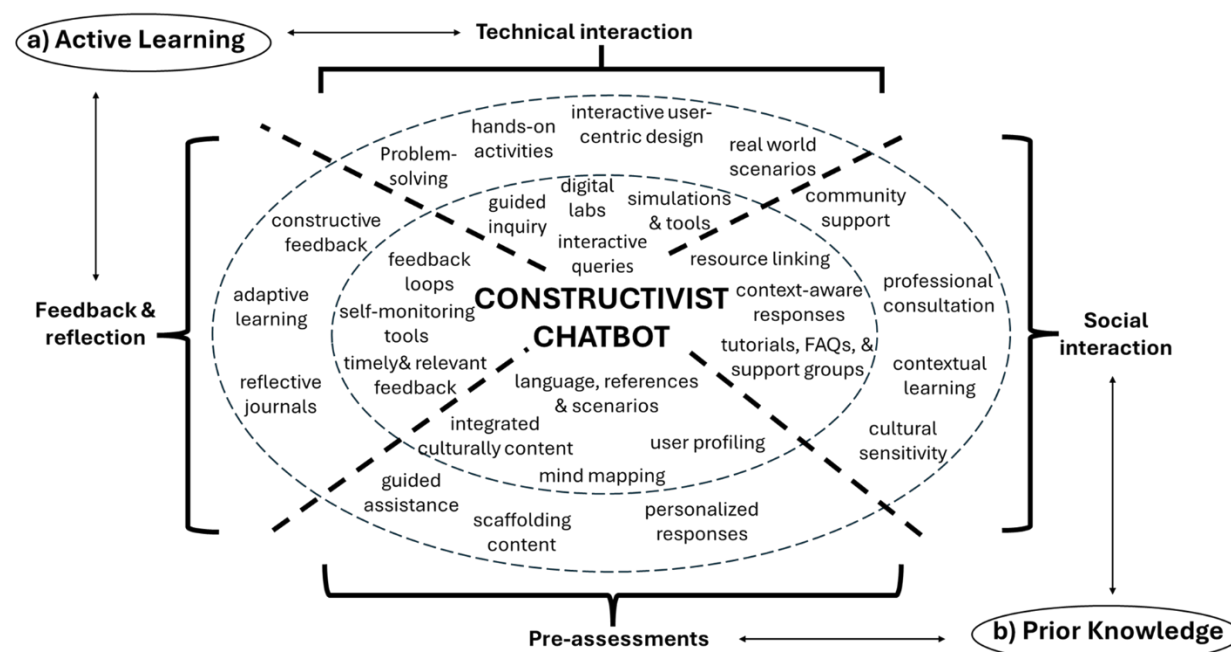


Figure 2: Assumptions, Strategies and Techniques to Design Constructivist Chatbots

In chatbot design, interactions are facilitated through tools like interactive simulations, digital labs, and virtual experiments, encouraging hands-on user engagement with content (Azad, 2023; Rossoni et al., 2023). These activities have demonstrated their potential in chatbot design by incorporating applications such as interactive queries and guided inquiry applications. For instance, chatbots can incorporate interactive queries and guided inquiry applications, allowing users to pose specific questions and receive detailed, personalized responses. These responses can be delivered through clickable options or guided questionnaires, enhancing the user's engagement and learning experience (Zhang et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2023; Gordon et al., 2018). Scenario-based interactions involve the simulation of real-life scenarios wherein users can explore various situations and receive guidance on appropriate actions (Barter 2023; Chen, 2024). For example, a public service chatbot can engage users by soliciting their queries and providing interactive feedback based on their responses. Current implementations of chatbots in the City of Helsinki have limited capacity to solicit further questions, although some forms of disambiguation have been implemented in specific queries.

Feedback, another principle of constructivism, assists individuals in comprehending their progress and identifying areas for improvement. Constructive feedback and encouragement significantly enhance user confidence, particularly among those who may feel marginalized or uncertain about utilizing digital services (Ortega-Ochoa et al., 2024). Feedback can be effectively designed using adaptive learning technologies that offer personalized responses based on users' performance. The implementation of adaptive responses through AI facilitates this personalization, tailoring feedback to the user's interactions and providing increasingly relevant and specific guidance (Izadi & Forouzanfar, 2024). Regular, timely, and specific feedback on user queries and actions, which includes suggestions for improvement and reinforcement of correct practices, helps users adjust their strategies and improve their performance. Feedback that is timely and directly pertinent to the user's current context and

needs fosters a sense of support and understanding. Encouraging self-reflection on their experiences and progress and incorporating mechanisms for feedback loops where users can share their experiences and thoughts about the chatbot's effectiveness, can enhance the chatbot's functionality and inclusiveness (Vijayaraghavan & Cooper, 2020). Feedback is more productive when methods and technologies to reflect user experiences are added to the chatbot design. Technologies such as reflective journals and blogs enable users to document and reflect on their experiences, providing opportunities for self-assessment, self-regulation, and constructive feedback (Chang et al., 2023). Features such as self-monitoring tools and regular summaries applications based on user inputs, where users can track their progress (e.g., blood pressure, glucose levels in healthcare digital services, and chatbots), assist users in reflecting on their progress and outcomes.

Prior Knowledge and Experience

The other assumption of constructivism theory posits that individuals build upon existing cognitive structures to acquire new knowledge (Sjøberg, 2010). In the context of chatbot design for public services, this translates to the importance of considering user background and context.

Pre-assessments provide preliminary data to determine the user's starting point and tailor content accordingly. A brief assessment of a user's prior knowledge allows for personalized responses. Chatbot interactions can be tailored based on previous encounters and information gleaned from the user. This personalization, achieved through user profiling, empowers the chatbot to deliver targeted advice and resources relevant to the user's background and current context (Jenneboer et al., 2022). For instance, a chatbot that remembers a user's past inquiries or preferences can leverage this information to optimize future interactions. Additionally, understanding user prior knowledge can enhance cultural sensitivity. Leveraging the prior knowledge and experiences of users, also, informs the scaffolding of digital content, the process of providing supportive structures that bridge new information with existing knowledge (Sjøberg, 2010). The results of user pre-assessments can be used to determine the structure of each subject within the chatbot. Tools like mind mapping and concept mapping can be valuable in visualizing this content scaffolding (Hu, 2006). In this context, Hosseini and Okkonen (2022) propose several criteria for structuring the content including known to unknown, simple to complex, tangible to abstract, analysis to synthesis, specific to general: empirical to rational, inductive to analogy, emotional to logical, actual to the general representative to the components, definite to the indefinite. By adhering to these principles, the chatbot can present information in a structured manner that aligns with the user's existing knowledge, promoting effective learning. Scaffolding the content of chatbots provides guided assistance through step-by-step guidance for complex tasks by breaking down information into smaller, manageable parts.

Social constructivism recommends chatbot designers to employ various methods to foster social interaction such as community support, professional consultation, and contextual learning. Community support refers to linking users to support groups, discussion forums, social media platforms, or any tools that encourage communication and knowledge sharing. Professional Consultation Integration facilitates connections to live chat or video consultations with professionals for more complex issues, offering users access to expert guidance. Resource linking can enrich social interaction by providing users with access to additional resources such as tutorials, FAQs, and support groups (Fig 2).

Concerning social interaction, effective knowledge acquisition occurs when information is relevant to real-life situations and reflects the user's specific context. Chatbots designed for public services can leverage various manners to create a learning environment that fosters both social interaction and contextualized learning. By integrating context awareness, chatbots can provide information and advice that is highly relevant to the user's specific situation. Imagine a user seeking medical advice. The chatbot, using location services, could recommend nearby clinics while also offering condition-specific guidance based on the user's description (Clarizia et al., 2019; Niederer et al., 2022). This not only addresses the user's immediate need but also empowers them to make informed decisions within their specific context.

These principles and methods for designing digital services are not standalone concepts. They can be effectively integrated into the creation of various applications in the form of core or supplemental tools for chatbot design. When designed with these principles in mind, public service chatbots move beyond simply providing information. They actively engage users in social interaction that enhances their understanding and management of their situations within a relevant context.

Conclusion

The development of AI chatbots through various LLMs has increased their potential to be more user-friendly, flexible, and competent to meet the needs of users from different backgrounds. Constructivism learning theory offers robust theoretical support for developing inclusive digital interactions by enhancing digital literacy and promoting equitable access, ultimately leading to increased fairness and justice in a multicultural society. This theory provides a powerful theoretical framework for designing and inclusive AI-based chatbots in many aspects.

Firstly, constructivism views the relationship between users and chatbots as a learning environment where a constructivist chatbot facilitates the construction of knowledge in users and assists them in their inquiry processes. By providing interactive and engaging learning experiences, these chatbots encourage users to explore and construct their understanding actively, which is critical for digital literacy improvement (Jonassen, 1991).

Secondly, constructivism principles guide the content construction process. They ensure that the information presented by chatbots is scaffolded, contextually relevant, and tailored to the user's existing knowledge and cognitive abilities (Vygotsky, 1978). This scaffolding is essential for helping users make sense of new information and integrate it with their prior knowledge, thereby fostering deeper learning and comprehension with more flexibility and individual respect.

Thirdly, constructivist chatbots incorporate instructions for the feedback and reflection process, promoting flexibility and cultural sensitivity through personalization. By allowing users to reflect on their experiences and providing tailored feedback, chatbots can adapt to individual learning styles and cultural contexts, ensuring that interactions are relevant and respectful (Bruner, 1966). This adaptability is crucial for creating an inclusive digital environment where all users feel understood and supported.

While AI-based chatbot design holds significant potential for enhancing migrants' inclusion within host societies, further research is recommended to address concerns related to

transparency and privacy. Specifically, exploring how users can securely share personal information in chatbot interactions remains a crucial area for development, ensuring that such systems not only foster inclusion but also protect users' data and build trust in public services.

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Contact emails: zahra.hosseini@helsinki.fi
aaro.tupasela@helsinki.fi

***Christianity, Modernity, and Cultural Abandonment in Africa:
The Example of the Ivyom Ritual Dance Performance Among the Tiv People***

Josephine Doofan Gande, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria

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Abstract

Historically, *Ivyom* ritual dance performance among the Tiv people of Nigeria have been integral to their spiritual and cultural identity, serving not only as a religious ceremony but also as a vital expression of social cohesion, identity and traditional knowledge. However, the advent of Christianity and the subsequent processes of modernisation have precipitated significant transformations within the Tiv society, leading to the marginalisation of this indigenous practice. This study, through adopting a multidisciplinary approach that combine ethnographic fieldwork, historical analysis, as well as cultural studies, examines the complex dynamics between the persistence of traditional rituals and the pressure of religious and cultural change. Through in-depth analysis of historical records and corroboration of research on the subject, the study highlights the tensions and negotiations that characterise the Tiv people's responses to these external influences. While Christianity and modernisation have introduced new forms of spiritual and cultural expression, they have also engendered a loss of traditional knowledge and practices, creating a crisis of cultural continuity. This research contributes to broader discussions on the impact of religious conversion and modernity on indigenous cultures in Africa, offering insights into the ways in which the Tiv people navigate their cultural heritage in the face of profound change. The findings underscore the importance of preserving indigenous rituals as living traditions that adapt to contemporary realities while maintaining their historical and cultural significance.

Keywords: Christianity, Modernisation, Cultural Abandonment, Ivyom, Ritual, Dance, Tiv

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Introduction

Christianity and western modern civilisation to a large extent has contributed to cultural erosion in most African societies today. In fact, contemporary generations in Africa may have come to measure African traditional worldview along the parameters of Christianity and modern civilisation; being that, it is that with which they are most familiar. That is to say, even in interpersonal interactions, Africans of contemporary generations adjudge what is the acceptable standard of behavioural code with the yardstick of Christianity and western modern standards. Thus, what is today considered as being African, invariably, translates as what is acceptable in the Christian worldview, in that regard. Before the onslaught of Christianity and modern civilisation, however, most traditional African cultures demonstrated originality of identity through cultural expressions of rituals, festivals, celebration, worship, etcetera, that resonated with the underlying character peculiar to that society. This phenomenon of cultural expressivity was no different with the Tiv people of central Nigeria. Being an oral-oriented culture, the preservation of the Tiv worldview was achieved through folk-media, traditional performances and/or indigenous theatre. Unfortunately, the incursion of Christianity in the Tiv society in the early 20th century redefined the trajectory of the cultural expressivity and preservation of sociocultural ethos, changing the way the people think, relate with one another, and respect the social standards unique to their collective behaviour as a people. Consequently, the cultural expressivity of their unique identity has been largely replaced by what is generally Christian, or modern. However, in order to understand the impact of Christianity and modernity on the cultural behaviour of the Tiv people, it is pertinent to bring to bear, the generic composition of the Tiv society in the pre-Christian age. It is hoped that with such a historical perspective, it shall be easier to establish the level of infiltration of Christianity in the Tiv society and to deduce its impact on the erosion of the cultural behaviour of the people.

Statement of the Problem

The *Ivyom* ritual dance performance is one of the most prominent occasions in the Tiv traditional society of the pre-colonial and colonial eras. In fact, remnants of this august cultural occasion filtered into the modern Tiv society, with clinical references as recent as the late 1990s. This ceremony was one of socio-cultural and religious significance in the life of the Tiv man as it used to represent a transformation of social status and attainment of affluent and powerful social recognition within the community. Its custom and rituals were deeply rooted in the religious ontology, and cosmo-spiritual belief system of the Tiv. However, the practice and performance of the *Ivyom* ritual dance and the corresponding cultural expression faded away with the increasing influence of Christianity and modernity. This study explores and analyses the ritual's historical and cultural significance and examining the influential impact of the aforementioned trends of Christianity and modernity, resulting in a clinical reference of the phenomenon of cultural abandonment.

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology with an ethnographic approach, focusing on the *Ivyom* ritual. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and observation. Through the Observation method, despite the *Ivyom* ritual's decline, the researcher, being an insider, attended one ceremony, observing attitudes and informal discussions across generations. Personal memories and contemporary ceremonies, such as religious gatherings, were also observed, where elements of the *Ivyom* ritual appeared in

modified forms. Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with Ivyom practitioners and initiates to gather authentic details about the ritual dance. In-depth interviews included various members of the Tiv community, such as elders, religious leaders, and youth, to understand diverse perspectives on the Ivyom ritual dance. The study also analysed the historical and cultural contexts of the Ivyom dance ritual and Tiv customs. This contextualization provided insights into cultural shifts over time and the community's ways of reconciling or resisting these changes.

The Pre-colonial Tiv Society

There are various versions relating the migration of the Tiv to the Benue valley. Although most of these have been documented variously in published literatures, the original versions had been largely oral-based. These oral-based versions served greatly for the inspiration of the first literary text ever written on the subject matter by Ezekiel Akiga Sai in his – *Akiga's Story*, annotated by Rupert East (1939). However, as more researches are carried out, the more advanced, authenticated and official the written versions become today (Dura et al., 2022).

The important point of consideration however, is that the Tiv form part of the Bantu continuum and the last habitat before their descent into the lower Benue Valley was the border between Nigeria and Cameroon, around the Obudu complex (Iyo, 2007). This area is still inhabited by groups that share linguistic and cultural similarities with the Tiv. Generally, the Tiv people were known to be a nihilistic lot with no allegiance to a particular conventional authority; be it physical or spiritual, long before the colonialist incursion. Each family existed with its leader at their compound administrative level referred to as *Orya*. However, in times of need for coherence such as war or conflict resolutions, such families came together to achieve the desired end (Dura et al., 2022). Most researchers and writers on the pre-colonial Tiv society such as East (1939), Bohannon and Bohannon (1953), and Dorward (1971) offer that the Tiv were a stateless and egalitarian society. This statelessness is characterised by the absence of a central authority to support administrative and judicial machinery. However, their political system was characterised by law and order maintained by elders meeting at the different levels and departments of various lineages (Agber, 2012). In spite of these summations, many indigenous scholars like Mude (1987), Dzurgba (2007) and Agber (2012) prefer to maintain that the Tiv administrative system was a complex machinery peculiar only to the Tiv citizens and which could not be comprehended by western ideology, hence such jaundiced speculations of nihilism and statelessness.

The basic unit of political organisation was the *Ya*, or household. Based on the description of Sorkaa (1993), a collection of closely related households therefore, made up a compound. Each compound was then headed by the oldest living male known as the *Orya*, directly translated as “man of the household.” Each Tiv compound is named after its *Orya* and is generally administered by a council made up of senior members of the compound. The council is chaired by the *Orya* who has many responsibilities including the pursuit of the political, social, religious and economic wellbeing of all members of the compound and settling the disputes that could arise between members of the compound (Agber, 2012).

Central to the Tiv social life was marriage. The centrality of marriage in the Tiv social life lays upon the fact that various other aspects of the social milieu are tied to its institution. The Tiv practiced the *Yamisha* marriage in the pre-colonial era and the system was abolished circa 1928, by the colonial authorities as influenced by the Christian missionaries (Wegh, 2003).

Yamishe was a system of marriage in which a young man took his sister and exchanged with another man's sister, both to have as wives. There was no form of dowry. However, this system of marriage had its downside, as a man born without a sister, or sisters found the exchange system difficult to transact. In such cases, a man could borrow a sister from a cousin, half-brother or even a friend, with the arrangement to pay back when the wife he acquires gives birth to a daughter. Largely, the Tiv practiced polygyny (Dzurgba, 2007). It was customary for a man to marry more than one wife in Tivland. A wealthy man could have as much as fifty wives, but an average man could have three or four. Polygamy amongst the Tiv was a show of wealth and ability, encouraging healthy competition amongst the age-grade or *kwav*. Thus, the more wives a man took, the more merry-making was attracted. So the complex marriage of *yamishe* fostered intricately woven social relationships by kin and association as well as paved way for merry-making and festivities which occupied the Tiv social milieu. Amase (2013) explains this phenomenon better where the author opines that, marriage is very significant in the life of the Tiv man. This is because the wife/wives and their children provide the much needed labour for effective work on the farm. In fact, the size of a man's family determines his farm size and of course, the wealth he acquires. No matter how wealthy a Tiv man may be, if he is not married, he is by traditional standards considered irresponsible. His social status is thus greatly reduced and he cannot therefore compete with his age-mates. Being married is a pre-requisite for hosting both the *Inyamtswam* and *Ivyom* dance festivals. Bachelors cannot host festivals because the wife must perform alongside her husband.

Christianity and Modernity in Tiv Society: A Case of Cultural Abandonment

Like most other African societies, the incursion of colonialism in Tiv land held sway with the institution of Christianity that advanced with the olive branch while paving the way for the colonialists to travel and establish farther into the hinterlands of Africa. Religion in Africa is the strongest element of the people's culture while the culture is the core of the society's identity. Hence, it is difficult to separate African cultural practices from African Indigenous religion because religion is embedded in African culture (Bienose–Osagiede, 2015). In as much as one can argue that culture and religion can be separated, it is important to note that most African creation narratives always have a religious dimension which is intrinsically connected to cultural habits and actions (Sanni, 2016). Mbiti (1991) asserts that “to be an African in the traditional setting is to be truly religious”. Hence, the author identified religion in five aspects of culture which include; beliefs and practices, ceremonies and festivals, religious objects and places, values and morals, and religious officials and leaders. As a matter of fact, African religion is found in all aspects of life. One may argue that religion and culture play enormous role in shaping a people's worldviews and participation in social life. Religion and culture define a particular people and what is at the core of their worldview and attitude towards life.

In Africa, African Indigenous Religion existed many years before the advent of Christianity. However, the early missionaries who brought Christianity to Africa presented the religion as being contradictory to African Indigenous religion and cultural practices (Bienose–Osagiede, 2015). In other words, these practices were termed pagan practices and hence, outlawed by these missionaries. As a result, the African people developed inferiority complexes concerning their cultural identity. This is because they now believe that in order to be a Christian; one must abandon his or her culture since they are thought to be “barbaric” and “heathen” (Nwosu, 1988). It can therefore be averred that, in order to de-Africanise an African, it is easier when the line of attack is aimed at their religion and belief system. This

was the success the White missionaries and colonialist registered in Tivland beginning from the first decade of the 20th century.

In as much as the colonial authorities instituted a policy of military conquest in Tivland, Christianity created easy inroads for the colonial authorities into the Tiv country. According to Rubingh (1969), the Tiv were the last to be subdued and brought under the British Colonial Government in Nigeria. Iorngurum (2017) explains that, through tactical peace, missionaries were able to penetrate Tivland, and they brought with them changes in the two most important aspects of a people, 'religion and culture'. While the missionaries were changing the people's belief system; their counterparts, the colonialists, were able to have access to the people and they were quietly changing the Tiv system of administration or governance in collaboration with the missionaries. The occupation of the Tiv country by the colonialist which had begun in 1899 had come to full circle completion by 1906 (Dzurgba, 2007). By 11th April 1911, the missionaries had established their first mission station in Sai, a settlement in Shitire in the present day Katsina-Ala Local Government.

Colonial conquest and the introduction of colonial rule by the beginning of the 20th century further contributed to the distortion of Tiv customs and traditions (Agber, 2012). Agber (2013) accentuates this position, where the author states that the colonial rule and western Christian religion brought to Tivland some anomalous permutations of cultural adulteration on the Tiv culture and at the apogee of their operation in the land, life had been arrested, as the horologist, with interjected finger, arrests the beating of the clock. All these have undermined African culture by demeaning the African's own sense of worth and dignity. In the Tiv society, Tiv traditional music and dance has suffered a callous and conscienceless brute from the colonial masters and the Christian religious vendors of the West and as such, the non-preservation and documentation of the Tiv traditional music and dance invariably became one factor that evaded the status of oral and calligraphic tradition in the making of Tiv philosophy, science and technology (Agber & Mngutyo, 2013).

As cited above, the erosion of the Tiv culture has tranquilised their indigenous cultural expression which translated as their original identity. Festivals, ceremonies, rituals, pacts, marriage rites and other customary and cultural institutions are no longer practiced in the identity of a true traditional Tiv society. One of such festivals which today has gone passé is the *Ivyom* ritual dance which occupied a central place in the Tiv social milieu in the pre-colonial Tiv society.

The *Ivyom* Ritual Dance Phenomenon

The study of the Tiv history reveals that the *Ivyom* festival occupied a prominent place in the sociocultural composition of the people. This notion is made reference to, in past tense, in the sense that much of the *Ivyom* ritual dance has eroded and is no longer found active in the present cultural behaviour of the Tiv. *Ivyom* itself primarily describes an earth mound, or heap, raised for the purpose of planting yams. In the plural fashion, *Ivyom* is referred to as *avom*, meaning many heaps. When reference is made of *Ivyom* in pluralistic terms, being *avom*, such reference may refer more or less about the farm. This is because, the Tiv people are generally agrarian people and their worldview is largely influenced from a farmer's point of view, hence this influence on the *Ivyom* ritual dance performance. Amase (2013) clarifies this position by stating that, according to some Tiv elders, the origin of *Ivyom* dance is not unconnected with the major occupation of the Tiv, which is farming. *Ivyom* being a mound or heap of soil, yam and other staple crops of the Tiv are grown on mounds of soil. Farming is

thus considered as the major source of wealth among the Tiv, hence the emergence of *Ivyom* dance.

The *Ivyom* as a performance occupied a central position in the Tiv sociocultural behaviour in the earlier Tiv society. The event of the *Ivyom* was what we could refer to on more informal terms as a ‘talk-of-the-town’ show. The dance festival had the potential to enhance a man’s prestige and guarantee his acceptability in the community (Amase, 2013). Mude (1987) also clarifies that, the *Ivyom* dance was held for entertainment, moral instruction and a general upliftment of the social status of the celebrant. It grants him the opportunity to enter into *Shagba* (prestige/affluence) competitions with his age-mates both within and outside his immediate environment. Being associated with wealth acquired through farming, the organiser of the festival uses the opportunity to make a show of his wealth as obtained from his vast agricultural enterprise. He can thereafter count on the unreserved support of his *Ityô* (patrilineage) on account of popularity and socioeconomic worthiness. In this regard, age-mates or *kwav* compete and each member of an age group strives to out-dance his mates by hosting a more elaborate festival. Amase (2013) is of the opinion that, apart from enhancing a man’s prestige, staging of *Ivyom* brings good fortune to the host and his immediate family members, especially if the *Ivyom* rituals are properly carried out.

The average height of *Ivyom* in the farm is about half a metre, while the base and top circumference of the *Ivyom* ranges from 50-70 metres in diameter (Waapela, 2019). In the context of the festival celebration, the mound of earth is specially constructed and treated with ritualistic reverence and embodying rites, sometimes involving a plethora of human sacrifices. The mound is constructed in a giant size ranging from three to five metres, and with a flat top and either conical or square-like edge forms. The theatrical perspective of *Ivyom* as *amar* or dance is intrinsically connected to the festival prerequisite of *Amar-a-mirin/amar a wan* or ‘organising the dance/putting up the dance.’ Amase (2013) corroborates this position, stating that *amar-a-mirin* literally means organising a traditional dance festival. The practice of *amar-a-mirin* is as old as the existence of the Tiv. From time immemorial, the Tiv have always found dance as a way of expressing their joy or excitement. Of the need to organise the dance, certain dances serve for the purpose of religio-cultural/prestigious significance, inclusive also of the *Ivyom*.

Heroic dance festivals also serve as a way of encouraging hard work and dedication to one’s occupation (Amase, 2013). In the Tiv context of old, one was considered a ‘man’ only when he must have been able to host at least one prestigious dance, preferably the *Ivyom* which was more socially inclined.

A man that wants to host the *Ivyom* has to obtain permission from the community elders (Amase, 2013; Waapela, 2019). It is at the instance of the preliminary prerequisites that rituals involving human sacrifices are required. This information is corroborated further by Elder Iordye Akutsev of Mbayegh clan in Ushongo Local Government of Benue State, in an oral interview (sic). Once the approval has been given and a date fixed, the host then invites the *Ivyom* priest to indicate and consecrate the point at which the *Ivyom* platform is to be built. After the *Ivyom* site has been chosen, the host goes ahead with other preparations to ensure a successful festival celebration. This includes inviting his *Igba* (matrilineage), organising dances, inviting ballads and folk singers and preparing food and drink. On the eve of the festival day, the ritual known as *asetá* is performed by the priest to clear the way for a successful festival. This final rite of initiation is performed beside the raised *Ivyom* platform. According to tradition, this ritual purifies the earth and ensures more yield for the celebrants

and their families. The rites also cleanse the celebrants from iniquities, thereby preparing them for a grand entrance into a new and esteemed class. Being a prestigious dance therefore, marriage by exchange such as the *yamishe* does not qualify a man to host the *Ivyom* festival. This is because, a man is said to have used his sister to contract a marriage, instead of using the products of his sweat to marry. During the pre-colonial Tiv era when only the *yamishe* marriage held sway, a man was expected to slaughter a cow for his wife as prerequisite for hosting the *Ivyom* (Waapela, 2019). A man can equally host the *Ivyom* if he is able to marry from another tribe.

The significance of *Ivyom* lies in the fact that it potentially served for enhancing an individual's personality traits, thereby letting him into the functional and affluent part of the social constitution of the community. Having raised the *Ivyom* platform it carefully and artistically painted with pictures of wild animals like lions, leopard, buffalos, and crocodiles depicting the bravery of the celebrant (Amase, 2013). The celebrant must be married and have access to wealth before he is allowed to host the *Ivyom*. While the chief celebrant dances or performs the ritual on the *Ivyom* with his wife, a spear and/or horsetail in hand, his age-mates who have never done the dance, shower money or gifts on the couple from a distance or through an initiate as anybody who is not initiated is forbidden to go near the *Ivyom* let alone touch it. The event was usually hosted between January and April to be sure that the rains would not disrupt the occasion. There was lavish entertainment comprising of drink, food and meat and the aftermath of the primary ceremony went on for days.

The Impact of Cultural Abandonment on the *Ivyom* Ritual Festival: A Discussion of Findings

As asserted earlier in this discourse, Christianity and modern civilization has played a large role in the erosion of original cultural tenets of the Tiv people. In this guise, the *Ivyom*, being one of the cultural expressions of the Tiv people has been found at cross-purposes with the tenets of Christianity and modernisation. The following opinions serve as the evidence of the erosion of the festival and as such, cultural abandonment.

i. Loss of Cultural Continuity and Sustainability: the decline of *Ivyom* ritual dance festival has precipitated a loss of cultural continuity and sustainability such that contemporary generations have no experience of this festival. The character of a Tiv man being deeply religious naturally influenced his generous embrace and assimilation of the Christian religion such that cultural practices such as *Ivyom* are regarded as anti-Christian. In fact, some Christian denominations in Tivland such as the *Nongo u Kristu u i Ser Sha Tar* (NKST), being the transition from the Sudan United Mission (SUM) and the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM), which was the first Christian mission instituted in Tivland in 1911, have laid down stringent punitive measures for member who engage in such traditional practices. Such 'recalcitrant' members are either excommunicated or restricted from taking the Holy Communion for a period of time. Even the Catholic Church which seem to exercise some level of accommodation of the African Traditional Religion may not tolerate a congregation member going out to host a cultural festival that embody original traditional rituals which are frowned upon as barbaric, crude, immoral or generally uncivilised. This widespread Christian orientation has affected a collective disposition of the people such that hosting the *Ivyom* ritual dance festival may underscore the host as being backward and uncivilised. Based on this religious restraint, many generations of Tiv origin in the 21st century may not have heard about the *Ivyom* festival.

ii. Replacement of Agriculture by Western Education: the *Ivyom* festival was borne from a Tiv man's pride in engagement in agricultural enterprises, hence its celebration to display the wealth gathered thereof. Cultural continuity in this regard would have seen the Tiv man leading in agriculture and also celebrating their agricultural products. Up till today, the Igede neighbours in Benue State still celebrate the *Igede-Agba* new yam festival, which have Igede sons in the diaspora attending and in the process encouraging agriculture. In the Tiv society however, inasmuch as the practice of agriculture naturally prevails, the passion for cultivation has been replaced by western education. An average educated person prefers to work a white collar job and leave agriculture to the rural dwellers. In fact, agriculture is perceived as an occupation for the uneducated.

iii. Status and Social Structure: the study revealed that the dance was a key social instrument, conferring and celebrating social status and hierarchy. Hosting or participating in the ritual held a mark of prestige and identity within the community. The respondent one (anonymous) during the fieldwork stated that, "Once I participated in the ritual, I commanded a lot of respect amongst my peers and even the orderly because mounting the *Ivyom* is the highest peak of social status to be attained in tiv community."

iv. Spiritual and Symbolic Meanings: The *Ivyom* Ritual dance hold tremendous spiritual beliefs and symbolism. The *Ivyom* ritual is a spiritual activity, only those who have prepared themselves can mount it and for each participant there is a pattern and style of dance that they must perform. "Even those who play drums and other musical instruments at the ceremony are not ordinary people. Also such a person must be very pure of heart else the die mysteriously soon after the celebration" (Respondent II [sic]).

v. Changing Perception and Practice: The influence of Christianity and modernisation has transformed or even diminished the *Ivyom* dance role within Tiv community. Respondent III offered that,

"my father was an adherent of *Ivyom*, he wanted to induct me but I wasn't interested because there are better ways to make my mark in the community. I am too exposed to believe in such an archaic practice that adds nothing tangible to one."

Meanwhile, Respondent II averred that,

"*Ivyom* is an evil practice that must never be allowed to re-emerge amongst our people, many lives were lost upholding this practice. As a born again Christian, I can always go to church to thank God for his many benefit, why should I sacrifice human life for what is completely worthless, it is God who gives life and only he has the right to take it."

Conclusion

Christianity and modernisation may have impacted positively on the development of the Tiv society, giving it an edge to participate in the activities of the rest of the world. However, this impact is not without its negative influences as it has engendered a loss of cultural continuity in Tivland, replacing the people's cultural expression with modern trends, hence a loss of cultural identity. In the face of this change, the Tiv, being a culturally resilient people have found a way to revive their cultural heritage. These have been made manifest in the forms maiden festivals which have emerged since 2015, inclusive of the *Kyegh Sha Shwa* festival,

Free Fish Festival, *Mba-apostoli* festival and *Iber sha Akpukpa* festival amongst other. Also, the most Tiv dances have survived today even in the face of this cultural crisis. Most of these dances find expression during these festivals, including the popular *Swange* dance, *ange*, *tembe duen*, etcetera.

Appendix

Oral Interviews

S/N	Name	State	Kindred/Clan	Age
01.	Iordye Akutsev	Benue	Mbayegh/Ushongo	68
02.	Respondent II (Anonymous)	Benue	Mbayegh/Ushongo	80
03.	Respondent III (Anonymous)	Benue	Mbayegh/Ushongo	70
04.	Iorfa Vembera	Benue	Mbayegh/Ushongo	42

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Contact email: josephinetulumadoo@gmail.com

***Positioning Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence in Creative Production:
The Synthetic Media***

Gilman Senem Gençtürk Hızal, Başkent University, Türkiye

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Abstract

This study examines the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and the creative industries, with particular emphasis on the challenges AI poses to traditional notions of authorship, creativity, and labor. Drawing on the recent Writers Guild of America (WGA) strike as a case, the research highlights the tensions between human and machine-driven production in creative fields. The study aims to explore the roles of artificial and human intelligence in synthetic media, considering the social and cultural context of the media, particularly about creative production processes where the debate between human and artificial intelligence is involved. The paper addresses this debate through the 2023 WGA strike in the USA. The study analyzes news coverage of the WGA strike on internet news sites using framing analysis. By employing framing analysis—conflict, economic implications, technological disruption, and ethical considerations—this study explores the complex discourse surrounding AI's influence on creative labor. It posits that the future of the creative industries will depend on achieving a balance between utilizing AI as a collaborative tool and preserving the distinct contributions of human creativity. Furthermore, the paper advocates for the development of ethical frameworks that ensure AI's integration into creative processes fosters innovation while safeguarding cultural diversity and the irreplaceable qualities of human creativity.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Human Intelligence, Creative Industry

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Introduction

In the academic discipline of communication and media studies, the history of communication and media has predominantly been evaluated through "medium". This literature predominantly associates media with technology and material constitution. It also considers the history of media as the history of medium or tools or in other words history of "objects". On the other hand, the question of what is a medium or media has always been discussed in the relevant literature (Horn, 2007; Phillips, 2017; Siegert, 2003; Shan, 2022). Moreover, new names of the media such as mass media, traditional media, new media, social media and, ott media are added to this literature every period. Today, (again) a new media has been added to this media: Synthetic Media. Any media such as images, video, or audio that are "artificially" created or manipulated using computer algorithms is defined as synthetic media. Synthetic media can also be defined as one of the outputs of generative AI, but of course, it is hard to say that not all synthetic media is created by generative AI. Generative AI models such as DALL-E, Midjourney, Stable Diffusion and, GPT-4 have played an important role in generating new images, text, sounds and, other creative content from simple prompts or inputs. This technology undoubtedly demonstrates the potential to augment and accelerate the creative process, enabling artists, writers, musicians and, designers to quickly explore countless ideas and iterate on concepts. However, concerns are also being raised about automation replacing human creativity and the need to develop ethical frameworks around AI-generated intellectual property. Media, as a term, has also been discussed through the political economy and cultural studies approaches, but discussions on production, labour, and creativity have become more frequent with digitalization. Especially since the 1990s, the field of cultural production, including media content, has been defined as creative industries.

This study aims to explore the roles of artificial and human intelligence in synthetic media, considering the social and cultural context of the media, particularly in relation to creative production processes where the debate between human and artificial intelligence is involved. The paper addresses this debate through the 2023 WGA strike in the USA. The study analyzes news coverage of the WGA strike on internet news sites using framing analysis.

Theoretical Framework: Artificial Intelligence in Media Studies

The intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and media studies represents a burgeoning area of research that addresses the transformative impact of AI technologies on the creation, distribution, and consumption of media. As AI systems become increasingly sophisticated, they are reshaping the landscape of media production and raising critical questions about authorship, authenticity, and ethical implications. A theoretical framework for understanding AI's role in media studies often incorporates concepts from media ecology and posthumanism. Media ecology, as articulated by Marshall McLuhan, emphasizes the medium as an integral component of communication, suggesting that changes in technology influence societal structures and human perception (McLuhan, 1964). Posthumanism challenges traditional notions of authorship and creativity, positing that AI technologies complicate the boundaries between human and machine contributions to media (Braidotti, 2013). This theoretical lens is crucial for examining how AI alters conventional understandings of media production and consumption. To understand the impact of AI on creative labor, it is essential to consider theoretical frameworks that address the nature of creativity and labor in a technologically mediated environment. The concept of "the creative industries" as described by Florida (2002) emphasizes the role of creativity as a driving force in economic

development. However, the advent of AI challenges traditional notions of creativity, prompting scholars to explore the implications of machine-generated content on human authorship and originality (McCormack et al., 2019). Additionally, the theory of postcapitalism suggests that the integration of AI into creative labor may lead to new economic structures and relationships between humans and machines (Cruddas & Pitts, 2020).

The historical trajectory of AI in media can be traced back to early computational experiments in the 1950s and 1960s, which laid the groundwork for modern AI applications. The development of machine learning and neural networks has accelerated advancements in synthetic media, leading to tools capable of generating text, images, and videos autonomously. As noted by Elgammal and colleagues (2017), the emergence of generative adversarial networks (GANs) has revolutionized creative practices in the arts and media, allowing for unprecedented levels of innovation and experimentation. Recent literature highlights the rapid growth of AI technologies in media, particularly in areas such as journalism, entertainment, and social media. For instance, AI-driven algorithms are increasingly used for content curation and recommendation on digital platforms and social media, shaping viewer experiences and consumption patterns (Kang & Lou, 2022). Additionally, tools like OpenAI's GPT-3 and DALL-E exemplify the potential for AI to generate creative content, raising questions about authorship and the value of human creativity in a digital landscape (Radford et al., 2019). The ethical implications of AI-generated media are a significant focus of contemporary research. Scholars have raised concerns about the potential for AI to perpetuate biases, manipulate information, and produce misleading content. For example, deepfakes—synthetic media that uses AI to create hyper-realistic forgeries—pose threats to personal privacy and public trust (Chesney & Citron, 2019). As AI technologies become more integrated into media practices, addressing issues of consent, authenticity, and accountability is paramount (Kietzmann et al., 2020). The ethical implications of AI in creative labor are a significant focus in current research. Concerns about copyright, ownership, and the potential for AI to perpetuate biases have garnered attention. For example, the use of AI to generate art raises questions about intellectual property rights: who owns the work created by an algorithm? Additionally, issues of bias in AI training datasets can lead to the reinforcement of stereotypes and exclusionary practices within creative industries (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018). Addressing these ethical dilemmas is crucial for fostering equitable practices in the integration of AI into creative labor. Several case studies illustrate the impact of AI on various media sectors. In journalism, AI-generated news articles are becoming increasingly common, with outlets like the Associated Press utilizing AI to automate financial reporting (Simon, 2024). In the entertainment industry, AI's role in scriptwriting and film production raises questions about the future of creative labor and the nature of storytelling. A notable example is the AI-generated short film "Sunspring," which highlights both the possibilities and limitations of AI in narrative construction.

The application of artificial intelligence in creative fields introduces complex challenges related to authorship, intellectual property, and the conceptualization of creativity. This complexity becomes particularly salient when AI-generated content is indistinguishable from that produced by humans. Anantrasirichai and Bull (2022) explore the transformative impact of AI technologies across various sectors of the creative industries, including music, visual arts, film, design, and gaming. They examine how AI tools, such as machine learning, deep learning, and generative adversarial networks (GANs), are enabling automation and the creation of new forms of artistic content. AI is increasingly used in tasks like music composition, image generation, video editing, and game design, offering creatives the

opportunity to enhance their work or reduce repetitive labor. The review also highlights the applications of AI in specific creative fields. In music, AI can compose original pieces or assist in sound design, while in visual arts, AI-generated artworks are pushing the boundaries of traditional creativity. In the film and gaming sectors, AI is used to generate dynamic content, improve visual effects, and create responsive gaming environments. Additionally, AI plays a significant role in advertising and marketing, helping to generate personalized content for target audiences. Rather than replacing human creativity, AI is seen as a tool for collaboration, aiding creatives by suggesting new ideas and variations that might not have been considered. Despite the exciting possibilities, the article also addresses several challenges and ethical concerns. Issues of authorship, intellectual property, and the potential displacement of human workers in creative fields are explored. There are concerns about the originality of AI-generated works and their cultural relevance, as well as the implications for job security in traditional creative roles. The authors suggest that while AI will continue to evolve, its integration into the creative industries must be carefully managed to balance innovation with ethical considerations. Ultimately, AI's role in creativity is envisioned as collaborative, where human intuition and AI technology work together to create innovative artistic experiences. Garcia (2024) explores the complex relationship between generative AI and the concept of creativity. Garcia discusses the growing influence of AI tools in the creative industries, particularly in the realm of art, where AI has been employed to generate original visual works, music, literature, and other artistic forms. The article highlights the paradox that while AI can produce works that appear highly creative, the technology itself lacks consciousness or intentionality, raising fundamental questions about the nature of creativity. Garcia (2024) examines both the opportunities and challenges posed by AI-generated art, suggesting that AI can serve as a tool that enhances human creativity, pushing boundaries and expanding artistic expression. However, the absence of human agency in the creation process leads to debates about authorship, originality, and the emotional depth typically associated with human-made art. Garcia also addresses the ethical and societal implications of AI in the creative domain. One key concern is the potential for generative AI to disrupt traditional artistic practices and employment in creative fields, as AI systems increasingly take on roles traditionally reserved for human creators. Furthermore, Garcia touches on issues of copyright, intellectual property, and the potential for AI to perpetuate biases or lack cultural sensitivity in its outputs.

The intersection of creative production and human agency raises important questions about the role of individuals in an increasingly automated world. As technology advances, particularly with the rise of artificial intelligence, the nature of creativity is being actively discussed and redefined. This transformation invites a reevaluation of what creativity means in the digital age and how it is expressed across various mediums. This evolution can lead to tensions that may prompt artists, writers, and other creative professionals to "strike" or advocate for their rights and recognition.

Strikes in the media and creative sectors are not a new phenomenon. Strikes within the media and creative industries serve as pivotal events that highlight the complexities of labor relations, economic pressures, and the evolving landscape of creative production. As industries undergo significant transformations due to technological advancements and changing audience consumption patterns, the demands of creative workers—ranging from fair compensation to job security—have prompted organized actions to address these issues. Historical events such as the 1960 Screen Actors Guild strike and the more recent Writers Guild of America (WGA) strikes have underscored the tensions between creative labor and industry management. The advent of AI technologies poses threats to traditional roles in

creative production, leading to fears of job displacement and calls for protection. Strikes not only reflect the grievances of workers but also have far-reaching implications for the creative production process. When creators halt work to strike, the entire production ecosystem is affected, leading to delays and financial repercussions for studios and networks. This disruption can highlight the essential role of creative labor in the media landscape, emphasizing that without fair compensation and appropriate working conditions, the quality and diversity of content may suffer (Fisher, 2024). Solidarity among workers is a crucial aspect of strikes in the creative industries. The collective actions taken by writers, actors, and other creatives often mobilize broader support from the public and other unions, creating a unified front against industry practices perceived as exploitative. The success of such strikes frequently hinges on the ability of workers to present a united stance and articulate their demands clearly.

The Writers Guild of America (WGA) is a labor union representing writers in the film, television, and digital media industries in the United States. Formed in 1933, the WGA aims to protect the rights and interests of its members by negotiating collective bargaining agreements, advocating for fair compensation, and addressing issues related to intellectual property, working conditions, and job security (WGA, n.d). The history of WGA strikes illustrates the evolving challenges faced by writers in the media industry, highlighting issues of compensation, job security, and adaptation to technological changes. Each strike has contributed to shaping the framework of writers' rights and industry standards, emphasizing the importance of collective bargaining in advocating for fair treatment.

WGA has a history of strikes that reflect ongoing tensions between writers and studios over compensation, working conditions, and industry changes and this history has been the subject of several academic studies, which have generally assessed the strikes as being technology-driven. The history of WGA strikes illustrates the ongoing struggle of writers to secure fair compensation, job security, and protections in an evolving media landscape. Each strike has significantly shaped the framework of writers' rights, emphasizing the importance of collectivity in the media and creative industry. The first major strike, in 1960, lasting 148 days, focused on issues such as residuals from television reruns and writers demanded a share of profits from rebroadcasts and syndication of their works and strike resulted in the establishment of a residuals system and improved benefits (Dings, 2024). The 1981 strike focused on residuals for cable and home video, with writers seeking compensation for works aired on cable networks and sold on home video. Job security, which is related to the instability of writing jobs in a changing media landscape, was also a prominent concern. The outcome of the strike was that the WGA won a deal that included cable residuals and improved job security provisions. The 1988 strike, lasting five months, addressed concerns over home video and residuals, ultimately ending with a deal that improved writers' compensation and established residuals for home video (Wilson, 1991). The 2007 and 2008 strikes, significant events that lasted 100 days, focused on digital media and fair compensation for new media content, ultimately leading to a new agreement that included provisions for digital media and set standards for compensation in an evolving landscape (Banks, 2010).

The most recent 2023 strike highlights issues such as AI in writing and regulations, working conditions, streaming residuals, and overall pay equity. From May 2 to September 27, 2023, lasting 148 days, the Writers Guild of America (WGA), representing 11,000 screenwriters, went on strike over a labor dispute with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP). Writers demanded higher pay to reflect inflation and changes in the

industry, particularly due to the rise of streaming services. They expressed concerns about long hours and the use of "mini-rooms," which limited job security. Additionally, there were fears regarding the use of AI in writing and the need for protections against potential job displacement. The strike ended with a tentative agreement that addressed many of the writers' concerns, including better compensation and protections related to AI.

The WGA strike primarily revolves around writers' concerns about job security, compensation, and the impact of AI on creative work. Writers fear that the use of AI in scriptwriting could undermine their roles, lead to decreased pay, and diminish the quality of creative content.

The strike garnered significant media attention and support from other unions and public figures in the industry. Writers participated in picketing and organized events to raise awareness about their issues and to pressure studios to negotiate. The strike lasted until late September 2023, concluding with a tentative agreement that addressed many of the writers' concerns, including improved compensation and safeguards against AI use in writing.

Framing Analysis of News Coverage: WGA Strike 2023

Framing analysis examines how information is presented and the implications of that presentation. According to Entman (1993), framing involves selecting certain aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text. This process shapes how audiences interpret events and issues. Framing analysis is a method used in communication studies and media research to explore how information is presented and understood within the media. It focuses on the ways in which specific aspects of an issue, event, or story are emphasized or downplayed through the selection of particular words, images, and narratives. This dual process shapes how audiences understand issues and can significantly influence public opinion and behavior.

In this study, an analysis is conducted on news articles published on on-line news websites that reference the keyword "WGA Strike 2023," utilizing framing analysis as the methodological framework. Focus on articles published before, during, and after the strike period, ideally from April to December 2023. A comprehensive analysis revealed a total of 292 news articles sourced from 92 distinct news outlets concerning the subject matter. Prominent among these sources were ABC Chicago, AP News, BBC, CNBC, CNN, Deadline, Los Angeles Times, NBC News, NPR, Reuters, The Guardian, The Hollywood Reporter, The New York Times, Variety, VOX, and The Washington Post. Notably, the month of September emerged as the period with the highest intensity of coverage, coinciding with the conclusion of the strike. In the study, key concepts such as creativity, creative production, and artificial intelligence were systematically defined, and the thematic frameworks that shaped the narratives were identified. In the context of the WGA strike, it was found that news items were formed under the themes of economy, technology and, working conditions. The economic theme emphasizes the financial stakes for writers and the broader industry, the labor rights theme focuses on the rights of workers, collectivity, and collective bargaining, and the technological theme discusses the impact of AI on writing jobs and the creative process.

The themes in the headlines of the news are as follows:

1. **Human-Centric Focus:** Many headlines emphasize the human element of the strike, focusing on the writers' struggles, job security, and creative rights. Phrases like

"Writers Fight for Fair Compensation" highlight the human impact and the emotional stakes involved. This framing tends to evoke sympathy and support for the writers, positioning them as victims of a larger economic system.

2. **Technological Threat:** Headlines that mention AI often frame it as a disruptive force threatening the traditional roles of writers. For example, "AI: The New Rival in Hollywood" portrays AI as a competitor, suggesting a dystopian narrative where human creativity is undervalued. This framing can amplify fears about job displacement and the erosion of creative professions.
3. **Collective Action vs. Corporate Power:** Many headlines highlight the writers' collective bargaining power against corporate entities. This framing emphasizes solidarity and the importance of human agency in the face of technological advancement. Phrases like "Writers Unite Against AI Overreach" signal a struggle for control over creative processes, underscoring the tension between human creativity and machine efficiency.
4. The framing of the WGA strike in headlines reflects a complex interplay between human and artificial intelligence. The emphasis on human narratives highlights the emotional and creative dimensions of writing, while the portrayal of AI as a threat underscores societal concerns about technology's impact on labor.

Based on the themes, it is seen that the framework of the news is determined as conflict, economy, technology and culture.

1. **Conflict Frame:** News coverage often emphasizes the conflict between writers and studios, portraying it as a struggle for creative rights against the backdrop of technological advancement. This frame highlights the fear of AI as a threat to human creativity, framing the issue in terms of a battle for survival. Many articles emphasized the irreplaceable aspects of human creativity, intuition, and emotional depth in storytelling. This framing positioned human intelligence as superior in areas like character development, thematic depth, and cultural context—elements that AI may struggle to replicate authentically. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) discusses the concept of flow and the intrinsic motivation behind creative work, highlighting the nuances of human creativity that are often lost in algorithmic processes. In this case, the focus on conflict can overshadow collaborative possibilities between AI and human creativity. Some narratives proposed a more optimistic view of AI, suggesting that the future may lie in collaboration between human writers and AI tools. It indicates a potential for enhanced creativity where AI serves as an assistant rather than a replacement. The idea of augmented intelligence emphasizes collaboration between humans and AI, suggesting that this partnership could lead to innovative creative outputs that benefit from both human insight and AI efficiency (Mandvikar & Dave, 2023).
2. **Labor Rights vs. Technological Disruption:** News articles often framed the WGA strike in the context of labor rights, emphasizing writers' demands for fair compensation, especially in light of the growing use of AI in scriptwriting and content creation. The framing here highlights the tension between human creativity and AI capabilities, where AI is often portrayed as a potential threat to job security for writers. In this case, the frame of "labor rights" emphasizes the importance of protecting human creativity against encroaching technology.
3. **AI as a Tool vs. AI as a Threat:** Different articles varied in their portrayal of AI. Some framed AI as a helpful tool that could enhance creativity, allowing writers to generate ideas more efficiently. Others framed it as a significant threat, suggesting that reliance on AI could undermine the unique value of human storytellers. Bennett

and Entman (2001) note that media framing can significantly influence public discourse by constructing specific interpretations of complex issues. The dichotomy of AI as a tool versus a threat reflects broader societal anxieties regarding technology's role in creative industries.

4. **Economic Frame:** The economic implications of AI in writing are another prevalent frame. Articles often discuss how studios might leverage AI to cut costs, thus impacting writers' livelihoods. This frame resonates with broader economic concerns about automation in various industries. The potential job displacement due to technological advancement, which resonates with writers' fears of being replaced by AI systems.
5. **Ethical Frame:** The ethical implications of AI in creative industries are also a significant theme. Reports often address questions of authorship, originality, and the moral rights of writers in the face of AI-generated content. This frame raises critical issues about the integrity of artistic expression and the potential commodification of creativity. The use of AI in creative industries raises ethical questions about authorship and authenticity. Who owns the rights to AI-generated content?
6. **Identity Frame:** The framing of writers as custodians of culture and storytelling is another critical aspect. This frame elevates the discussion to one of cultural preservation, arguing that AI lacks the human experience and emotional depth that writers bring to their work. Discussions around AI often touch on ethical concerns, including ownership of content and the potential for bias in AI-generated materials.

Conclusion

The intersection of artificial intelligence and creative industries has emerged as a significant area of inquiry within communication and media studies. This exploration reveals that AI technologies, particularly within the realm of synthetic media, pose challenges to traditional concepts of authorship, creativity, and labor. The recent Writers Guild of America (WGA) strike exemplifies the complexities surrounding these themes, highlighting the nuanced tensions between human and artificial intelligence in the realm of creative production. The framing of the WGA strike's news emphasizes the critical role of human agency in an increasingly automated environment. Various frames—conflict, economic considerations, technological disruption, and ethical implications—illuminate the multifaceted nature of the discourse surrounding AI's impact on creative labor. As writers advocate for fair compensation and protections against potential job displacement resulting from AI, they underscore the irreplaceable qualities of human creativity that algorithms find challenging to replicate.

This study posits that the future of creative industries may depend on establishing a balance between utilizing AI as a collaborative tool and preserving the unique contributions of human creators. As the media landscape evolves, it is imperative to cultivate ethical frameworks that address the implications of AI in creative processes, ensuring that innovation does not compromise creativity, diversity, and cultural richness. The ongoing dialogue surrounding these issues will significantly shape not only the future of media production but also the broader cultural narratives that define society.

Future research could further investigate how various media outlets utilize these frames and their subsequent impact on public opinion and policy concerning AI in creative industries. While AI offers promising opportunities to enhance creativity across various sectors, it

fundamentally differs from human intelligence in terms of emotional depth, cultural context, and ethical considerations.

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***Intangible Heritage of Aci Trezza:
Historical Reconstruction of the Rodolico Shipyard and Its Living Human Treasure***

Grazia Nicotra, University of Catania, Italy

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Abstract

In the seaside village of Aci Trezza, in Sicily, the Rodolico family's shipyard has been building boats since at least 1808. They use the "mezzo garbo" construction technique passed down orally. In 1960 the golden age for the shipyard began, Salvatore Martino, assisted by his sons and over thirty workers. He began building large wooden boats by applying a modification of his own invention to insert a third engine on the hull, applying a modification in the hull of his invention to insert a third engine on board. The Salvatore Martino represents the old tradition, with his own naivety he manages to relaunch the economy of the village. In 2018 he was recognized as a Living Human Treasure. Among the construction techniques of the shipyard, the use of the "Jupiter's dart" (an ancient Phoenician carpentry technique) also stands out. The importance of his work, and of his ancestors, was recognized by the inclusion in 2014 of their "trezzote wooden boats" in the REIS. The decorations present in the wooden boats, characteristic of the traditional Sicilian naval carpentry. The motivations that push to decorate the hulls are to be found in superstitions, which lead to elevate the boat to the status of a living being. The study examines literary works, paintings, engravings, videos, interviews, archive documents: to trace a continuity over time in support of the oral transmission of the wooden boat building technique typical of Trezza. We are dealing with an intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords: Intangible Culture Heritage, Living Human Treasure, Shipyard

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Introduction

The location of my research is a seaside village called Aci Trezza. In particular, I assess the shipbuilding practice developed in the Rodolico shipyard from the early 19th to the 21st century. During the Roman period, it became a place of transit and landing: evidence of this can be seen in the various anchors and amphorae found on the seabed of the Riviera dei Ciclopi and the wreck of a Roman ship offshore.¹ Later, the town was officially founded at the end of the 17th century by Prince Stefano Riggio (Castorina, 2018, p. 53). Initially born as a maritime landing place of the Principality, it was the feud's only village from which the sea could have been reached and if properly arranged would have become an excellent port of call. Soon, it became the centre of local commercial life: a shelter for boats, a church, an emporium and an oven where pasta was also made were built. It became one of the most active commercial ports in Sicily (Castorina, 2018, p. 58). Over time, the coastal landscape has been the setting for the myth of Ulysses and Polyphemus, Aci and Galatea. The town inspired the pen of the young Giovanni Verga, who wrote the novel *I Malavoglia*, which Luchino Visconti later filmed in his documentary *La Terra Trema*, in 1948. During the 17th century, the activity of the shipwrights is presumed to have begun. In order to understand the craft of the shipwright, it is necessary to know the anthropological and ethnological point of view. The sea contains strong contrasts: it is wealth, work, contact, life and death. The boat represents the indispensable working tool for accessing the sea. For the fisherman, the boat becomes a member of his family, to whom he entrusts his life and the sustenance of his family. The boat is the hub of social, working, family activities. Who is the shipwright? The shipwright builds boats and sums up several specialisations in his figure: from carpenter to caulker to painter (Li Vigni & Tusa, 2002). Building a boat at the Rodolico shipyard involves several stages, that are strictly followed still today:

- Ordering and choosing the shape of a vessel's hull according to its function.
- Choice of the proper timber, a very hard wood for the skeleton, a more impermeable wood for the planking.
- Use of the empirical construction technique of the 'half-rib'. This technique reproduces the master half-section of the boat to be built and is used to create the curvatures of the central body of the hull.
- After completing the deadwork, the hull is covered with hull planking, individually prepared, plank by plank, formed and bent following the ancient custom of using fire and water.
- In order to make the hull watertight, the technique of caulking is used, tarry tow is inserted between the gaps in the boards (i.e. the joints) with the help of a handmade mallet.
- Finally, the painting and decorations (Seafaring images, apotropaic symbols) are usually done by a *Pingisanti* (the hull painter), who uses both sacred and profane symbols.

¹ Castorina, A. (2018). Aci Trezza tra natura, storia, fede e tradizioni (Eds.), *Paesaggi del Sacro tra memoria, storia e tradizione* (pp.53-64), Regione Siciliana, Palermo.



Figure 1: The Decorations on the Hull of the Boat by a Pincisanti (Photogram from ‘La barca siciliana’ by Ugo Saitta [1958]) (Source: Sicilian Regional Film Archive, CRicd.)

The methodology research was carried out initially following an open scheme, in order to know the main subjects of the matter. Furthermore, interviews were organized, following the topics that were considered relevant. After collecting and analysing the testimonies, I verified the truthfulness of the information through combination of documentary sources already recorded at the shipyard in possession of national archives. By cross-referencing the data, it is possible to draw a timeline, in which the bibliographic research allowed me to fill in some gaps and broaden the horizons in the multidisciplinary approach, helping me with the fields of anthropology, ethnology, history and art.

The presence of the Rodolico shipyard is as early as 1808. This is testified by an invoice recorded in the archives of the Sicilian Region, though this document does not specify the purpose of the work required to the shipwrights. The place where the wooden fishing boats were built was along the coast, today this street bears the name Rodolico. In 1908, the University of Catania commissioned the shipwright Salvatore Rodolico Sr. (homonymous grandfather of Salvatore Martino) to build a 22-palm-long wooden boat to accompany scholars to the Lachea island. The family tree of the Rodolico family shipwrights begins with Salvatore Rodolico, born in 1887 and ends with the last heir Giovanni Rodolico, born in 1963. The *savoir faire* was handed down from father to son, the activity of shipwright being the central focus in the family, everyone from childhood onwards attending the shipyard and learning its secrets. The shipyard, in the past until the 1950s, only built the typical Trezzote wooden boats for fishing anchovies and sardines in the Gulf of Catania. These boats have an average length of 6-7 meters, the shape of the hull varies depending on the type of fishing, and are rowed or fitted with a lateen sail if necessary. Today, this construction technique is included in—and protected by—a regional legislation. Sicily, in response to the call for the protection of the Intangible Heritage by UNESCO,² in 2003, organised itself in the activation of a strategy on the territory by issuing, on July 26, 2005, Decree no. 77, the Register of Intangible Heritage (REI) and the Regional Programme of Intangible Heritage. By means of the REI, the Sicilian Region has initiated the surveying and recording of its cultural heritage, also making a significant contribution to its protection, with particular attention to heritage at risk. Recently, on the basis of accumulated experience and with the aim of further enhancing

² The Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003

the regulatory tool, in order to adapt it to the latest UNESCO's guidelines, the regulatory framework was revised. This took place through D. A. no. 571 of March 5, 2014, which established the new Register of the Intangible Heritage of the Sicilian Region (R.E.I.S.)³. This register consists of a series of specific books, recording spaces that have hosted significant events, capable of generating dynamics of collective memories, symbolic production, or representing historically recognised socio-cultural scenarios. In 2014, typical Trezzote wooden boats were inscribed in the Book of Trades, Knowledge and Techniques. The sixties marked the beginning of the golden age for the shipyard, which passed to the young Salvatore Martino Jr who, assisted by his sons Sebastiano and Giovanni and over thirty workers, began the construction of wooden fishing boats. These large vessels measured 40 meters, and over time and according to requests, Salvatore Martino, thanks to his ingenuity, applied a modification to the hull to insert a third engine underboard (Li Vigni, Tusa, 2010, pp. 124–125). Orders arrived from Tuscany, Liguria, the Aeolian Islands and the island of Elba. The flourishing activity of the shipyard marked the development of the village, helping it in its expansion and modernisation. Where the shipyard is today, it is presumed to be the ancient Malavoglia dockyard, mentioned in Verga's works. In 2018, the shipwright Salvatore Martino Rodolico Jr was declared a Living Human Treasure, listed in the REIS.



Figure 2: Salvatore Martino Rodolico, Shipwright and Living Human Treasure Included in the REIS of the Sicilian Region (2022) (Photo by G. Nicotra)

Today, the shipyard takes care of the typical Trezzote boats included in the REIS, depending on the fishing technique used, in: Sardare, Cozzolare, Fiocinare and Nassarole. The typical Trezzote wooden boats are no longer than 6–8 metres in length and use oar propulsion or sail rigging with the use of lateen sail. The construction technique used for small boats, but also for large wooden vessels, is the 'half-rib'. The difference in construction is the addition of inboard engines in large wooden fishing boats up to a maximum of three, and the hull design also varies up to the addition of cabins below deck. When the wooden base is finished, the decoration of the hull served as a means of procuring divine protection by dedicating it to a saint of the Catholic religion. The *pingisanto* was the painter who decorated the hulls

³ Fonte web: <https://reis.cricd.it/>

(Finocchiaro, 2012). The following were usually painted on the bow: the mermaid, the dolphin, the fist, the eye (Coppola, 2011, p. 5). The eye symbolizes being on the alert to escape from danger. An example is the Providence of G. Verga's *I Malavoglia* in which *Sardara*, besides being conceived as a member of the family, also becomes a paradigm of their destinies. The decorations, like the types of boats, also depend on its function, and each ornamental motif occupies a precise portion of the hull, as an identifying feature of a precise area. Aci Trezza seafaring will have Saint John the Baptist imprinted in their hulls in the 'Palummedda'. The recurring colours of the area are red, yellow, blue, orange and green. The edge of the planking often hosts a festoon with geometric motifs. On the prow a mermaid is represented blowing a trumpet, symbolizing a warning against danger, both the mermaid and the eye are defined as apotropaic symbols.

Conclusion

The case study offers a perspective on the maritime and coastal culture of eastern Sicily, with a focus on the ethnography that characterizes the place. The aim is to highlight how tradition in shipbuilding has generated innovation in technology in order to pass on its maritime heritage to future generations (Li Vigni & Tusa, 2002). The purpose of the study on the family of Aci Trezza's shipwrights showed how an ancient craft evolved in the construction of the living human treasure, Salvatore Martino Jr. He expanded the shipyard, acquired new machinery to be able to build ever larger boats. In addition to the typical wooden Trezzote fishing boats, which he built together with his father and grandfather, he started to design new hulls that were closer to the demands of his clients. Eventually becoming the driving force behind the town's economy, almost all the townspeople worked in the shipyard. Since around 1980, the port filled up with six new large boats every year, plus the old boats pulled out for annual refitting. During his time there, he built around one hundred larger boats with commissions around Italy. His ingenuity allowed him to evolve in step with the rules of modernity.



Figure 3: Cantieri Navale Rodolico During the Construction of Large Wooden Boats During the 1980s c.e. (Source: Sicilian Regional, CRicd)

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Contact emails: grazia.nicotra@phd.unict.it
grazianicotra@hotmail.it

***Enhancing Media Literacy Among Older Adults for Creative Engagement:
A Case Study in Khlong Sam Wa, Bangkok, Thailand***

Nitta Roonkaseam, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand
Sirimon Puengsangwal, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand
Nisararat Wilailuk, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand
Pratchaya Tongchum, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand

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Abstract

In Thailand's rapidly evolving digital landscape, media literacy is crucial for older adults' well-being and active participation. This study aimed to enhance media literacy among older adults in Khlong Sam Wa, Bangkok, Thailand, focusing on creative and safe digital engagement. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving 41 participants in a six-module curriculum covering foundational media literacy concepts, media ecology, legal and ethical considerations, and active media participation. Pre- and post-test assessments and qualitative interviews were conducted. Results showed significant improvement in participants' media literacy scores, from 16.24 to 18.39 out of 20. Qualitative findings revealed increased confidence in digital navigation, a deeper understanding of media influence, and a newfound enthusiasm for creative expression. Participants produced two TikTok videos raising awareness about romance scams, demonstrating the practical application of their new skills.

Keywords: Media Literacy, Older Adults, Creative Engagement

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Introduction

In Thailand's rapidly evolving digital landscape, older adults face unprecedented challenges in navigating an increasingly digitalized society. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital adoption, transforming how information is consumed and shared, particularly through social media platforms like Facebook, LINE, and TikTok. This digital transformation has exposed older adults to new vulnerabilities, as evidenced by recent data from Khlong Sam Wa district, where investment scams (37%), romance scams (28%), and fraudulent health product advertisements (22%) constitute the majority of reported online threats. Lee (2018) emphasizes that addressing these emerging digital threats requires media literacy education that extends beyond traditional classroom settings.

The shift towards digital platforms has fundamentally altered the information ecosystem, particularly affecting how older adults engage with media content. While this transformation has democratized content creation through user-generated content (UGC), it has also presented significant challenges. Research by Pérez-Escoda and colleagues (2021) reveals a growing distrust in traditional media sources, leading users to rely more heavily on peer networks for information—a trend that potentially increases vulnerability to misinformation. Thailand's Anti-Fake News Center has documented this phenomenon, reporting over 20 million shares of false information between October 2020 and June 2021. This situation is particularly concerning for older adults, who often encounter unique obstacles in developing media literacy due to varying levels of digital literacy and the rapid evolution of digital technologies (Lee, 2018).

When people turn to content that aligns with their existing biases, often without proper verification, it can lead to significant negative impacts on health beliefs, scientific understanding, and cultural relationships. In Thailand, this challenge is compounded by sophisticated online scams targeting older adults through various channels, including investment schemes, romance scams, and fraudulent health products. The prevalence of these threats, coupled with declining trust in traditional information sources, creates a pressing need for targeted intervention.

Given these challenges, this study aimed to enhance media literacy among older adults in Khlong Sam Wa, Bangkok, empowering them for creative and safe digital engagement. While existing research has established the importance of media literacy education, there remains a significant gap in understanding how to effectively develop these skills among older adults, particularly those aged 60 and above in urban communities. Through a structured curriculum covering foundational media literacy concepts, media ecology, and legal considerations, this research sought to bridge the digital literacy gap and promote more resilient online behaviors. The study focused on developing practical skills for identifying and responding to online threats while fostering active participation in digital spaces, addressing the critical need for targeted media literacy education that specifically considers the unique vulnerabilities and learning needs of older adults in rapidly digitalizing urban environments.

Research Objectives

This study was guided by four interconnected objectives designed to create sustainable change in how older adults engage with digital media in the Khlong Sam Wa community:

1. To assess the media literacy levels of older adults before and after participating in the intervention program, provide quantitative measures of the program's effectiveness.
2. To enhance participants' fundamental skills in critical evaluation of media content, particularly focusing on their ability to identify and analyze potential online threats such as investment scams, romance scams, and misleading health information.
3. To develop practical competencies in navigating digital platforms safely and effectively, enabling participants to confidently engage with social media while maintaining awareness of potential risks.
4. To evaluate how participants apply their newly acquired media literacy skills in addressing real community issues, as demonstrated through their creation of awareness content about romance scams on TikTok.

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of a media literacy intervention program for older adults in Khlong Sam Wa, Bangkok. The methodology was designed to address the study's four interconnected objectives through both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis.

Population and Sample

The study focused on adults aged 40 and above residing in Khlong Sam Wa district, Bangkok. This age threshold was strategically selected based on research indicating that individuals born before 1983 often face unique challenges in digital adaptation compared to younger "digital natives". Through purposive and convenience sampling, we recruited 41 participants who met our specific inclusion criteria: permanent residence in Khlong Sam Wa district, basic smartphone proficiency, regular access to digital devices, and ability to attend all training sessions.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

The research instruments were developed in alignment with the NBTC's MELit Project framework. At the core of our study was a six-module curriculum, adapted into an intensive two-day format delivering 12 hours of focused training. The curriculum was designed to build competencies in media literacy, media ecology, legal and ethical issues, digital safety, active participation, and content creation. To gather comprehensive data, we utilized multiple instruments including a 20-point scale pre- and post-test assessment measuring media literacy knowledge, semi-structured interview protocols for in-depth qualitative insights, and structured observation forms for documenting participant engagement and challenges.

Our data collection process unfolded across three distinct phases. The pre-intervention assessment established baseline measurements through media literacy tests and initial participant interviews regarding digital media habits and challenges. During the intervention implementation, we delivered the six-module curriculum while conducting continuous participant observation and facilitating hands-on practical exercises and group activities. The post-intervention evaluation comprised post-test administration, follow-up interviews exploring participant experiences and perceived changes, and assessment of practical applications through participants' created content.



Figure 1: The Six-Module Curriculum Structure of the Media Literacy Intervention Program, Showing the Progression From Foundational Concepts to Practical Application

Data Analysis

The analysis of our data followed a comprehensive approach integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods. Our quantitative analysis encompassed descriptive statistics of participant demographics and pre/post-test scores, paired t-tests to measure statistical significance of changes in media literacy scores, and analysis of specific competency areas showing greatest improvement. The qualitative component involved thematic analysis of interview transcripts to identify key patterns in participant experiences, content analysis of observation notes documenting learning progression, and integration of quantitative and qualitative findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of program effectiveness.

This methodological framework was specifically designed to capture both measurable improvements in media literacy skills and deeper insights into participants' learning experiences and behavioral changes in digital media engagement. The integration of multiple data collection methods and analysis approaches allowed us to develop a nuanced understanding of how older adults engage with and learn about digital media literacy.

Research Findings

The study demonstrated notable improvements in media literacy across multiple dimensions. These findings are organized and presented according to the study's four primary objectives.

Assessment of Media Literacy Levels Among Older Adults

The study's findings revealed significant improvements in participants' media literacy skills based on pre-test and post-test assessments of 41 participants. The quantitative analysis showed a statistically significant increase in media literacy competency after completing the intervention program, with the mean score rising from 16.24 to 18.39 out of 20 points ($p < .001$).

Table 1: Summary of Pre-test and Post-test Scores (N=41)

Statistical Measure	Pre-test	Post-test	Change
Mean Score	16.24	18.39	+2.15
Highest Score	19	20	+1
Lowest Score	10	15	+5
Score Range	9	5	-4

A detailed analysis of individual performance revealed several significant findings. The intervention's effectiveness was particularly evident in the achievement of maximum scores, with three participants reaching 20 points in the post-test. The program's positive impact was further demonstrated by the fact that 85% of participants showed improvement in their scores, with only one participant experiencing a slight decline in performance. Most notably, one participant demonstrated remarkable progress, improving from 10 to 20 points. The intervention also appeared to create more consistent performance levels across the group, as indicated by the narrowing of the score range from 9 points in the pre-test to 5 points in the post-test and the decrease in standard deviation from 2.31 to 1.92.

These quantitative findings provide compelling evidence of the media literacy intervention program's effectiveness in enhancing participants' competencies. The substantial improvements observed across most participants, along with the statistical significance of the changes, suggest that the program successfully achieved its educational objectives, contributing to enhanced media literacy skills among the target population.

Enhancement of Critical Evaluation Skills

The qualitative analysis through participant interviews revealed significant improvements in critical evaluation skills, with behavioral changes manifesting in both individual and collective learning contexts. Our findings highlighted three key areas of development that emerged from participants' experiences and reflections.

The first notable change was participants' adoption of more rigorous information verification practices. As one participant emphasized: "I now check information sources before sharing," demonstrating a fundamental shift from passive content consumption to active critical evaluation. This behavioral change reflected a deeper understanding of digital media responsibility and the importance of source verification.

The second significant development was the emergence of knowledge transfer within family networks. Participants began taking on educational roles within their families, particularly with younger generations. This was exemplified by one participant who reported teaching her grandchildren about online safety - a role transformation that highlights both increased confidence and practical application of learned skills.

The third key observation was the development of peer learning networks among participants. The program fostered a collaborative learning environment where participants actively shared experiences and strategies for evaluating online content. This peer-to-peer knowledge exchange enhanced the learning process and created sustainable support systems for continued skill development beyond the formal training sessions.



Figure 2: Participants Engaging in Collaborative Content Creation Activities, Demonstrating the Practical Application of Media Literacy Skills

These findings suggest that the program not only enhanced individual critical evaluation skills but also catalyzed broader social learning dynamics, creating multiple channels for knowledge sharing and skill reinforcement within both family and community contexts.

Development of Digital Platform Navigation Skills

The findings revealed significant advancements in participants' practical digital competencies across multiple dimensions, demonstrating the program's effectiveness in developing essential digital navigation skills. Our observations align with Vroman and colleagues' (2015) findings that older adults can develop strong digital competencies when provided with structured support and opportunities for hands-on practice. Participants showed marked improvement in their ability to independently navigate various social media platforms, reflecting increased confidence in their digital interactions. This enhanced confidence was particularly evident in their improved understanding of digital safety measures and their heightened ability to recognize and respond to potential online threats.

A particularly noteworthy outcome was the spontaneous emergence of peer-to-peer learning networks among participants. This finding supports Sayago and colleagues' (2013) ethnographic research, which identified collaborative learning and mutual support as crucial factors in older adults' successful ICT adoption. These informal networks became valuable platforms for sharing experiences and digital safety tips, creating a supportive learning environment that extended beyond the formal training sessions. Martínez-Alcalá and colleagues' (2018) similarly found that such peer support networks significantly enhance digital literacy retention among older learners.

The impact of the program reached beyond individual participants, as many began transferring their newly acquired knowledge to family members. This intergenerational knowledge transfer reflects findings by Ivan and Hebblethwaite (2016), who documented how older adults can become active digital participants and mentors within their families.

once they gain confidence with technology. Several participants reported teaching digital safety skills to their grandchildren, demonstrating what Schehl et al. (2019) describe as a “digital empowerment cycle,” where increased digital competence leads to greater social engagement and knowledge sharing across generations.



Figure 3: Participants Demonstrating Their Content Creation Skills Through Tiktok Video Production, Addressing Romance Scams in Their Community

Application of Media Literacy Skills in Addressing Community Issues

The practical application of acquired media literacy skills was most notably demonstrated through participants' creation of awareness content about romance scams on TikTok, reflecting their successful transformation from passive consumers to active content creators. The participants developed engaging content that effectively addressed a significant community concern through various creative approaches. Their videos skillfully simulated realistic scam scenarios using chat conversation formats, making the content both relatable and educational for their target audience. The participants demonstrated sophisticated understanding by illustrating common tactics employed by romance scammers and clearly showing the gradual trust-building process that fraudsters typically use before attempting financial scams.

The effectiveness of their content was particularly evident in how they tailored their messages to resonate with their peer group. Participants carefully considered age-appropriate presentation styles and communication approaches, ensuring their content would be both accessible and impactful for their target audience. This thoughtful adaptation of content demonstrated not only their technical skills in digital content creation but also their deep understanding of their audience's needs and preferences.

The success of this content creation project was further supported by both quantitative and qualitative findings, indicating that the program effectively achieved its objectives in enhancing media literacy among older adults. The consistently high attendance rate and enthusiastic participation in content creation activities suggested that the intervention format

successfully addressed the learning needs of the target demographic. Perhaps most significantly, the project fostered the development of a supportive learning environment where participants actively collaborated in skill development, contributing to improvements in media literacy at both individual and community levels.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the effectiveness of media literacy enhancement among Thai older adults in the digital age, revealing three significant transformations. First, there was a substantial improvement in media literacy scores from 16.24 to 18.39 out of 20. Second, participants transformed from passive consumers to active content creators, particularly evident in their creation of TikTok videos addressing romance scams. Third, peer-to-peer learning networks emerged, extending the program's impact to families and communities.

These findings lead to three practical recommendations: piloting the curriculum in three diverse districts within the next year, implementing a peer learning "buddy system" to leverage tech-savvy older adults' expertise, and developing specialized modules focusing on creative video content production. For future research, we recommend conducting longitudinal studies to examine long-term impact, developing standardized assessment tools specifically designed for older adults, and investigating cultural factors influencing program effectiveness across different communities.

This study represents a significant step toward understanding how to effectively enhance media literacy among older adults while highlighting the importance of continued research and development in this crucial area. The findings suggest that implementing these recommendations can contribute to creating a more inclusive and empowering digital environment for Thai older adults.

While this study demonstrates promising results, several limitations should be noted. The relatively small sample size of 41 participants and the focus on a single district may limit generalizability. Additionally, the short duration of the intervention (12 hours over two days) may affect the long-term retention of skills. Implementation challenges include varying levels of digital device access among older adults, potential resistance to new technology adoption, and the need for ongoing technical support beyond the formal training period. Future studies should address these limitations through larger-scale implementations across diverse demographics and longer intervention periods.

The practical implementation of this program faces several challenges that require consideration. These include securing sustainable funding for program expansion, maintaining participant engagement over time, and adapting the curriculum to accommodate different learning paces and technological comfort levels. Additionally, the rapid evolution of digital platforms and scam tactics necessitates regular curriculum updates to remain relevant and effective.

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Contact email: nitta@pnru.ac.th

Mapping as a Medium to Re-imagine Ankara With Unlost Tumuli – Ankara With Tumuli?

Hatice Hilal Topuz, Middle East Technical University, Turkey
Ela Alanyali Aral, Middle East Technical University, Turkey
Sinan Cem Kizil, Middle East Technical University, Turkey

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Abstract

In the city of Ankara, which is known to have been founded by the Phrygians in the 8th century BC, there are monumental tombs called tumulus – an element of the Phrygian burial tradition – located on natural heights in the north and west of the city following the streams. These tumuli serving also as landmarks began to disappear one by one during the urbanization of Ankara since the 1950s (Alanyalı Aral, 2017). This research aimed to integrate these invisible landmarks with the contemporary city and enable citizens to notice and experience them. In this regard, the methods of this research were first to portray today's Ankara with tumuli and the Phrygian settlement, Roman roads and milestones, streams, and topography with which tumuli are associated; then to reveal their current situations, problems, and potentials; and finally to propose possible interventions to make them visible again, using creative mapping techniques – layering and drift. To attract the attention of locals/tourists and raise awareness about these lost historical values, this study focused on the western tumuli of Ankara due to their proximity to the city center and the current city landmarks. By overlapping western tumuli and their related areas expressed in layers, an experiential route was determined to explore Ankara with tumuli. The positive/negative aspects that were uncovered while experiencing this route by walking and using public transportation, and the interventions proposed accordingly were integrated into the map as new layers, resulting in an intriguing, informative, and suggestive mapping study.

Keywords: Creative Mapping, Urban Experience, Tumuli, Ankara

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Introduction

Ankara, the capital of Turkey, has a rich cultural heritage, having hosted numerous civilizations throughout history. Known to have been founded by the Phrygians in the 8th century BC, the city is home to significant monuments known as tumuli (Alanyalı Aral, 2017). These structures served as burial sites for prominent figures of the Phrygian period, who were interred in wooden chambers placed on natural heights along the region's waterways. A tumulus, formed by heaping earth over this burial chamber, was not merely a tomb but also a symbol of power and a prominent landmark visible from the Phrygian city center and ancient routes such as the King's Road and the Pilgrim Road.

These tumuli retained their prominence until recent times, serving as iconic elements in the city's silhouette and as spaces appropriated by locals for recreational activities. However, with the beginning of urbanization, these key elements of Ankara's cultural heritage and collective memory have largely lost their visibility and presence in the cityscape. Among the numerous tumuli identified in Ankara's northern and western regions, this study focuses on the western tumuli due to their proximity to the city center. Of the 19 western tumuli recorded in the past, only two remain visible today which are Asti Tumulus and The Great Tumulus (Figure 1). Despite their historical importance, the tumuli have become invisible within the current city, often unrecognized or forgotten even by those who were born and raised in Ankara. Once situated on natural heights, the tumuli established strong visual and spatial connections with streams, the Phrygian settlement, and ancient roads (Alanyalı Aral, 2017). These relationships have been disrupted over time due to urbanization, the closure of streams, changes in topography, and alterations to the city's silhouette. Today, the tumuli are not only physically flattened but also culturally diminished, their historical significance obscured in the evolving urban fabric of Ankara.

Public awareness about tumuli in Ankara is also limited. Often confused with mounds, their distinct historical significance remains largely unrecognized. This study seeks to bring attention to these monuments, emphasizing their value as part of the city's historical and cultural identity. The aim is to integrate these historical remains into the contemporary city and enable citizens to engage with and experience them. The focus is on making these tumuli visible again, reestablishing their connections with the urban fabric, and reinterpreting them as integral elements of Ankara. The study tries to illustrate how Ankara would appear when its historical layers are reintegrated and to explore the visual experiences citizens can have today through an intriguing, informative, and suggestive mapping approach. While offering visitors a historical experience on one hand, the study also promotes awareness and encourages the preservation of these invaluable cultural remains. It specifically addresses the following questions: How can Ankara's invisible tumuli become visible again today, and how can people become aware of their existence?



Figure 1: Asti Tumulus (left) and The Great Tumulus (right)
(photographs taken by Topuz in May 2024)

Mapping as a Creative and Subjective Process

Maps are conventionally perceived as objective and frozen in time, offering static and rigid representations of spaces. However, this conventional claim has been deconstructed (Alanyali Aral, 2016). Maps are inherently subjective; they involve personal perspectives, positions, and interpretations. According to Tawa (1998), mapping is the process of observing and documenting the relationships and connections within a site to uncover its current patterns and future potential. It serves as a tool for envisioning possibilities and guiding design decisions by engaging with the context and weighing its transformative potential. According to Corner (1999), mapping involves three core operations: establishing a framework, isolating and extracting data, and reconfiguring relationships to create meaning, which reflects the map-maker's choices and intent rather than neutral documentation. He also identifies four innovative techniques in contemporary mapping practices—drift, layering, game-board, and rhizome—that reshape perceptions and interactions with space in design and planning.

Among these techniques, this study focuses on layering and drift. Layering involves combining independent layers, each with its own logic, to create a complex, non-hierarchical structure. Pioneered by architects such as Bernard Tschumi and Rem Koolhaas, it allows for richer, more flexible designs and hybrid interactions beyond conventional master plans. Drift, on the other hand, inspired by the Situationist practice of 'derive', is a subjective mapping approach that captures personal, street-level experiences, revealing hidden and overlooked aspects of urban life through spontaneous exploration (Corner, 1999).

Mapping is not just a tool for representation but also an act of design, a provocative and creative process that challenges conventional spatial understanding. Inspired by the map "A Car-Free London" of Muf Architecture/Art (1999) reimagining London without cars, this study proposes reimagining Ankara through its tumuli, emphasizing the subjective nature of mapping as a creative and provocative action. For this research, layering and drift mapping techniques are employed to explore spatial and temporal relationships, enabling richer and more dynamic interpretations of the city. Layering becomes a critical method in understanding the city with its tumuli. Each layer, from contemporary life patterns to historical and natural landscapes, contributes to a multidimensional narrative. Overlapping these layers reveals the role of tumuli in the history of Ankara and their connection to the present, providing valuable insights into the city's evolving identity. Drift complements this by adding an experiential dimension, capturing the personal and spatial relationships that emerge through direct engagement with the tumuli and their surroundings.

Research Methodology

Within the scope of this study, the existing literature was reviewed from various perspectives, including the locations of tumuli within the city, their relationships with the Phrygian settlement, waterways, historical roads, the contemporary urban fabric, and topography, as well as creative mapping techniques to represent these connections. In light of the gathered information, it was decided to create a touristic map integrating written, visual, and digital content, enabling visitors to access information about the tumuli, Phrygians, and all the related areas as they navigate through these maps. This was tried to be achieved in two steps.

The first step of the research focused on mapping each layer considered to be associated with the tumuli. These layers were then overlapped to reconstruct the spatial connections between the past and the present. In the second step, the focus was on creating an experiential route based on the outputs of the first step. Accordingly, the study area—the western tumuli region and the historical city center—was explored by walking and using public transportation, applying the drift technique to uncover existing conditions, problems, and potentials, and developing design proposals for these issues. Based on the information observed, an additional layer of current state and future interventions was created.

By overlapping the layers from both steps, the final map defined a route that guides residents and tourists to the landmarks of the past and present, along with designated information points located near the tumuli. This route aims to reconnect visitors with the historical and contemporary significance of the tumuli and their surrounding elements.

Design Ideas Behind the Map

First Step: Layering

The layers included in the map are as follows: western tumuli and the Phrygian city center, waterways, Roman roads and milestones, significant locations in the current city, and topography. The positioning of the western tumuli and the Phrygian settlement on the map was based on the information provided in the research of Alanyalı Aral et al. (2023) (Figure 2). For the placement of the streams, the map illustrating Ankara's stream system from Yavuz's (2018) study was utilized (Figure 3).

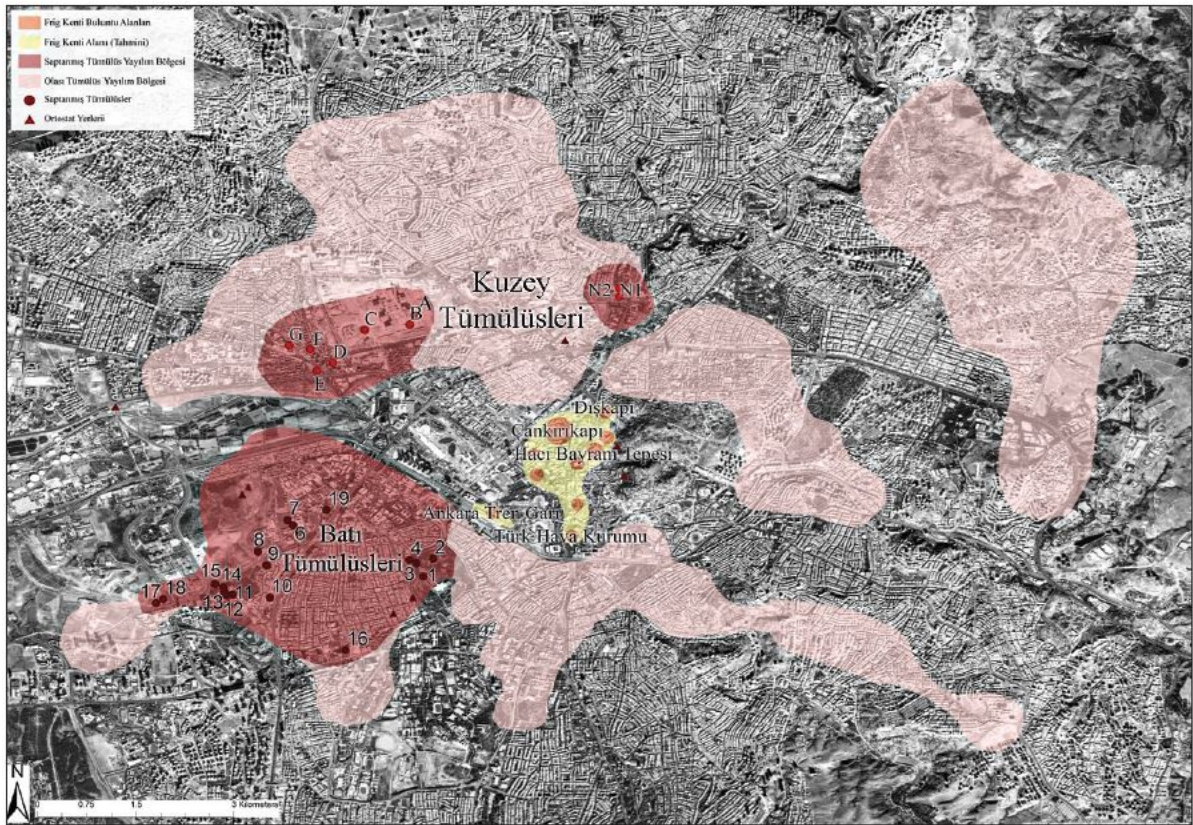


Figure 2: The Locations of the Tumuli and the Phrygian Settlement in Ankara (Alanyalı Aral et al., 2023)

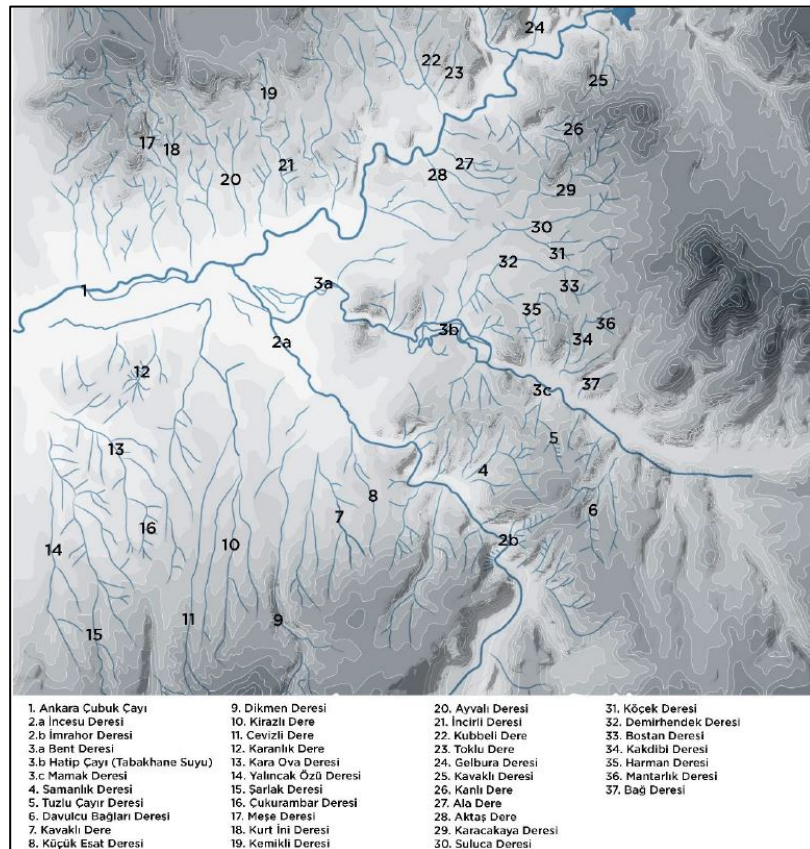


Figure 3: The Stream System of Ankara (Yavuz, 2018)

Regarding the layer of Roman roads and milestones, it is first worth noting that during their occupation, the Romans developed an extensive and highly organized system of roads. Some of these roads passing through Ankara are known to have had visual connections with the city's tumuli serving as symbols of power. Although these cultural elements have largely disappeared today and do not align with the Phrygian period, including them on the map was considered meaningful. This approach contributes to the broader framework of reviving the lost or invisible aspects of Ankara's urban and historical landscape.

Furthermore, the Romans erected cylindrical stone markers, known as milestones (Clarkson-Wright, 2023), at mile intervals along these roads to inform travelers of the distance covered or the remaining distance to their destination. Such milestones were also present on the Roman roads passing through Ankara. Some examples can still be seen today in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara (Figure 4). Although the prominence of Roman milestones has faded, the practice of marking distances continues in various forms. This concept was also integrated into this study. The design of signages and wayfinding elements, helping to guide visitors toward the tumulus locations was inspired by milestones. The layer of Roman roads and milestones was created based on the map "Galatia: 4.2.2 Ankara Sheet" by French (2015, p. 93) shown in Figure 5.



Figure 4: One of the Milestones Exhibited in the Ankara Anatolian Civilizations Museum (photograph taken by Topuz in May 2024)

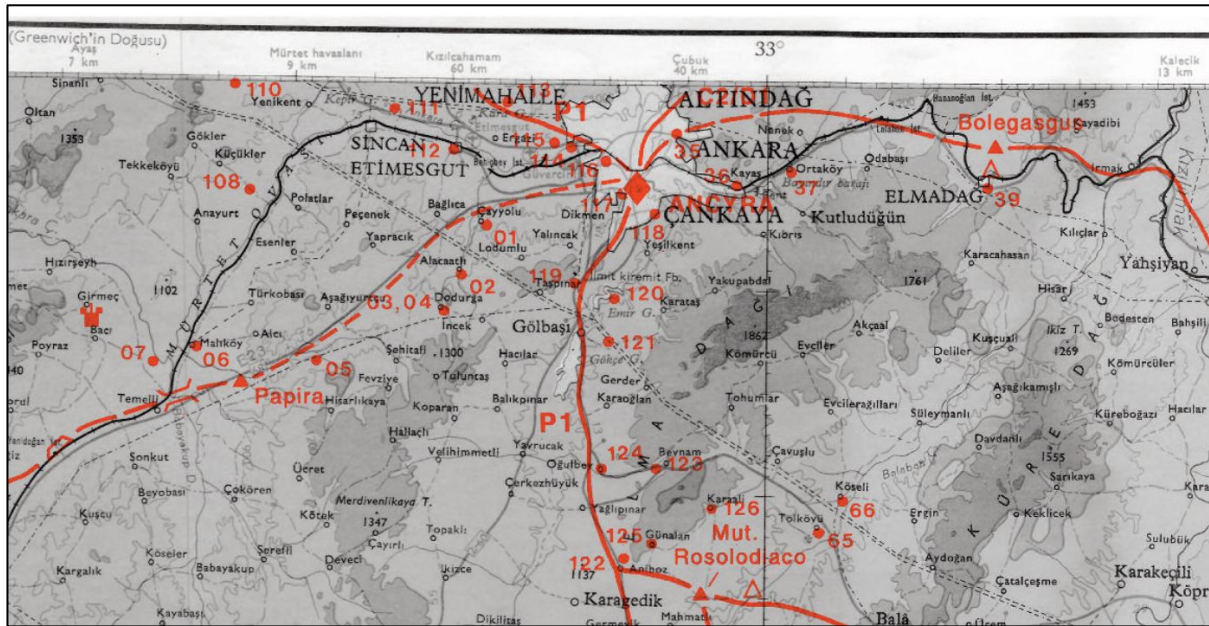


Figure 5: Partial Image of ‘Galatia: 4.2.2 Ankara Sheet (French, 2015, p. 93)’ Showing the Roman Roads and Milestones in Ankara

The western tumuli addressed in this study are located in areas close to the city center. To increase interest in the tumuli, current city landmarks situated in the city center have been included as another layer on the map, aiming to guide city residents and tourists visiting these landmarks toward the tumulus sites as well (Figure 6).

The topography of Ankara forms the final layer of the first step of the methodology. The practice of placing tumuli on elevated points in the city, the fact that the Phrygian city was established at the foothills of Hacı Bayram Hill, the natural flow of waterways shaped by elevation, and the preference for ancient roads to traverse flat terrains for easier access all highlight the importance of incorporating topography as a layer to analyze and understand all the layers effectively which are illustrated in Figure 6.

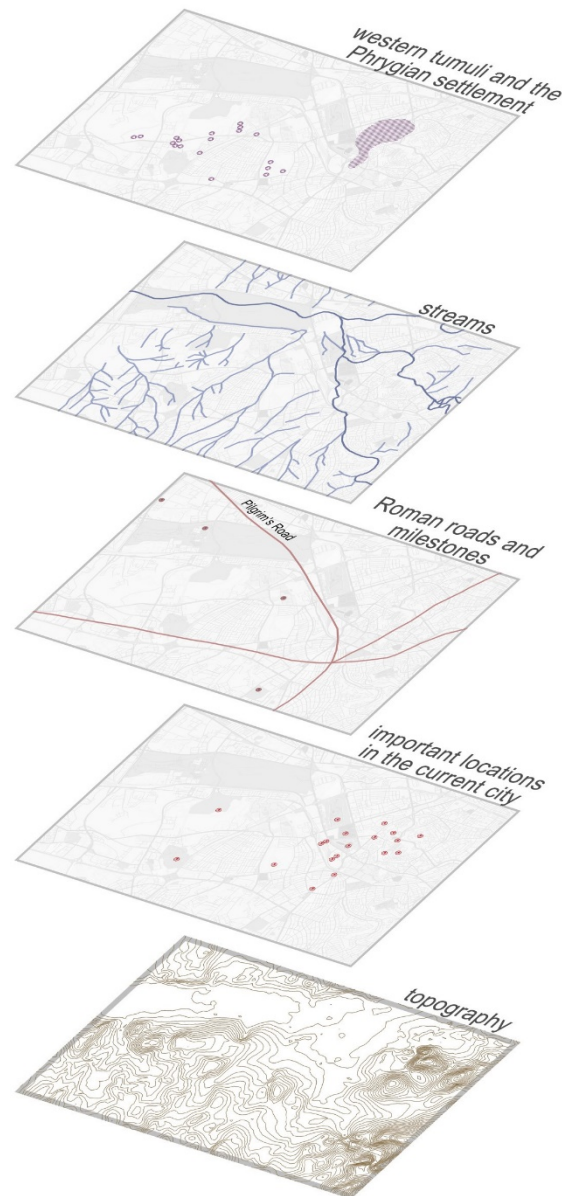


Figure 6: Ankara Tumuli and the Areas Related to Them Expressed in Layers

Second Step: Drift

The proposed mapping study for Ankara seeks to raise awareness about the tumuli as an integral part of the city's heritage. It envisions a route that combines historical, spatial, and experiential layers, allowing visitors to rediscover Ankara with a focus on its tumuli. Accordingly, in the second step of the research, it was tried to design an experiential route connecting the western tumuli region of Ankara with the city center. All layers revealed in the first step of the study were integrated into a single map to identify viewpoints that would allow visitors to experience the lost visual connections of the tumuli with other layers; locations planned for visits to learn about the Phrygians, tumuli, Roman roads, and milestones; as well as the starting and ending points of the route (Figure 7). Based on the initial planning, the route was experienced by walking and using public transportation. During this process, photographs of the current conditions were taken regarding observed problems, potentials, and possible design solutions.

For instance, out of the 19 western tumuli, 17 have unfortunately been replaced by roads, buildings, a pool, and parking lots. Among these 17 lost tumuli, the locations of 3 were found to be not very convenient for inclusion in the route due to their distance from the other tumuli and the planned walking or public transportation path. Access issues were also observed for the surviving Asti Tumulus and the Great Tumulus, as their surroundings are fenced off. While limited access to the Asti Tumulus was possible, entry to the Great Tumulus could not be achieved. Additionally, visual connections between the sites are mostly obstructed by tall buildings. Furthermore, the area thought to have once been the location of a Roman milestone is now occupied by a university campus.

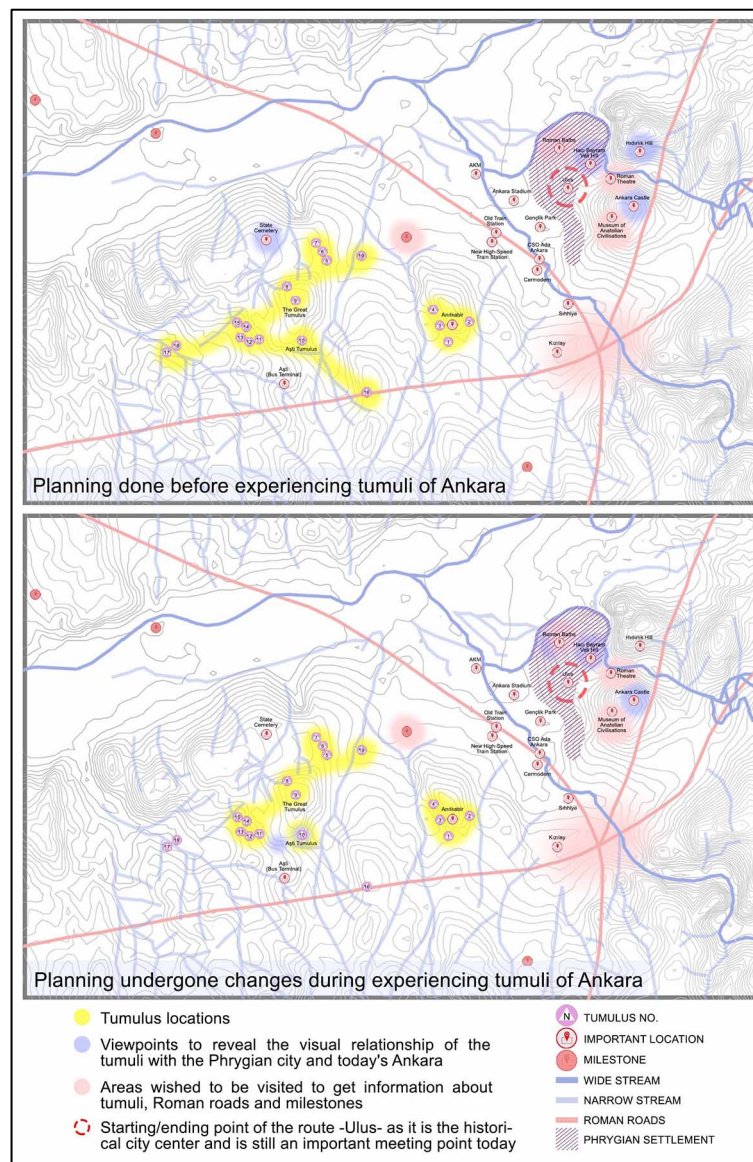


Figure 7: Planning of the Experiential Route Determined Over the Overlapped Layers

As a result of various observations made and notes taken during the process, adjustments were made to the route initially created before the drift phase, and design suggestions were proposed (Figure 8). For instance, pedestrian pathways and public transport routes, including the vehicles and their stops used, when necessary, were mapped. One significant issue was the busy road separating tumulus sites 8 and 9, with no pedestrian crossing available, which disrupts the connection between the tumuli and extends the route. To address this, a

pedestrian overpass was proposed at this point. Additionally, the route requires resting points, so existing parks along the route were included, and the creation of a new park was suggested. Some of these areas also have the potential to serve as viewpoints and therefore require reorganization to fulfill this dual purpose.

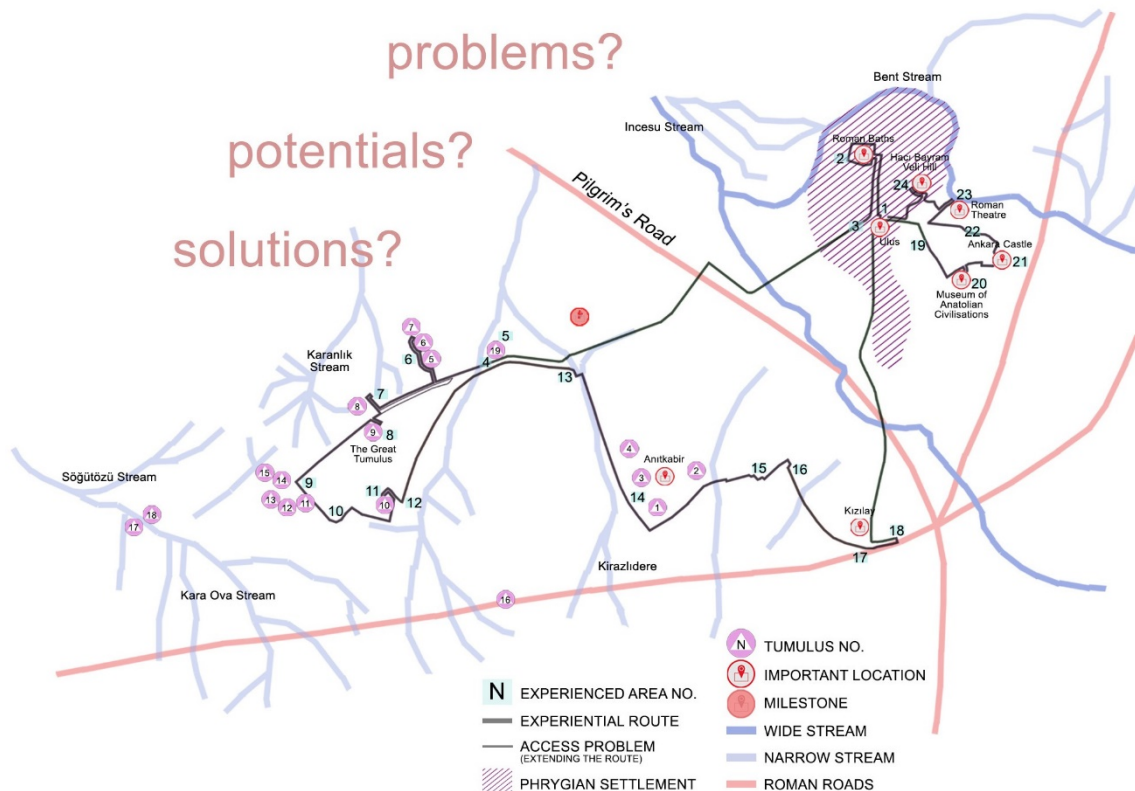


Figure 8: The Proposed Experiential Route Connecting Ankara's Western Tumuli Region With the Historical City Center

One of the most critical problems identified during the experience of the route is the lack of informative elements at the sites of the lost tumuli. People are unaware of these lost cultural values. The two tumuli that have survived to the present day have become trapped amidst urban development. Even locals have forgotten or are unaware of their significance. There is only a statue that was placed in the area when tumuli number 7 and number 8 were converted into a parking area and that contains brief information about these tumuli, but this has made the situation quite tragic. A comprehensive arrangement is needed to inform people about all the tumuli and their historical and contemporary connections, offering a chance to reexperience them.

It is believed that reconstructing all the tumuli at their original locations is unfortunately neither realistic nor feasible. Instead, it was decided to create info points at the sites of the lost tumuli, acting as a mirror to the past. Inspiration for this approach was drawn from a project implemented in the Trenčín region of Slovakia. In this project, transparent graphic info panels were placed at specific viewpoints overlooking castle ruins that had lost their structural integrity (Figure 9). These panels displayed line drawings of the missing sections of the castles, allowing visitors to instantly visualize the original outlines of the structures by looking through the glass, thereby connecting the past with the present (Ard System, 2023, pp. 30–32). A similar approach could be applied to Ankara's tumuli (Figure 10). Visitors could access additional information through QR codes, such as animations depicting the

tumuli, artifacts discovered within them, and more. The placement of these panels can be determined based on their relationship with the surrounding context and the points that offer the best views for visitors. Temporary frames can be used to photograph the locations of the tumuli and appropriate dimensions and angles can be determined, then these photographs can be used to create drawings based on historical information from literature. These drawings can then be transferred to glass panels and placed in ideal locations for visitors. Furthermore, to facilitate access to these panels, cylindrical units resembling milestones could be placed at various points in the city (Figure 11). These units could provide distance information and quick details about tumuli, guiding people to the info points effectively.



Figure 9: Info/Instructional Media Realization Called ‘Window to History’ Created for Beckov Castle Located in the Trenčín Region, Slovakia (Ard System, n.d.)



Figure 10: An Example of Info Points Proposed for the Tumuli of Ankara: Anittepe Info Point, Inspired by Ard System's Info/Instructional Media



Figure 11: A Design Idea: Milestones Leading People to Info Points (Originally an Advertisement Unit of Masia Media)

This study also proposes preserving the Great Tumulus and Asti Tumulus, the only surviving western tumuli, and transforming them into museums. By doing so, these historical assets could be made more visible, offer visitors a richer cultural experience, and raise awareness about the tumuli. Additionally, a replica of the Roman milestone could be placed at its original location, turning the site into an informational point (Figure 12).

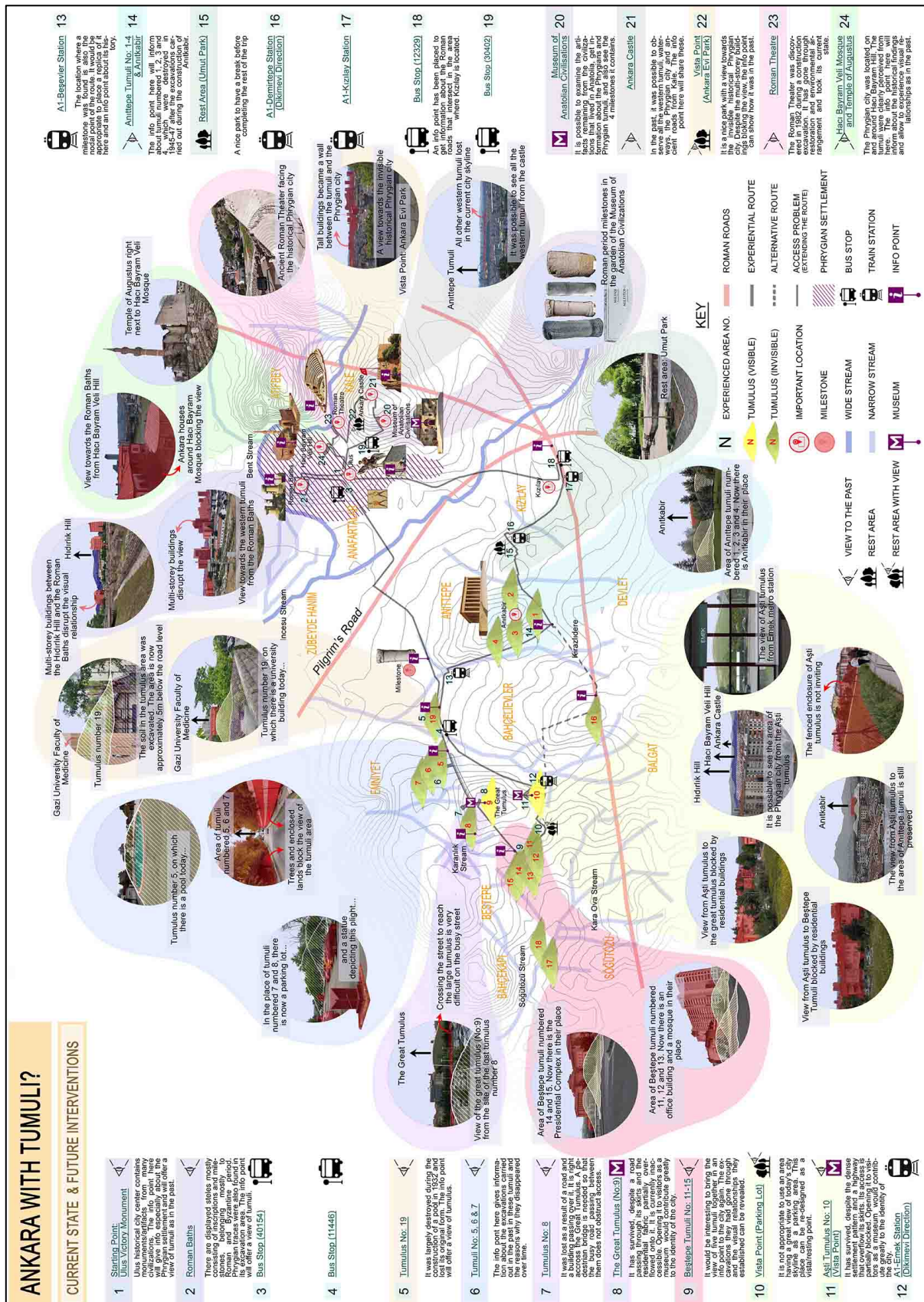


Figure 12: The Final Map: Ankara With Tumuli

Conclusion

This research has emphasized the significant role of the tumuli in shaping Ankara's historical and spatial identity. In order to ensure spatial continuity between the past and the present, the visual and spatial connections of the tumuli were re-established, and attempts were made to improve the visitor experience with design proposals and to strengthen the urban identity. The resulting map integrates landmarks of both the past and present, serving as a touristic guide designed to attract public attention. Alongside the map, images provide insight into the obstacles and challenges encountered along the route concerning the tumuli. This approach aims to make visitors aware of the tumuli, encourage them to scan QR codes for more detailed historical information, allow them to compare the original forms of the tumuli with their current state, and understand the transformations they have undergone over time, fostering a stronger willingness to protect and preserve these historical assets.

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Contact email: hilal.topuz@metu.edu.tr

***Creating Awareness About Planetary Wellness Using Projection Mapping Through
“NOKTAH”***

Maslisa Zainuddin, Sunway University, Malaysia
Delas Santano, Sunway University, Malaysia
Yuen Beng Lee, Sunway University, Malaysia
Mohd Firdaus Mohd Anuar, Sunway University, Malaysia
Muhammad Ayman Jamaludin, Sunway University, Malaysia
Chan Leong Kit, Sunway University, Malaysia

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Abstract

Projection mapping transforms physical objects into immersive art displays. *Noktah*, a research-creation project, combines art, filmmaking, and upcycling to explore the connection between artistic expression and sustainability. By using video projections, audiences experience visual narratives that showcase the beauty of the natural world, address contemporary challenges, and explore the relationship between humanity and the planet, in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through projection mapping and micro short films, this project encourages reflection on planetary health. Each micro short film is paired with an SDG such as poverty, climate action, biodiversity conservation, responsible consumption, and health to raise awareness, provoke discourse, and inspire action. Interdisciplinary collaboration forms the theoretical framework of *Noktah*, bringing together artists, designers, and environmental experts to craft impactful works. Idea generation methodologies and prototyping processes are guided by the ethos of sustainability, focusing on upcycled physical artworks and digital storytelling. This approach integrates ecological awareness into the project's artistic narratives and material choices. This paper discusses the research-creation process behind *Noktah*, emphasizing how interdisciplinary collaboration informs its development. It also highlights the role of sustainability in the creation of projection mapping films and upcycled artworks. The study explores how *Noktah* can bridge the gap between art and advocacy, engaging audiences in pressing environmental issues while fostering a collective commitment to sustainable practices and harmonious coexistence.

Keywords: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), Projection Mapping, Upcycling, Installation Art, Filmmaking, Research-Creation

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Introduction

Across cultures worldwide, the full stop is a punctuation mark used to signify the end of a sentence or indicate the end of a thought or idea. In the Malay language, the full stop is known as *noktah*. The function of the *noktah*, like its usage in English, Mandarin, Japanese or various other languages of the world, similarly marks the end of a thought or sentence. In 2024, *Noktah* was selected as the title for a projection mapping project held in conjunction with the Sunway University Planetary Health Summit 2024. In line with the Summit's aim of connecting global communities to seek solutions faced by humanity and the planet, a team of researchers/artists understood how a notch could become a focal point that connects ideas instead of signifying the end. *Noktah*, as a single dot, rather than signifying an end, when repeated thrice, forms an ellipsis—a symbol of growth, continuity, and the forward march towards a sustainable future. This led to the creation of *Noktah*, which serves as the focal point for a transformative group exhibition that delves into the critical theme of planetary health.

Through research-creation, each researcher/artist in *Noktah* correlates their short film and projection mapping with a United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). Upcycled items were used to create a display surface for short film projection to create a form of 3D projection that transforms digital films into real-life art exhibits to harness the transformative power of art to raise awareness, provoke meaningful discourse, and inspire collective action. This intentional pairing of filmmaking, art, and upcycled items transforms the exhibition into a thought-provoking exploration of artistic expression, global sustainability, and planetary health.

Guided by the SDG goals, *Noktah* portrays the complex relationships between humanity and the planet to harness the transformative power of art to raise awareness, provoke meaningful discourse, and inspire collective action. Audiences will experience dynamic visual narratives showcasing the natural world's beauty and addressing its challenges. This experience is aimed to inspire reflection, dialogue, and a collective commitment to positive change by merging art and sustainability.

Ultimately, *Noktah* strives to bridge the gap between art and advocacy, foster a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between artistic expression and pursue a healthier, more sustainable world for all. This paper first discusses the research-creation process behind the project's inception, the creation of the short films and projection mapping. Second, this paper outlines how *Noktah* aimed to create a sense of planetary awareness by intentionally pairing art, filmmaking and upcycled products to create a thought-provoking exploration of artistic expression and global sustainability.

Projection Mapping

Developed in the 1990s, projection mapping is defined as a simple hybrid of cinema, animation, and scenography (Schmitt et al., 2020). It is a form of mapping tantamount to spatial augmented reality, short film mapping and spatial correspondence. It is a technique to project digital content onto surfaces, often irregularly shaped objects or architectural structures. It transforms into a dynamic short film display that creates an immersive visual experience. This method is frequently used at concerts, fashion shows, music festivals, and performing arts events to create a physical illusion of images by combining audiovisual elements (Ekim, 2011). Such shows are performed live and prerecorded, and technology is

used as a tool to compose and edit programs to create motion graphics and images. It also presents readymade images to audiences by beaming short films using a projector onto three-dimensional objects.

The projection is effectively mapped according to the target object's shape instead of spilling onto walls. It becomes eye-catching as the short film is no longer a flat square on the wall but becomes an object in space resembling an animated sculpture. When overlaying computer-generated images onto a material surface using a projector, projection mapping forms an augmented reality (AR) backdrop where the virtual and real worlds blend seamlessly (Iwai, 2024). As such, 2d graphics become 3d when the image interacts with the projected surface as the surface provides messages through audiovisual elements (Ekim, 2011). Because image technologies influence how we represent ourselves, projection mapping offers a unique experience of amazement and wonder and does not always require any equipment on board the spectators (Schmitt et al., 2020). As such, projection mapping through electronic, technological, and digital art is increasingly significant at institutions and gallery events.

Although projection mapping has become standard, its place in research within the humanities and social sciences fields remains wanting. For *Noktah*, projection mapping enhanced audiences' visual impact and immersive experience. Projection mapping can transform static artworks into dynamic installations by projecting dynamic visuals onto physical surfaces. As shown in the cultural preservation and awareness exhibitions, these installations encourage audience engagement and call to action (Nikolakopoulou et al., 2022). *Noktah* also represents the link between human existence and the planet's health, as it involves projecting light and images onto a surface constructed from waste materials, as seen in Figure 1. As the visuals created by the six artists differ in the form and colour of projections, projection mapping allows for a multi-dimensional representation of the artwork, creating a rich and diverse visual experience. These attributes enhance the static canvas, allowing audiences to engage more in the visuals and embrace each artist's work's narrative.



Figure 1: Calibrating Projection Mapping Onto an Uneven Surface

Upcycling in Malaysia

Upcycling is an effort to minimise waste and promote sustainability by finding new uses for items that would otherwise end up in landfills. In 2002, William McDonough and Michael Braugart defined the term upcycling, and it differs from recycling, which requires a copious amount of energy and resources to collect, sort and process unwanted items and waste. Often referred to as 'cradle-to-cradle', upcycling attempts to disrupt the environmentally unsustainable production cycle of 'cradle-to-grave'; sustainability issues include environmental and social matters (Wegener, 2016).

Rather than adopt the cradle-to-grave model—where items are eventually disposed of in a landfill or incinerator, upcycling adopts the cradle-to-cradle model, where resources are extracted and shaped into products that are ultimately resold. As a greener way of recycling, upcycling finds new purposes for items. Rather than throwing them away, the cradle-to-cradle model discourages the downcycling of low-end products. This model, however, favours upcycling as it repurposes products that offer improvements that allow for disposable items and create new value for these items. Examples of upcycling include turning old clothes into quilts or rugs, using empty glass jars as candle holders, or repurposing wooden pallets into furniture. Upcycling is also a fun and creative way to breathe new life into old items and reduce your environmental and social impact.

In valuing the new, the word upcycling is a sustainable alternative to throwing items away and is created by mixing “upgrading” or adding value with “recycling” or reusing (Wegener, 2016). In short, upcycling means reassessing and transforming waste or trash into something valuable. This process is essential because the challenges brought upon by socioeconomic inequalities, climate change, and ecosystem damage in Malaysia require changes in the behaviour of companies, governments, communities, and individuals. Aside from the environmental impacts, upcycling can drive social change by promoting sustainability, creating job opportunities, encouraging creativity and innovation, supporting marginalised communities, and raising awareness about waste and its impact on the environment and society. Besides promoting sustainable practices by reducing the amount of waste going into landfills, conserving natural resources, and reducing carbon footprint and need for new resources, upcycling also creates job opportunities and supports marginalised communities by providing them with a source of income and a way to use their skills and resources. Upcycling can be a powerful tool for social change, as it can promote sustainable practices, reduce waste, and support local communities.

Upcycling is gaining popularity in Malaysia for addressing waste management challenges and promoting sustainable development. According to the Solid Waste Management and Public Cleansing Corporation (SWCorp), Malaysians throw away about 39,078 tonnes of solid waste daily, equivalent to about 1.17kg per person (Zainal, 2024). The amount of waste generated is expected to increase with the country's growing population and economy. Upcycling can help address this challenge by reducing waste sent to landfills and promoting the efficient use of resources.

Malaysia's upcycling industry currently faces several challenges that limit its potential impact on sustainable development. One of the main challenges is a need for more awareness and understanding of upcycling. Many individuals and businesses in Malaysia need to become more familiar with upcycling, limiting its potential to reduce waste and promote resource efficiency. Currently, no specific policies or regulations support upcycling practices in Malaysia. Government support is needed to limit the growth and impact of the upcycling industry in the country.

Furthermore, the lack of a supportive regulatory environment can make it difficult for upcycling businesses to access funding and resources. In addition to these challenges, the upcycling industry in Malaysia is fragmented and lacks coordination and collaboration. The lack of collaboration and coordination can limit the potential of upcycling to promote sustainable development by limiting innovation and creativity in the production of upcycled products.

Despite these challenges, the upcycling industry in Malaysia has significant opportunities to promote sustainable development. Upcycling can create employment opportunities, promote economic development, and contribute to environmental conservation. Malaysia's growing population and economy provide a significant market for upcycled products, fostering economic growth and development. Furthermore, upcycling can contribute to environmental conservation by reducing waste sent to landfills and promoting resource efficiency.

Upcycling has the potential to contribute significantly to sustainable development in Malaysia by addressing waste management challenges, promoting economic growth, and contributing to environmental conservation. However, to achieve these benefits, addressing the challenges faced by the upcycling industry in Malaysia, including a need for more awareness and understanding, limited government support, and fragmentation, is crucial. By promoting collaboration and innovation in the industry and establishing a supportive regulatory environment, Malaysia can realise the full potential of upcycling and contribute to sustainable development. *Noktah* aims to serve as a conduit to pursue the narrative, as a catalyst to initiate public discourse, and to pique their curiosity in a visually striking manner.

Design Process of Upcycled Display Surface

Noktah began with an open call to create artwork for display during the 2024 Planetary Health Annual Meeting and Summit. A dynamic collaboration emerged among six academic artists from Sunway University's Department of Art, Design and Media, and Department of Film and Performing Arts. This fusion of talent and vision sparked research-creation, culminating in short videos for projection mapping on an upcycled surface. Over lunches and brainstorming sessions, these artists explored their diverse strengths collectively, seeking a unified expression that captivated audiences and championed sustainability and planetary health. One common goal underpinning the entire output is that the output needs to be sustainable and address sustainability issues and planetary health as seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2: The Upcycled Base for Projection Mapping Entitled 'White Trash'

The team members brought expertise in visual aesthetics, graphic design, filmmaking, and multimedia artistry. Artists were keen on composition, colour theory, and manipulating visual elements to convey meaning and emotion. Their proficiency extended to graphic design principles, allowing them to craft visually striking imagery communicating complex ideas with clarity and impact. Additionally, their background in multimedia artistry equipped them with the skills to seamlessly integrate various media forms, such as digital graphics,

animation, and interactive installations, into their creative repertoire. Team members contributed their specialised cinematography, storytelling, and audiovisual production knowledge. Filmmakers and performers within this department excelled in visual storytelling, employing cinematic techniques to evoke emotion, immerse audiences in narrative worlds, and convey messages through film language.

Their expertise encompasses the technical aspects of camera work, lighting, sound design and the art of narrative structure, character development, and thematic exploration. Through their mastery of audiovisual production, they brought stories to life on screen with depth, authenticity, and resonance. The artists found common ground in their commitment to sustainability and planetary health. This shared ethos guided their creative exploration, anchoring their collaborative efforts in a shared vision of using art for positive change. They embarked on a journey to explore the intersection of art and environmental consciousness, seeking to amplify their collective voice and inspire action towards a more sustainable future. Through their collaborative endeavours, they aimed to harness the power of creativity to raise awareness, provoke thought, and cultivate a deeper connection to the natural world.

Resolume Arena was used to project visuals onto the installation. Although open-source options like MapMap and VPT8 were initially considered, Resolume Arena was ultimately selected because of its advanced mapping features and flexibility, which proved essential given the complexity of the artwork's shape and the need for real-time adjustments during the exhibition as well as its stability in managing six different visuals over long periods.

Significant technical challenges were encountered while implementing projection mapping on *Noktah*. These included precisely calibrating projections to align with the installation's intricate curves and uneven surfaces. This process necessitated meticulous adjustments to ensure the seamless blending of visuals with the organic form of the artwork, effectively enhancing its dimensionality and creating a captivating visual display for audiences. Furthermore, all six exhibitors undertook extensive efforts to learn unfamiliar software for mapping visuals. This resulted in a trial-and-error process and learning experience.

A collection of video projections, conceived by six distinct artists, were meticulously aligned onto a three-dimensional art installation constructed from upcycled materials. The projection technique involved the utilisation of a projector to achieve visual effects on the three-dimensional, uneven projection surface. Complementing the visual spectacle, a sound bar was affixed beneath the installation to augment the immersive atmosphere. Additionally, informational posters were strategically positioned within the designated area to elucidate the conceptual underpinnings of each artist's contribution, thereby enriching the collective exhibition. The exhibition space was deliberately situated in a dimly lit corner to heighten the sensory engagement of attendees.

Findings and Discussion

As part of this research-creation process, the interdisciplinary design theory is adapted as a guiding theoretical framework. Interdisciplinary design theory is an approach that emphasizes integrating knowledge, methods, and perspectives from multiple disciplines to address complex problems, create innovative solutions, and foster holistic understanding (Menken & Keestra, 2016). This theory operates on the principle that no single discipline can adequately address the multifaceted challenges of contemporary issues, such as sustainability, planetary health, or urban planning. Instead, it advocates for the collaboration and intersection of

various fields to produce more comprehensive and effective outcomes (Repko et al., 2019). By transcending traditional disciplinary boundaries, interdisciplinary design theory encourages flexibility and creativity, making it particularly effective in tackling complex, real-world challenges that demand multifaceted and innovative solutions.

For *Noktah*, the concept and design process began with a brainstorming session to visualise the collaborative endeavour. A chart was created to map the individual strengths and interests of each artist. Keywords included sustainability, upcycling, filmmaking, documentary, trash to treasure, visualisation, heritage preservation, sustainable development goals, impact, surface, and shape. As expected, the mind map grew exponentially and included a section naming the collaborative project. Some key initial words included Earth and Sphere, which the team agreed upon but decided to translate into the Malay language instead to promote the national language at a poignant international event.

This collaborative mapping identified overlapping areas where strengths intersected, signalling opportunities for synergistic collaboration. This visual representation provided a roadmap for the collective journey, ensuring that each artist's contribution found resonance within the broader thematic sustainability framework. Guided by shared principles, creating a series of short films tailored for projection mapping commenced. Each short film serves as a narrative vignette, exploring diverse facets of sustainability and planetary health through the lens of artistic expression. Drawing inspiration from nature, technology, and human interaction, the short films offer a poignant reflection on the interconnectedness of global ecosystems and the imperative of collective action.

There were three iterations for the projection mapping surface. The first version was the most ambitious; it used three sets of projectors, one mounted and projecting downwards, and two others on the floor projecting upwards onto a semi-spherical shape representing the Earth mounted on the wall. Collective research revealed how difficult it would be to quickly create such a surface from sustainable materials. The second iteration would use three projectors to project short films onto three smaller semi-spheres in a row, mounted on a wall. Figure 3 shows a 3D rendering visualising the latter, showing the impact would be more significant with a larger sphere. It was back to the drawing board for the team.

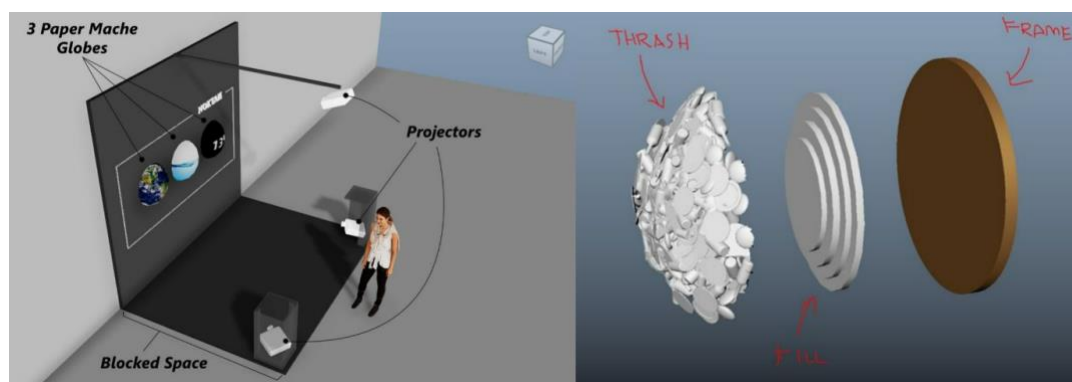


Figure 3: 3-Dimensional Visualisation of Ideas 2 and 3 for Spatial Impact

Considering the cost and potential visual narrative impact, the team decided to utilise simple techniques and materials rather than custom-ordering a brand-new structure using new raw materials just for this project. Hence, discarded objects were transformed into a giant canvas with an engaging uneven surface for projection mapping, breathing new life into forgotten relics of extensive consumer culture. It was painted white for projection purposes, and it was

entitled 'White Trash' as shown in Figure 4. From leftover wood panels to repurposed toys, packaging, car parts, e-waste and metal scraps, the projection mapping surface now infused a vibrant tapestry of light and sound. This process of creative reimagining, which is filled with various narratives, invites more significant potential for discourse. Conventional notions of waste and consumption were challenged, inviting audiences to contemplate the transformative power of art in shaping sustainable futures.



Figure 4: Projection Mapping on 'White Trash'

The immersive nature of projection mapping provided a dynamic platform for artistic exploration, transcending traditional boundaries of space and perception. As depicted in Figure 5, the collection of short films unfolded across the uneven textured landscape of upcycled surfaces, creating distorted imagery; they invited audiences on a multisensory journey through realms of imagination and possibilities. By seamlessly integrating art and technology, the aim was to provoke thought, evoke emotion, and inspire action to support planetary health.



Figure 5: Projection Mapping Setup With Upcycled Décor Pieces

The research-creation journey culminated in short films illuminating the intersection of art, sustainability, and planetary health. Through projection mapping on upcycled surfaces, the confines of conventional art forms were transcended, harnessing the power of collective imagination to spark dialogue and drive positive change.

Significance of Short Films and SDG Mapping

Each short film carries the themes of the UN SDGs (Programme, 2023). These films transcend the boundaries of traditional storytelling, weaving together elements of artistry, activism, and advocacy to provoke thought, stir emotion, and inspire action, as noted in Table 1 and Figure 6, respectively.

Table 1: Description and Mapping of Short Films to SDGs

Title & Description	SDG Target
Fisherman Tiram <i>A short film highlighting the necessity for further support to bolster the oyster farming industry and combat poverty.</i>	1 (No Poverty) <i>Poverty eradication through targeted interventions for vulnerable populations and enhancing resources for communities facing conflict and climate-induced crises.</i>
Culture, Heritage & Nature <i>Derived from culture and heritage digitisation in VR360 Data Capture format.</i>	11 (Sustainable Cities & Communities) <i>Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.</i>
Resonance Reclaimed <i>Composed of upcycled materials for projection mapping.</i>	12 (Responsible Consumption & Production) <i>Managing resources, reducing pollution, promoting recycling for sustainable consumption, food security, and transitioning to a resource-efficient economic model.</i>
Fading <i>Visualises global temperature data, aiming to raise awareness of climate change by presenting academic information in a visually captivating manner.</i>	13 (Climate Action) <i>To mobilise US\$100 billion annually for developing nations to mitigate climate disasters, support sustainable development, and limit global warming.</i>
Wasteful Echoes <i>Confronts societal consumption habits through motion graphics, urging introspection and a shift towards sustainability, justice, and compassion.</i>	14 & 15 (Life Below Water & Life on Land) <i>Preserving marine ecosystems from pollution and acidification, advocating conservation through international legal frameworks and conserving biodiversity for food security, climate resilience, and peace.</i>
O <i>Experimental film exploring the cyclical nature of existence, inviting audiences to reflect on universal rhythms.</i>	17 (Partnership for the Goals) <i>Facilitating technology to spur innovation and promote investment in underdeveloped regions.</i>



Figure 6: Display of Artist Expressions for *Noktah* on Discarded Boxes

Conclusion

This paper discussed how projection mapping through *Noktah* has become a platform to create awareness by creating discourse about the UN SDGs. *Noktah*, through its ability to transform its surface made from recycled items into a dynamic campus, becomes a powerful apparatus for further engagement about critical subject matters. As *Noktah* signifies a symbol of growth, continuity, and the forward march towards a sustainable future, it has become the focal point for a transformative group exhibition delving into issues regarding planetary health. Through research creation, the *Noktah* short films projected onto an upcycled display surface helped to raise awareness, provoke meaningful discourse, and inspire collective action about the UN SDGs. The week-long exhibition, which explores the connection between artistic expression, global sustainability, and planetary health, has discussed critical global issues that can be narrated visually. Using themes related to six SDG targets puts forth our current challenges' urgency, interconnectedness, and intricacy.

Overall, the *Noktah* projection mapping was well-received, garnering positive feedback from audiences. The audience was drawn to the uniquely shaped installation, and the visual was projected onto the artwork, inviting them to experience the artwork more dynamically and in an immersive way. This approach to showcasing art in a non-traditional setting sparked meaningful conversations about the intersection of art and technology and its potential to convey powerful messages about planetary health. Its captivating projection mapping and thought-provoking themes sparked meaningful discussions around sustainability and planetary health. The engagement with the audience was notable, with many expressing admiration for the innovative approach to addressing pressing global issues through art, including using discarded boxes to mount the exhibition posters rather than opting to mount them on foam boards.

The positive reception has allowed the artwork to be displayed again for the 2024 Times Higher Education conference week. This extended opportunity not only underscores the resonance of *Noktah* but also highlights its potential to continue inspiring dialogue and action in diverse settings. There is an opportunity to further amplify the impact of *Noktah* by speaking with visitors during the upcoming exhibition. This presents a chance to gather

valuable insights, reflections, and reactions from those who experienced the artwork firsthand, providing valuable feedback for future iterations.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

Authors declare the use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process.

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Contact email: lisaz@sunway.edu.my

Bridging the East-West Divide: Unraveling Convergent Aesthetic Values Between China and Europe in Design and Art Through Expert Perspectives

Meizi Gu, University of Lisbon, Portugal
Anita Fang Chen, Chalmers University of Technology, Sweden

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Abstract

This research investigates the aesthetic commonalities between the East and West in art and design. It discloses fundamental similarities by employing expert interviews and thematic analysis with blue-and-white porcelain (BWP) as an exemplar. The findings reveal that, notwithstanding historical disparities, both traditions share values in aesthetic philosophy, symbolic representation, and form-function integration, with BWP serving as a paradigmatic cultural bridge. This study advances cross-cultural aesthetic comprehension and underlines its significance in fostering innovation.

Keywords: Design and Art, Cross-Cultural Aesthetics, Interview Research, Blue-and-White Porcelain

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Introduction

In the expansive realm of aesthetic research, the relationship between Eastern and Western aesthetics has invariably held a central and crucial position. Ye Lang, in the prefatory remarks of *"Outline of the History of Chinese Aesthetics"* (2005), unequivocally states that the integration of Chinese and Western aesthetics constitutes an essential foundation for the construction of an internationalised and comprehensive aesthetic discipline, as well as for the formulation of a scientifically rigorous modern aesthetic system. This assertion underlines the profound and far-reaching significance of delving into the latent intersections and dynamic interactions that bridge these two aesthetic traditions.

Simultaneously, the burgeoning field of social aesthetics (Olcese & Savage, 2015) offers an illuminating and novel vantage point. It accentuates the complex and intertwined nature of aesthetics with sociality, positing that aesthetics extends beyond the boundaries of individual aesthetic experiences and is deeply enmeshed in the continuous reproduction processes of society and culture. This further bolsters the urgent need to explore the fusion and symbiotic interaction of Chinese and Western aesthetics within the overarching context of globalisation. Given its profound implications for the refinement and advancement of the aesthetic discipline and the multifaceted development and sustainable reproduction of social and cultural landscapes, it becomes imperative to meticulously unearth the latent commonalities and efficacious integration mechanisms that permeate diverse strata. Such an endeavour holds the potential to unlock a plethora of innovative breakthroughs in cross-cultural aesthetic research and practice, thereby endowing it with truly transformative significance.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that pronounced differences between Eastern and Western aesthetics have persisted over time. Bernard Bosanquet, a distinguished British philosopher and aesthetician, articulated this perspective in his seminal work, *"A History of Aesthetics"* (1892, p. xii). Foreseeing potential criticism due to the omission of Eastern aesthetic concepts, especially those from China and Japan, he defended by stating that the aesthetic consciousness of the East was markedly different and couldn't be integrated into the cohesive historical account of Western aesthetics. While the era's context doubtless influenced his viewpoint, it reveals the paucity of meaningful cross-cultural exchanges during the initial phases of intellectual interaction between the two traditions.

Zhu Guangqian, a pioneer of modern Chinese aesthetics who had sojourned and studied in Europe, further expounded on this dichotomy. In his *"Psychology of Literature and Art"* (1982), he contended that Chinese aesthetics is deeply rooted in the organic unity between humanity and nature, manifesting through the prioritisation of intuitive experience and the cultivation of 'Yi jing' (artistic conception). This concept epitomises a transcendent state wherein emotion and nature coalesce in a seamless and ethereal union, embodying the Chinese philosophical ideal of "the unity of heaven and humanity" (tian ren he yi), characterised by holistic and integrative thinking, as well as the immediate and intuitive apprehension of aesthetic experience. In stark contrast, Western aesthetics has been historically steered and moulded by a rationalist tradition that places preponderant emphasis on the systematic study and meticulous analysis of form and structure. It employs rigorous logical methodologies to delineate and define beauty by constructing organised frameworks and rule-based systems, as exemplified by the development of classical aesthetics theories and the evolution of various art forms predicated on geometric and proportional principles.

Zong Baihua, another luminary in the Chinese aesthetic pantheon, further embellished and deepened the concept of "Yi jing" in his work *"Meixue Manbu [Strolling in Aesthetics]"* (2019, pp. 131 - 168). He described it as a state of harmonious transcendence that dissolves dualities such as subjectivity versus objectivity or emotion versus environment, forging a holistic and unified aesthetic realm. This stands in sharp relief to the Western predilection for representational fidelity, the privileging of individual perspectives, the pursuit of material precision, and the fixation on stable symbolic meanings. These contrasting features lucidly illustrate each tradition's distinct aesthetic predilections and conceptual underpinnings.

However, despite the conspicuous and significant differences between Eastern and Western aesthetic traditions, extant literature has regrettably fallen short in exploring whether there exists a certain cross-cultural aesthetic commonality. Most extant studies have focused predominantly on comparing the peculiarities of the two aesthetic systems yet notably neglected targeted exploration of their potential commonalities. In contemporary globalisation, cultural interaction and integration have become dominant and irreversible trends across various fields, with the design domain being a particularly prominent example. From the aesthetic contours of product designs to the nuances of visual languages, from design styles to the application of colour palettes, myriad design works now unabashedly embrace aesthetic elements from disparate cultures. This burgeoning phenomenon thus prompts the crucial question of how to reveal and meticulously examine, through a cross-cultural lens optimally, the shared values and latent synergies between Eastern and Western aesthetics and design practices. This pursuit undoubtedly warrants further in-depth research.

Furthermore, to substantiate or elaborate on the potential commonality between Eastern and Western aesthetics, the incorporation of specific design cases proves advantageous. The globally renowned blue-and-white porcelain (BWP) is a prime exemplar of the confluence of Eastern and Western aesthetic sensitivities. While prior investigations have shed some light on its allure, the intricate aesthetic underpinnings that permit it to surmount cultural barriers remain only partially fathomed. A comprehensive understanding of how such design forms can robustly facilitate cross-cultural aesthetic exchange remains elusive. Consequently, gaps and prospects for further refinement pervade this domain.

Building on these insights, this study formulates the following pivotal research inquiries:

1. Do Eastern and Western aesthetics in art and design share a foundational commonality, which could give rise to meaningful dialogue and interaction between the two aesthetic systems?
2. Can the blue-and-white design of porcelain serve as a typical and effective example to bridge Eastern and Western aesthetics, further deepening cross-cultural aesthetic exchange?

To address these questions, this research employs the expert interview method. Through in-depth discussions, it delves into experts' insights and professional verdicts regarding the topic. Expert interviews excel in amalgamating viewpoints from diverse disciplines, supplying multi-dimensional perspectives and spurring the discovery of overlooked academic matters via open-ended exchanges. Their professional acumen and critical insights erect a sturdy analytical framework for the study, proving especially crucial when grappling with intricate cross-cultural phenomena.

Study Method

This study employed expert interviews to collect data.

I. Expert Backgrounds

Four experts with profound academic backgrounds and significant influence in their respective fields were invited to participate in a group interview lasting approximately two and a half hours. These experts have accumulated extensive experience in studying Eastern and Western aesthetics and related design disciplines, providing diverse perspectives and professional insights for the analysis central to this research. The specific details of the experts are as follows:

1. **Professor of Aesthetics and Art:** With a long-term focus on Western aesthetics, this expert has recently expanded their academic interests to include comparative studies between Eastern and Western aesthetics, publishing numerous widely recognised academic works.
2. **Professor of Visual Communication Design:** Specialising in modern design theory and practice, this expert focuses on integrating Eastern and Western aesthetic elements and the dynamic expression of visual culture in the context of globalisation.
3. **Professor of Urban Landscape Design:** This expert's research focuses on applying Eastern aesthetic principles in modern urban design, particularly to the adaptability and transformation of Chinese and Japanese aesthetic concepts in a globalised social environment.
4. **Professor of Ceramic Art:** Specialising in traditional Eastern ceramic craftsmanship, this expert has systematically researched the historical legacy of BWP and its evolving techniques and practices.

By bringing together these experts from complementary disciplines, we aimed to explore cross-cultural aesthetic values comprehensively. Their combined knowledge and experience would help to address the research questions more effectively and build a more robust analytical framework.

II. Expert Interview Process

This study employs a group interview method to explore the commonalities between Eastern and Western aesthetic values and the aesthetic characteristics and cultural significance of BWP design. The interview is designed as a free-form discussion centred around the following two core themes:

1. **The Commonalities of Eastern and Western Aesthetic Values**
 - An exploration of the differences and shared aspects within Eastern and Western design aesthetics;
 - Experts' core understanding of "beauty" (aesthetics) and its cultural connotations;
 - The reinterpretation and realisation of traditional art's value in modern design.
2. **The Aesthetic Characteristics and Cultural Role of BWP**
 - The core aesthetic features and cultural value of BWP;
 - The symbolic meaning of blue-and-white patterns in historical and contemporary contexts and their function in the creative reinvention of cultural symbols.

The interview design strictly adheres to these two principal themes: (1) summarising the commonalities between Eastern and Western aesthetic values and (2) exploring the aesthetic characteristics of BWP and its value dissemination in a cross-cultural context. This framework ensures logical coherence while enabling experts to engage in open and unrestricted discussion.

III. Methods for Processing Interview Data

This study employed the Thematic Analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyse the interview data systematically. Thematic Analysis is a pattern- and meaning-oriented analytical method that facilitates precise alignment between the interview content and the research objectives. The data analysis in this study comprises the following six stages:

1. Transcription and Familiarisation with the Data

The interview recordings were transcribed into text and repeatedly reviewed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the context and the nuanced perspectives. This process allowed us to discern the layered meanings in the experts' views, forming a solid foundation for subsequent coding and thematic analysis.

2. Generating Initial Codes

Open coding was conducted on the textual data based on the two core research directions: the "commonalities in aesthetic values between Chinese and Western cultures" and the "cultural and aesthetic dimensions of blue and white porcelain design". During the coding process, particular attention was paid to aligning with the research objectives by extracting relevant content from paragraphs, sentences, and key terms, ensuring that the initial codes comprehensively covered all critical information in the interview content.

- Example:

From the theme "commonalities in aesthetic values between Chinese and Western cultures", the following initial codes were derived:

- Social and spiritual dimensions of beauty: "Beauty is both subjective and intricately connected with social and spiritual dimensions."

3. Searching for Preliminary Themes

The initial codes were categorised, and potential themes were identified and integrated by examining the relationships between the codes. Codes with similar or complementary meanings were grouped to form preliminary themes, constructing a rudimentary thematic framework.

- Example:

Theme: Aesthetic Philosophy

- Categorised Codes:

- The rational, analytical stance of Western aesthetics (corresponding to the code "rational analysis of symbols, expression, and meaning")
- The emphasis on nature, Zen, and intuition in Eastern aesthetics (corresponding to the code "natural harmony, intuition, and Zen philosophy")

4. Reviewing and Refining the Themes

The preliminary themes were reviewed and revised to ensure that each theme had clear boundaries, internal consistency, and logical coherence. Overlaps or redundancies between themes were identified and resolved during this stage, and incomplete themes

were further refined and integrated, enhancing the depth and accuracy of the thematic analysis.

5. Defining and Naming the Themes

Themes were defined and named based on analysing their underlying meanings. The names of the themes were chosen to accurately reflect their core semantic meanings and supporting data while delineating each theme's scope.

6. Synthesising Results

Tables 1 and 2 present the core findings from the interview data analysis and theme extraction stages. These key results directly inform the development of the specific research conclusions for 'Results (II) Theoretical Framework Development and Case Analysis.'

Results

I. Results of the Interview Data Analysis

Through systematic coding and inductive analysis of the interview data from four experts, this study identified two core thematic categories, focusing on 'Commonalities in Eastern and Western Aesthetic Values' (see Table 1) and 'The Cultural and Aesthetic Dimensions of BWP Design' (see Table 2). These themes spotlight key issues in cross-cultural aesthetic research and offer profound insights into the cultural significance and value of BWP as an art form in both traditional and contemporary contexts.

Table 1 encapsulates ten themes across cross-cultural aesthetics, the relationship between tradition and modernity, and the interaction between nature and art. It analyses the key issues of commonalities and differences in aesthetic philosophies and design approaches in Eastern and Western contexts.

Table 2 presents six themes, exploring aspects such as cultural symbolism, characteristics of materials and craftsmanship, and visual aesthetics. It examines the historical legacy of BWP in the context of Sino-Western cultural exchange and its unique value in modern society.

Table 1: Identifying Commonalities Between Eastern and Western Aesthetic Values

Theme	Sub-themes	Expert Opinion Summary
Aesthetic Philosophy	Aesthetics transcend cultural boundaries; Eastern and Western philosophies each have distinct emphases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Western aesthetics emphasise rational analysis of symbols, expression, and meaning, while Eastern aesthetics place greater importance on natural harmony, intuition, and Zen philosophy. - Eastern art simplifies complex ideas, whereas Western art focuses on critical interpretation. - Beauty is both subjective and closely tied to social and spiritual dimensions.
Expression and Symbolism	Emphasis on the expression of emotions and intentions, using symbolism to convey philosophy and feelings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both traditions employ symbolism to present profound meanings, communicating emotions such as awe towards nature. - Western art places more emphasis on individual perspectives and social change, while Eastern art seeks the integration of humanity and nature. - Symbolism gains new interpretations in philosophical reflections on traditional and modern forms of art.
The Beauty of Nature	Mutual reverence for natural beauty, expressed through distinct approaches that convey deep awe and integration with nature.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Western garden design features geometric symmetry and rational planning, while Eastern gardens focus on harmonious coexistence with nature. - For instance, Chinese and Japanese gardens aim to create "Yijing" (artistic conception), whereas Western gardens emphasise physical functionality. - Both traditions reflect a shared pursuit of nature and organic elements in architecture and design.
Form and Function	Beauty lies in the perfect fusion of form and meaning, balancing functionality with emotional expression.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beauty is not just about aesthetic form but also intrinsic emotions and cultural structures. - Aesthetics must consider historical and cultural contexts, and works embody the artist's experiences and creativity.
Fusion of Tradition and Modernity	The spirit of tradition is innovatively interpreted through modern design, preserving cultural uniqueness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditional crafts (e.g., ceramics, bronze) are revitalised through modern techniques and functionality, retaining cultural identity in a globalised world. - Traditional symbolic language is integrated into modern design, balancing cultural depth with contemporary applications (e.g., urban space design). - New technologies breathe life into traditional crafts while avoiding superficiality.
Education and Modes of Thinking	Alignment in goals between Eastern and Western design education, with distinct strengths in approaches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Western design education highlights industrialisation and scientific methods (e.g., Bauhaus rational principles), while Eastern education values craftsmanship and holistic expression. - Chinese design promotes "seeking harmony amidst diversity," combining functionality and innovation in areas like packaging design. - Respect for materials and craftsmanship facilitates aesthetic consensus and interdisciplinary collaboration in fields such as ceramics.
Contemporary Design Innovation	Innovative applications of traditional elements enhance cultural depth and modern functionality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In graphic design, infusing traditional Chinese colour systems or symbolic language generates distinctive visual effects. - For instance, abstract art methodologies pave the way for the expression of colour and emotion in modern art. - Innovation requires merging the essence of tradition with modern technologies to meet market demands and the aesthetic needs of modern life.
Spirit and Symbolic Meaning	The elevation of beauty transcends physical forms, relating to morality, religion, and spirituality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aesthetics are deeply connected to spirituality, moral values and religious beliefs. - In ceramics, both Eastern and Western cultures unite the functional aspects of materials with a pursuit of spiritual ideals, conveying complex cultural meanings.
Globalisation and Cross-cultural Integration	Exploring new forms and concepts through the integration of Eastern and Western design philosophies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The blend of Eastern "emptiness" and Western spatial arrangements creates balance and innovation. - The Bauhaus spirit becomes a focal point of cross-cultural convergence, with both traditions pursuing the shared goal of design serving society.
Artistic Conception and Contrast of Void and Reality	The combination of Eastern "Yijing" (artistic conception) and Western functional scene design.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The "yijing" of Chinese gardens sparks deep reflections on abstraction and reality in the field of design. - Environmental design incorporates Western methods while adhering to traditional principles of artistic conception.

Table 2: Cultural and Aesthetic Interpretations of BWP Design

Theme	Sub-themes	Summary of Expert Opinions
Cultural Symbolism and Meaning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Colours and cultural symbolism 2. Patterns and historical emotions 3. Taoist and Buddhist aesthetic implications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The blue-and-white porcelain colours carry profound cultural symbolism, reflecting Chinese history and culture. * The patterns are visually appealing and express the emotions and social consciousness of ancient craftsmen. * The elements of Taoism and Buddhism within the designs give the porcelain a unique aesthetic significance in East Asian culture.
Cultural Exchange Between East and West	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Trade and technological exchange 2. Reinterpretation of patterns across cultures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Blue-and-white porcelain entered Europe via maritime trade, becoming highly favoured among the upper class. * The cobalt blue pigment originated from Persia, symbolising the importance of technological exchanges between East and West. * Its forms and patterns show mutual cultural influence, representing a symbol of cultural exchange. * Traditional Chinese designs were reinterpreted in the West, demonstrating lasting cultural impact.
Technical and Material Characteristics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High-temperature cobalt blue technique 2. Rarity and economic impact of cobalt 3. Influence of Islamic culture in design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The underglaze cobalt blue technique at high temperatures enabled the seamless combination of blue designs with white porcelain glaze. * In the past, the high cost of cobalt pigment limited its accessibility and linked it to the socio-economic conditions of the time. * Islamic culture had a noticeable impact on the design of blue-and-white porcelain, especially in the use of colour, showcasing intercultural technical evolution.
Education and Transmission	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connection between tradition and modernity 2. Historical context and emotional expression 3. Cross-cultural aesthetic education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * In research and teaching, blue-and-white porcelain illustrates the blend of Chinese craftsmanship and modern design. * Teaching about blue-and-white porcelain highlights its historical and cultural significance, helping students understand its symbolic meaning and emotional expression. * Blue-and-white porcelain serves as a focal case study in cross-cultural aesthetic education, aiding students in balancing tradition and innovation in modern design.
Aesthetic Features	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Symbol of elegance in East and West 2. Visual harmony and cultural significance 3. Universal appeal of colours and patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The simplicity and elegance of blue-and-white porcelain appeal to audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds, making it a symbol of elegance and refinement. * The contrast of blue and white reflects visual harmony while carrying deep cultural meaning. * The design of its colours and patterns possesses universal appeal, transcending cultural boundaries to become a cornerstone of global aesthetics.
Social Status and Identity Symbolism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aesthetic preference of royalty and commoners 2. Material cost and social distinction 3. Art objectification in Europe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The use of blue on porcelain appealed to both the refined tastes of royalty and, at a broader level, symbolised the people's aesthetic preferences. * The high cost of cobalt pigment historically rendered blue-and-white porcelain a symbol of particular status and identity. * Introduced via maritime trade, blue-and-white porcelain became a highly desired art object among European elites, further highlighting its significance in social status and cultural identity.

Table 1 delves into the core commonalities and distinctions of Eastern and Western aesthetic values. The four contributors' interdisciplinary expertise evidences significant consensus on themes like "The Beauty of Nature," "Form and Function," and "Fusion of Tradition and Modernity". For example, in the "Beauty of Nature" theme, all experts emphasized the shared reverence for nature and its artistic representation in both aesthetic traditions. Similarly, they acknowledged certain cultural and emotional aspects within "Form and Function". Yet, in "Globalisation and Cross-Cultural Integration," notable divergence arose, influenced by their respective professional contexts. The urban landscape design professor stressed the macro-level impact of cultural fusion on spatial design, while the ceramics arts professor analyzed the role of traditional symbols within a globalized framework from a craft and material culture perspective. Despite agreement on fundamental themes such as "The Beauty of Nature" and "Fusion of Tradition and Modernity", disciplinary outlooks led to different ways of interpreting and implementing these ideas.

In Table 2, the four experts share substantial common ground, especially concerning the cultural symbolism and universal aesthetic allure of BWP design. They unanimously affirm that its colours and patterns mirror Chinese history, emotions, and social consciousness and embody the philosophical influences of Daoism and Buddhism, endowing the porcelain with profound cultural significance. Moreover, they all concur on its crucial role in facilitating East-West cultural exchange. Likewise, they highlight its simplicity, elegance, and harmonious blue-white colour scheme as universally appealing aesthetic features transcending cultural boundaries. However, notable differences surface in their assessments of BWP's education and transmission: the urban landscape design professor regards BWP as a key reference for blending tradition and modernity in public aesthetics, whereas the ceramics arts professor primarily views it to preserve craftsmanship traditions. These variations, stemming from their distinct professional backgrounds and disciplinary priorities, enrich the comprehensive understanding of BWP design.

II. Theoretical Framework Development and Case Analysis

Differences in Aesthetic Principles Between Eastern and Western Thought

When juxtaposed with the well-established theoretical insights from the literature review, the findings of our expert interviews (as evidenced in Table 1) not only corroborate but also further illuminate the long-standing nature of these philosophical differences.

The experts have highlighted that Western aesthetics is firmly grounded in the rational analysis and deconstruction of symbols, structure, and meaning. This approach gives prominence to critical interpretation and in-depth formal analysis. In contrast, Eastern aesthetics highly value simplicity, fluid and intuitive understanding, and natural harmony, drawing substantially from Zen philosophy and the time-honoured Chinese thought traditions. For example, in garden design, Western gardens, characterised by geometric precision and well-ordered layouts, can be seen as a manifestation of humans' attempt to exert control over nature. On the other hand, Eastern gardens deliberately avoid rigid symmetry and instead aim to create a harmonious coexistence with the natural surroundings, thereby reflecting the profound integration of humanity with the environment.

Spirituality and symbolism serve as another crucial point of divergence, a theme consistently emphasised in the existing literature and the data obtained from the experts. In Western traditions, aesthetics is often anchored in external ideals such as moral, social, or individual values, with symbolism used as a means of explicit expression and transformation. Conversely, Eastern traditions integrate symbolism into a more metaphysical realm of abstraction, exploring the idea of transcendence through the interaction between the void and reality. Zong Baihua's "Yi jing" concept effectively encapsulates this abstract nature, dissolving the opposing dualities and evoking a state of existential harmony, which contrasts sharply with Western art's more structured, figurative, and often literal use of symbolism.

A similarly nuanced disparity emerges in the interpretations of materiality and functionality. Western design, influenced by the industrial heritage and rationalist modes of thinking, often tries to balance practical function and conceptual symbolism. However, Eastern design philosophies view material forms as channels for metaphysical resonance and the expression of deep-seated emotions. Instead of giving primacy to utilitarian concerns, Eastern approaches focus on eliciting spiritual and intuitive depth, mirroring the integrative ethos that Zhu Guangqian identified in traditional Chinese aesthetics. Moreover, the differences in

educational paradigms further accentuate this contrast: Western design education typically centres around industrial principles and scientific methodologies (such as the influential Bauhaus movement), while Eastern traditions advocate for craftsmanship and the all-around cultivation of artistic expression.

Although these differences highlight the significant disparities in aesthetic philosophies and methodologies, it is essential to note that they also converge in their shared pursuit of beauty as a universal value. Despite their contrasting approaches, both traditions strive to articulate the profound essence of beauty and its intrinsic connection to human experience. This shared aspiration provides a fertile ground for cross-cultural dialogue and the potential for mutual enrichment and innovation. By acknowledging these differences and commonalities, we can better understand the complex and multi-faceted nature of aesthetic traditions in the East and West and pave the way for more in-depth cross-cultural aesthetic research and exchange.

An Analysis of Aesthetic Commonalities Between Eastern and Western Art and Design

Scholar Gu Mingdong (2021), through a comparative analysis of the aesthetic theories of the Chinese traditional aesthetic thinker Liu Xie (刘勰) and the German aesthetician Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, noted that despite their differing cultural backgrounds and historical contexts, both exhibit remarkable similarities in core themes such as artistic creation, sources of inspiration, and the relationship between nature and art. These cross-cultural commonalities provide a theoretical foundation for dialogue between Eastern and Western aesthetic thought. Incorporating Table 1's expert interview data further disclosed the homogeneity of cross-cultural aesthetic values and their dialogic potential, facilitating global design aesthetic integration.

The primary shared principle lies in the core dimensions of aesthetic philosophy, wherein both Eastern and Western traditions acknowledge the subjectivity of beauty and its connection to social and spiritual dimensions. The expert interviews confirmed this perspective: whether in the Eastern notion of "the unity of heaven and humanity" or the Western emphasis on intentionality and purpose in meaning-making, beauty is regarded as surpassing mere sensory pleasure, imbued instead with profound cultural and spiritual significance. Moreover, from the theoretical perspectives of Liu Xie and Schelling, both demonstrate a striking convergence in their discussions of artistic inspiration and nature's unconsciousness. Liu Xie's notion of "literature and art as products of nature" parallels Schelling's emphasis on art as the unconscious creation of nature. This connection highlights the shared foundational relationship between nature and human aesthetic creativity.

Secondly, both Eastern and Western traditions emphasise symbolic expression, using metaphor and symbolism to convey complex emotions and profound cultural meanings. Evidence from the expert interviews shows that this shared emphasis manifests in the symbolic representation of modern and traditional art forms. Contemporary design, for instance, imbues traditional symbols with new interpretations through philosophical reflection. Examples include the Zen-inspired aesthetic of the East and the abstraction-rooted aesthetics of the West, both striving to express deeper intellectual connotations through material and form. Similarly, Liu Xie's concept of "shen li" (spiritual logic) and Schelling's notion of the "eternal idea" exhibit striking concordance: both regard artistic symbols as symbolic instruments transcending material existence, aiming to articulate the essence of the cosmos or the core of cultural values. Such an understanding underscores that artistic

symbols possess an intuitive material significance and function as mediums for communicating cultural spirit and universal principles.

Lastly, there is further convergence in design's principle of unifying form and function. Experts pointed out that whether it is the Eastern emphasis on the organic integration of emotion and cultural structure or the Western exploration of the practical roles of symbols through formal analysis, design aesthetics in both traditions pursue harmony amidst the tension between tradition and modernity. This alignment is intricately linked to the shared aesthetic pursuit of "nature" in both traditions. Liu Xie's naturalistic view in *The Literary Mind* and the Carving of Dragons (Wenxin Diaolong) and Schelling's scientific understanding of nature's creative force underscore the notion that art is rooted in the essence of nature. This advances the commonality between Eastern and Western design traditions and lays a conceptual foundation for collaborative design practices in globalisation.

BWP is a Case of Cross-Cultural Aesthetic Convergence

Based on the data from expert interviews (Table 2) and the comprehensively integrated research findings, BWP represents an exemplary case that illustrates the commonalities between Eastern and Western aesthetics. This conclusion is in line with the established theoretical framework.

In the context of the core dimension of aesthetic philosophy, according to Table 2, the expert insights reveal that the high value and wide-ranging appeal of BWP are closely related to the perception of beauty's subjectivity and its social and spiritual connotations. In European markets, consumers acknowledged BWP because of its refined craftsmanship and the profound cultural and spiritual essence it embodied, which parallels the Western focus on intentionality and purpose within the realm of meaning-making. Concurrently, in Asian markets such as China, its standing as a representative of traditional porcelain art was also linked to the Eastern concept of "the unity of heaven and humanity", further corroborating the shared recognition of the multi-faceted significance of beauty.

Regarding artistic inspiration and nature's unconsciousness, in accordance with the data presented in Table 2, the origin and development of the cobalt blue pigment in BWP can be regarded as an instance of the underlying technological exchange that resonates with the theoretical convergence proposed by Liu Xie and Schelling. The manner in which this pigment was incorporated into the Chinese high-temperature underglaze techniques, along with its precise heat treatment procedure, may have been affected by certain unconscious elements within traditional craftsmanship, analogous to the concept of art being a product of nature or an unconscious creation. This technological progression has significantly contributed to the distinctive aesthetic qualities of BWP, thereby underlining the shared fundamental relationship between nature and human aesthetic creativity.

In the domain of symbolic expression, Table 2 indicates that the diverse design elements within BWP, ranging from the cobalt blue pigment originating from Persia to the incorporated Islamic and traditional Chinese Taoist and Buddhist aesthetics, are explicit demonstrations of the common emphasis placed on utilising symbols to communicate intricate emotions and profound cultural connotations. The varying interpretations and combinations of these elements in BWP, as manifested in the market response, mirror the reality that both Eastern and Western traditions perceive artistic symbols as means to express

the quintessence of cultural values, much like Liu Xie's "shen li" (spiritual logic) and Schelling's "eternal idea".

From the standpoint of integrating form and function, as per Table 2, the triumph of BWP across different markets can be ascribed to its capacity to strike a balance between traditional and modern elements. In European high-end art auctions, the soaring price of BWP signified its highly esteemed status as a premier cultural artefact, thereby exemplifying the harmonious fusion of form (its aesthetic allure) and function (its significance as a cultural symbol). In Chinese cultural markets, its pricing approach, which laid emphasis on historical and artistic value, also attested to the organic synthesis of emotion and cultural fabric, in accordance with the Eastern focus on the unity of form and function.

Furthermore, BWP is a physical artefact of cultural exchange and a symbol of shared aesthetic values. Its historical progression, commencing from its production in China and proceeding to its reinterpretation within European markets, exhibits the reciprocal exchange of artistic inspiration and cultural significance. As noted by experts (Table 2), the porcelain's designs transcended their original purpose, becoming objects of social distinction and artistic admiration in Europe, where traditional Chinese patterns were adapted to local tastes. This recontextualisation aligns with Gu Mingdong's analysis of cross-cultural artistic philosophies, underlining the universality of symbolic representation and aesthetic aspiration. Eastern and Western designs, although moulded by distinct cultural narratives, converge in their mutual dependence on nature and artistic intuition as sources of inspiration, as exemplified by figures such as Liu Xie and Schelling, who stressed art's inherent connection to natural creation. BWP bridges these diverse traditions through its materials, patterns, and symbolic resonance, presenting a persuasive case study of how intercultural aesthetic philosophies can converge to yield artefacts that surpass cultural boundaries. This capacity to harmonise Eastern and Western artistic principles contributes to laying a specific foundation for the theoretical exploration of design traditions. It adds to the significance of this case in the in-depth study of cross-cultural aesthetics and provides some support for the research on intercultural aesthetic philosophies. However, further investigations are essential to evaluate its role and influence comprehensively.

Discussion

The selection of four experts from complementary disciplines proved instrumental in conducting a comprehensive exploration of cross-cultural aesthetic values. Each expert brought a unique yet interlinked perspective: the Professor of Aesthetics and Art elucidated Western traditions and Eastern philosophies; the Professor of Visual Communication Design spotlighted the interaction of Eastern and Western visual languages in contemporary design; the Professor of Urban Landscape Design probed the application of Eastern aesthetic principles in spatial design; and the Professor of Ceramic Art furnished specialized insights into BWP as a cultural synthesis artefact. This methodological strategy enabled a multi-faceted analysis, spanning philosophical, historical, and practical aspects of aesthetic convergence.

Nevertheless, this expert selection methodology had its drawbacks. Limiting the panel to four experts constricted the breadth of viewpoints. Incorporating a more extensive and diverse range of specialists from other fields could have unearthed additional insights and subtleties. Moreover, the limited availability of Western scholarship in comparative aesthetics

compelled a heavier reliance on Chinese sources, augmenting the study's depth regarding Eastern traditions but potentially creating an imbalance in cultural representation.

Notwithstanding these challenges, this research made specific contributions to cross-cultural aesthetics. It unearthed fundamental values shared by Eastern and Western aesthetic traditions, challenging the entrenched perception of divergence. Shared tenets such as harmony, metaphorical symbolism, and integrating beauty's spiritual and social dimensions laid the groundwork for productive dialogue. BWP emerged as a prime example of aesthetic synthesis, amalgamating Persian materials, Chinese craftsmanship, and Western artistic reception. This artefact illustrated the confluence of transcultural forces, technological innovation, and symbolic meanings across traditions. Consequently, the study redirected scholarly attention from divergence to integration, recasting cross-cultural aesthetics as a catalyst for innovation in art and design. Additionally, the findings underlined the pivotal role of leveraging shared aesthetic foundations in nurturing creativity in a globalized milieu.

The study tackled the research questions through a thematic and interdisciplinary investigative methodology. In response to the first question—identifying commonalities in Eastern and Western aesthetics—the research validated the existence of specific shared values. These findings substantiated the viability of fostering mutual dialogue between the two traditions, rooted in shared aspirations. Regarding the second question, the research established that BWP epitomizes aesthetic convergence, demonstrating how transcultural interactions have moulded enduring design legacies. These findings proffered a novel theoretical scaffolding for advancing cross-cultural creativity and dialogue, positioning aesthetic synthesis as a central motif in contemporary art and design discourse.

Conclusion

This study has successfully identified crucial theoretical commonalities in integrating Eastern and Western aesthetics through blue-and-white porcelain. However, its scope was limited by the restricted expert selection and disciplinary focus. Future research should address these limitations by including a wider array of experts, such as anthropologists, sociologists, and art historians, to better examine aesthetics' cultural and social foundations.

Further, exploring other art forms—such as textiles, architecture, and graphic arts—can deepen understanding of how diverse cultural techniques and designs embody and integrate aesthetics. Such comparative and longitudinal studies would provide valuable insights into the evolution of aesthetic values amidst globalisation, fostering cross-cultural innovation in art and design. Strengthening both theoretical contributions and practical applications, such research would enrich cross-cultural understanding in the interconnected global cultural landscape.

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Contact emails: meizigu@edu.ulisboa.pt
 lovinmeizi@gmail.com
 acanita6@gmail.com

***A Study of Visual Language Extraction From Uttarakhand's
Cultural and Natural Resources for Application in Ringaal Craft Design***

Soumitra Bhattacharya, UPES, India

Naveen Kumar, UPES, India

Debkumar Chakrabarti, UPES, India

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to examine the feasibility of designing a visual language that can be employed in Ringaal crafts, one of Uttarakhand's many traditional craft forms. By examining the forms and colours found in Uttarakhand's cultural traditions, architecture, and natural resources, the research aims to create visual design patterns for application to Ringaal craft products. Although colour referencing is frequently adopted in other industries, there is a lack of prior studies focusing on its application in craft design. This study investigates how visual design elements influence product aesthetics and contribute to crafting a distinctive local identity for Ringaal products. The research gathered 16 photographs depicting Uttarakhand's culture, nature and architecture. These were processed by Visual Designers to derive colour palettes for application on Ringaal products by artisans. An Aesthetic Pleasure Value (APV) rating was obtained with assistance of three Communication Design specialists. The study compared APV scores for 60 craft products with patterns (CWP) and without patterns (CWoP), finding a significant difference: CWoP (Mean = 22.16, SD = 2.19) and CWP (Mean = 27.33, SD = 2.62). The study shows that the integration of design elements escalates the beauty of products to higher levels. This study contributes to the field of visual communication in craft design, offering insights into using local visual elements to enhance traditional crafts. Additionally, the color palettes developed could be applied to products such as home appliances and stationery, expanding their aesthetic appeal while fostering a connection to Uttarakhand's cultural and natural heritage.

Keywords: Cultural Elements, Ringaal Craft, Visual Language, Aesthetic Pleasure Measurement

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Introduction

Creating new works of art and craft involves the process of visual language extraction, which requires examining visual elements from a variety of sources (Ball, 2016; Benyus, 1997). Researchers have highlighted that fields such as graphic design, traditional art forms, digital media, fabric patterns, and others can serve as inspiration for this approach (Panofsky, 1979; Davis & Simon, 1992; Jones & Smith, 2013). Examples of these diverse sources include digital media, which includes modern graphic design and digital art; Photography, which uses cameras to capture moments and artistic compositions; Architecture, which includes geometric structures, aesthetic materials, and decorative designs; cultural artefacts reflecting traditional crafts, symbolism and iconography; nature, which provides inspiration through landscapes, natural formations, plants and animals; and art history, offering techniques and compositions from the classical to the present.

Visual language extraction may also involve the use of digital tools and the expertise of designers. Software such as Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, and other image editing programs are often used to capture specific visual elements and color patterns. In addition to these tools, designers use their drawing and observation skills to document lines, shapes, colors and textures. Despite the potential of these methods, it has been observed that the extraction of visual language elements from cultural traditions, architectural styles and natural resources has not been widely applied to Ringaal craft products in the past.

The market currently offers a range of Ringaal craft products for various uses, with customers mainly purchasing them offline for functional and decorative purposes, such as storage baskets or home accents such as lampshades and flower vases. Field observations suggest that if Ringaal craft products were made available online through e-commerce websites and mobile applications, their demand could increase substantially. Aesthetics and appearance of products in that case will play a bigger role in influencing consumers' online purchasing behavior.

To assess this, we measured the aesthetic pleasure value (APV) based on previous literature (He et al., 2022). This study draws inspiration from three key categories—Uttarakhand's cultural traditions, architectural styles, and natural resources—to create visual elements for the design patterns used in Ringaal craft products. Uttarakhand's natural environment provided a wealth of subject matter, forming the foundation for numerous images representing a wide spectrum of visual design themes. The development of a visual language involved a systematic process of observing, documenting, and interpreting the colors and patterns derived from these sources.

Table 1 summarizes prior studies that examine how visual language has been extracted from different sources for application in art and craft. This research builds on those findings to integrate Uttarakhand's cultural and natural heritage into Ringaal craft products, aiming to enhance their aesthetic appeal and marketability.

Table 1: Literature on Visual Language Extracted From Nature, Architectures, and Cultural Events for Craft Design

Source	Study Title	Authors	Year	Key Findings
Nature	"Biomimicry in Design: Inspiration from Nature"	Benyus, J. M.	1997	Explores how natural patterns and forms inspire design and art, leading to sustainable and innovative artistic expressions.
	"The Aesthetic Significance of Patterns in Nature"	Ball, P.	2016	Discusses how natural patterns such as fractals, symmetry, and spirals are translated into visual art, enhancing aesthetic appreciation and creativity.
	"Nature as a Source of Inspiration for Textile Design"	Mallik, A., & Das, D.	2018	Analyzes how natural elements like flora and fauna influence textile patterns, leading to the creation of innovative designs in fashion and interior decor.
Architecture	"Architectural Inspirations in Contemporary Art"	Goodman, D., & Jennings, H.	2004	Examines how modern and classical architectural forms are integrated into contemporary art, shaping the visual language and structural composition of artworks.
	"The Influence of Gothic Architecture on Modern Art"	Panofsky, E.	1979	Discusses the impact of Gothic architecture's verticality and ornamentation on the development of modern artistic styles and motifs.
	"Minimalism in Architecture and Art: A Comparative Study"	Meyer, J.	2001	Compares minimalist principles in architecture and art, highlighting how architectural simplicity informs visual language in art and design.
Cultural Events	"Artistic Expressions in Cultural Festivals"	Turner, V.	1969	Explores how cultural events like festivals inspire visual motifs in art, emphasizing the role of communal experiences in artistic creation.
	"Visual Culture in Rituals and Ceremonies"	Davis, W., & Simon, H.	1992	Investigates how rituals and ceremonies shape visual culture, leading to the creation of symbolic art forms and craft traditions.
	"The Role of Cultural Heritage in Contemporary Craft"	Jones, M., & Smith, R.	2013	Discusses how cultural heritage, preserved in traditional events, influences contemporary craft practices, merging historical and modern visual languages.

The objective of this study is to identify color palettes and extract them from three different categories: culture, architecture and nature. It also investigates how visual language influences product aesthetics and examines the systematic process of extracting visual design patterns from various sources to create a new range of marketable craft products, thereby contributing to knowledge creation. To achieve this, a research methodology was developed and a quantitative study was conducted as described in the following section. The results are then presented, followed by a discussion of the results and the conclusion of the study.

Methodology

This study includes two main phases. In the first phase, we collected data (photos) from three sources and created colour samples (schemes) for various Ringaal craft products. In the second phase, an experiment was conducted to determine the difference between products with patterns and products without patterns by measuring the aesthetic pleasure value (APV). Figure 1 shows both the phases and the sequence of steps contained in the phases. It also illustrates the methodology used for data collection, which was then analysed to extract patterns for application to craft product designs.

In Phase 1, the study included a field visit to four provinces in the Indian state of Uttarakhand, during which interviews were conducted with 35 Ringaal artisans. The aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of the process involved in creating Ringaal craft designs, explore the visual design patterns on the products, and identify the challenges artisans face

with regards to craft design. The demographic information of the artisans surveyed is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic Data of the Artisans

	Age	Years of Experience	No. of Products
Mean age	47.65	28.03	15.24
SD	13.17	13.96	6.99
Male			
Mean age	47.42	27.82	15.24
SD	13.31	14.12	7.1
Female			
Mean age	40.4	14.4	15.2
SD	7.36	10.44	5.53

In addition to interviews, data were collected through direct observations at various culturally significant sites including temples, fairs and festivals, traditional houses, national parks, and scenic locations. These observations were supplemented by photographic documentation of the local flora, fauna and natural landscapes with images of flowers, birds and animals. Figure 2 shows the craft products with and without the design patterns. Products with basic shapes were used to conveniently apply the design patterns created using colour palettes derived from photographs of nature, cultural events and architecture. A total of 16 photos were shortlisted for the same. A total of 60 craft products (with and without patterns) were shown to the participant to collect APV values.

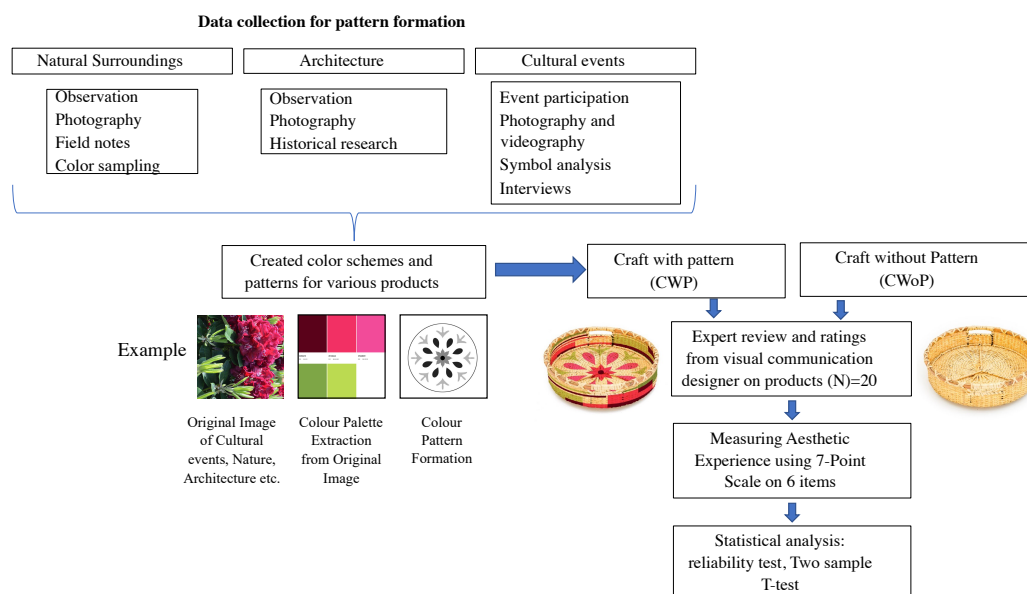


Figure 1: Research Methodology



Figure 2: Images of Crafts With and Without Pattern

For Phase 2, the experiment described is a between-subjects design in which participants were exposed to one of two conditions: craft products with patterns (CWP) and craft products without patterns (CWoP). The study included a single independent variable: craft design, which was manipulated at two levels – craft products with patterns and craft products without patterns. A total of 20 craft products were evaluated for each category, representing each level of the independent variables (CWP and CWoP). The dependent variable, aesthetic pleasure value (APV), was rated for each craft product with and without a pattern by three design experts. A total of 20 products x 3 categories (nature, architecture, culture) = 60 items each for CWP and CWoP.

In this study, photos (60 images) from three categories were used to extract color palettes and create patterns for Ringaal craft products. Each Ringaal craft product image was rated on a scale of 1 to 7 for APV measurement. The APV ratings were based on the aesthetic experience of the design expert. There were 7-point rating scale on 5 questionnaire items 1. Beauty (1= Not beautiful at all, 7 = Very Beautiful) 2. Pleasure (1= Not Pleasurable at all, 7 = Extremely Pleasure) 3. Desire to own (1= Not Desirable at all, 7 = Very Desirable) 4. Elegance (1= Not Elegant at all, 7 = Extremely Elegant) 5. Well Designed (1= Not Designed well at all, 7 = Very well designed). The five question items is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Description of the Question Items Which Was Explained to the Experts for the Ratings

Question items	Description
Beauty	A combination of qualities, such as shape, color, or form that pleases the aesthetic senses, especially sight.
Pleasure	A feeling of happiness, satisfaction and enjoyment.
Desire to own	To have a strong wish to own or enjoy something.
Elegance	The quality of being graceful and stylish in appearance.
Well designed	Artistically or skillfully planned, especially for a particular purpose.

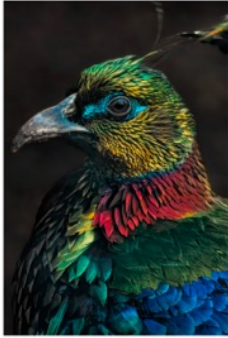





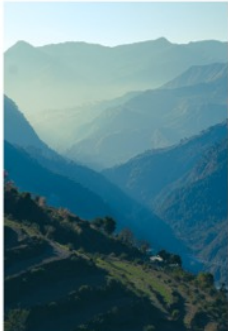

The APV values were collected separately for each level of craft design. To assess the reliability of the APV ratings provided by the design experts, Cronbach's alpha was calculated. An independent sample t-test was then conducted to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in APV between patterned (CWP) and un-patterned craft products (CWoP).

Results

The color palettes were extracted from three categories: nature, culture and architecture of Uttarakhand. The results were derived from the analysis of photographs and data collected

through interviews. Three visual designers individually extracted colors from the given photos and then common colors from each category were identified. Tables 4, 5 and 6 show the color palette created with the help of these designers along with their hex codes. These color palettes (shown in the appendix) were then used to create samples on products that were used to evaluate the aesthetic pleasure value of the 60 handcrafted products presented to the users on the computer screen.

Table 4: Color Palette From Nature Elements

Color Palette from Natural Elements			
Process	Images	Swatches	Hex Code
This study used photographs of Uttarakhand's flora and fauna to extract color palettes to create patterns for Ringaal products.			#035AA6
			#03588C
			#024059
			#038C73
			#D9BC66
			#142601
			#365902
			#84BF04
			#618C03
			#F1F2CE
			#590219
			#F23064
			#F24B99
			#7FA646
			#BCD952
			#025373
			#025E73
			#D0ECF2
			#72326
			#9FBF89

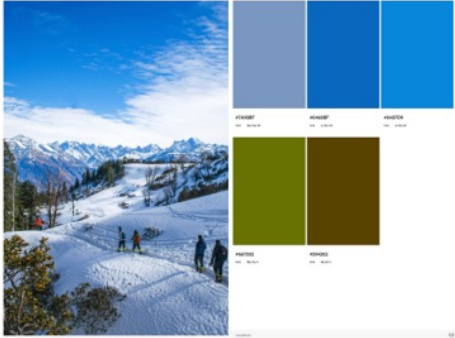











	#7A98BF
	#0468BF
	#0487D9
	#667302
	#594302
	#010D00
	#344021
	#748C4F
	#6F8C30
	#F2EDD5

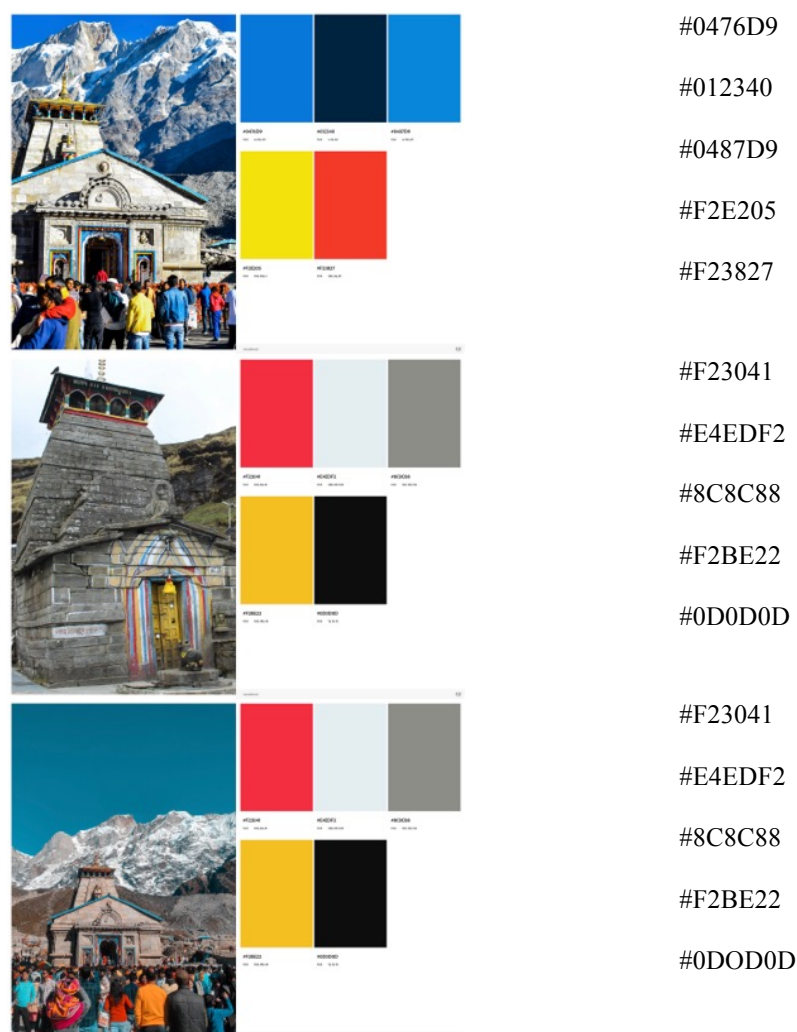
Table 5: Color Palette From Cultural Elements

Color Palette from Cultural Elements			
Process	Images	Swatches	Hex Code
This study used photographs of Uttarakhand's customs, traditions, and aesthetic beliefs to extract color palettes to create patterns for Ringaal products.			#04971A6
			#D5D96C
			#D9BB96
			#BF2315
			#F24141
			#F2E527
			#F2BC1B
			#D96523
			#401201
			#D90404
			#731D2C
			#F299A9
			#728C4A
			#A61F12
			#0D0D0D

	#1C4040
	#F2EADF
	#A6896F
	#F25757
	#8C3232
	#BF0426
	#8C031C
	#7890BF
	#F29F05
	#D96704

Table 6: Color Palette From Architectural Elements

Color Palette from Architectural Identity			
Process	Images	Swatches	Hex Code
This study used photographs of Uttarakhand's architectural elements to extract color palettes to create patterns for Ringaal products.			#418EF2
			#F2D230
			#D9A404
			#BF8173
			#F26B6B
			#65A603
			#618C03
			#5A7302
			#465902
			#D9D0C1



Internal reliability analysis (IRA) of the gathered Aesthetic Pleasure Value (APV) ratings, provided by three design experts for craft products without patterns (CWoP) and craft products with patterns (CWP), was conducted using Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha for the APV ratings given by the three experts was $\alpha = 0.747$ for CWoP and $\alpha = 0.826$ for CWP. Both values were found to be significant ($0.7 \leq \alpha \leq 0.99$), indicating that the data gathered from the three design experts is reliable for further analysis.

There are a total of 60 craft images ($20 \times 3 = 60$) across both categories, CWoP and CWP. Figure 3 illustrates the mean APV ratings for each type of craft in both categories. The mean and standard deviation of APV ratings, as evaluated by the three design experts for the 60 craft images, were analyzed. A two-sample t-test was conducted to compare the APV ratings between CWoP and CWP.

The results showed a significant difference in APV ratings between CWoP (Mean = 22.16, SD = 2.19) and CWP (Mean = 27.33, SD = 2.62), with $t(58) = -15.48$ and a p-value of 2.91×10^{-22} , effectively 0.000000000029. This p-value is far below the standard significance level of 0.05, indicating a highly significant result. These findings suggest that the design experts unanimously agreed that the visual design patterns significantly enhanced the aesthetic pleasure of the crafts. Additionally, the aesthetic appeal was notably higher in CWP compared to CWoP.

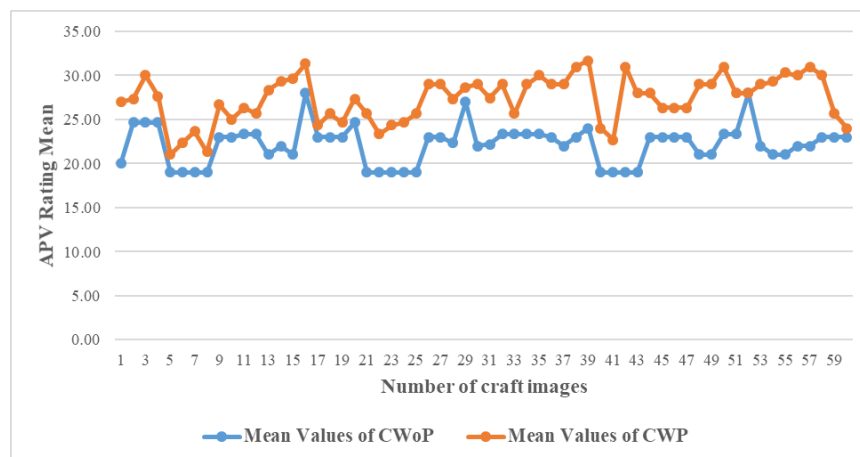


Figure 3: APV Rating Mean Values of 60 Images for CWoP and CWP

Discussion

The results of this study highlight the significant impact of integrating design patterns to develop a visual language - derived from the nature, architecture and cultural elements of Uttarakhand - in Ringaal crafts, particularly in the area of e-commerce. As online consumption continues to increase, the importance of visually appealing products becomes increasingly important. The use of visual design patterns significantly increases the aesthetic value and saleability of Ringaal craft products, increasing their appeal to both online and offline consumers. The research team used image editing software to create visual design patterns and apply them as surface decorations to high-quality 2D product images to effectively convey the essence and spirit of Uttarakhand's rich cultural heritage.

In the online marketplace, where consumer decisions are often driven by visual impressions alone, these colour patterns and designed visual elements play a critical role in distinguishing Ringaal products from other offerings. The pattern-enhanced designs not only grab attention, but also convey a deeper cultural narrative and promote an emotional connection that increases the likelihood of purchase. This digital integration of cultural aesthetics highlights that thoughtfully designed, pattern-rich crafts can fulfil the modern consumer's desire for authenticity and uniqueness, even when experienced through a digital screen.

The APV values (Aesthetic Pleasure Value) determined by design experts confirm that crafts with patterns (CWP) are significantly more attractive than those without patterns (CWOP). The increased APV values for patterned crafts also suggest that consumers may find products with these traditional, nature-inspired patterns more valuable and visually appealing. Successfully integrating these designs into online retail represents a promising strategy for traditional artisans, as visually enriched products can increase online sales by making cultural craft items more visually competitive on e-commerce platforms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study illustrates how culturally inspired color patterns, applied digitally as surface decoration on Ringaal craft product images, significantly enhance the aesthetic and market value of these items in both online and offline spaces. The innovative approach of using image editing software to overlay culturally significant color patterns on product photographs bridges traditional craft with modern consumer preferences, especially within

the e-commerce domain. This visual enhancement supports the saleability of Ringaal crafts by appealing to online consumers' appreciation for aesthetic beauty and cultural depth.

As the demand for unique, culturally resonant products grows in online marketplaces, these visual design techniques offer artisans and marketers a powerful tool to capture consumer interest and foster a connection with the cultural narrative embedded in each craft. Future research could explore consumer purchasing behaviors in response to these pattern-enhanced designs, particularly within e-commerce settings. Expanding this approach to include diverse cultural elements and advanced digital techniques could further elevate the global appeal of Ringaal crafts, reinforcing their value in both digital and traditional retail environments.

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Contact email: sbhattacharya@ddn.upes.ac.in

***Can Technology Save Our Education?
A Critical Reading of Mohamed Hamoudou's Work on Textbook Digitalization***

Loubna El Moncef, Dar Essalam High School, Morocco

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Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

In his work *The Moroccan Textbook in the Digital Age: Challenges and Bets*, Mohamed Hamoudou described textbook digitalization as an inevitable step toward Moroccan school reform. He claimed that textbook digitalization would contribute to Moroccan education reform and also serve as a stronger alternative to paper textbooks. The latter, the writer explained, would hardly hold out against technological expansion. This paper, however, calls into question the relation Hamoudou tended to establish between school digitalization and education reform. The idea here is that no one can assert with certainty that the two factors are related as long as no study confirms this. This paper argues that while Hamoudou's work remains a solid piece of research, it failed to raise and subsequently tackle fundamental questions that would allow to determine the real share of technology in school reform. Some of these questions are: Does school digitalization enhance the quality of education; or can it only successfully contribute to this when it interacts with other factors, including teachers' competence and the relevance of teaching content? What if all these urgent calls to digitalize schools merely emanate from an inner dread of being left behind, especially as technology continues to invade the world at such an unprecedented pace? Drawing upon various studies and experiences in the field of education and technology, this paper endeavors to resolve these questions, or at least initiate a serious discussion around them.

Keywords: Digital Revolution, Education Reform, Textbooks, Textbook Digitalization

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Introduction

The demand for school digitalization is increasing in the digital age. Countries and regions, wealthy or poor, are all racing towards this goal. However, amid this digital fuss, almost no one ever takes a moment and thinks: what's in it for education? In other words, can the incorporation of information and communication technology (ICT) in education improve the latter's quality and enhance learners' performance?

This paper addresses this question while focusing on the Moroccan context. It offers a critical reading of the Moroccan textbook in the digital age: challenges and bets by Mohamed Hamoudou.

Moroccan education has been wrestling with serious issues, including the deterioration of education quality. According to PISA test results, Moroccan students continue to score low in the three main test focus areas, namely reading, science, and maths. The subject of education has, therefore, triggered heated debate, especially at the academic level. One of the researchers to contribute to this talk is Mohamed Hamoudou. He produced a work entitled *The Moroccan Textbook in the Digital Age: Challenges and Bets*, where he tackled Moroccan education reform plans and actions in the middle of technological development. He argued that textbook digitalization is intrinsic to Moroccan education reform.

This paper is organized as follows. The first part introduces Hamoudou's assumption of the positive correlation between textbook digitalization and education reform. It also describes and discusses Hamoudou's study findings, particularly those investigating the prospects of textbook digitalization in Morocco. The second part of this paper, however, calls into question Hamoudou's assumption while drawing upon the educational experience of the best five performing countries according to PISA test results (2018).

Digitalization vs Digitization

A new lexicon has emerged as a result of technological development. The two words digitization and digitalization, for example, have become common tech buzzwords in recent years. They describe two interdependent technology-related processes. According to Corensek and Kohont (2019, p. 95) digitization refers to the "conversion of analog data (e.g., images, video, text) into digital format." By scanning a text, for example, and converting it into a PDF, digitization "mediates between the material and the intangible, making it a unique process" (96). Digitalization, on the other hand, refers, as Reis et al. put it, "to the technology of digitalizing information" so it can be read and processed by a computer or any other electronic device.

In this context, a digitalized textbook refers to "an intangible book that is accessed on screen or via a video projector player and which offers, in addition to the texts and images paper textbooks contain, a wide range of audio-visual documents" (Berenguer, 2015, p. 27). A digitalized textbook is different from a digitized/electronic textbook, which is the digital converted version of printed textbooks.

Digitalized textbooks, Hamoudou argued, would revolutionize education, allowing new and attractive learning opportunities both inside and outside school.

Moroccan Textbook Digitalization (Hamoudou's Study Findings)

Mohamed Hamoudou conducted an insightful study investigating the prospects of textbook digitalization in Morocco. His study participants included trainee inspectors, trainees at the Educational Planning and Orientation Center, students, and Genie coordinators. Genie refers to a Moroccan program launched in 2005 to generalize ICT in education.

Among the questions Hamoudou's study addressed, two are related to textbook digitalization. The first one sought to determine the time span for the completion of the project of textbook digitalization in Morocco. The second question focused on the respondents' textbook format preferences. The results are as follows.

51% of trainee inspectors (CRE), 53% of trainees at the Educational Planning and Orientation Center (COPE), and 40% of students believe that textbook digitalization is only possible in the long term. 53% of Genie coordinators, however, assume that there is a possibility of digitalization in the medium term. As for textbook format preferences, 93% of trainee inspectors, 73% of trainees at the Educational Planning and Orientation Center, and 63% of Genie coordinators all revealed their preference for traditional textbooks. 39% of students, however, encouraged the adoption of digitalized textbooks.

A Brief Interpretation of Hamoudou's Results

The majority of Hamoudou's respondents place great importance on traditional textbooks. Almost all of them agreed that textbook digitalization is unlikely in the short run. They argued that human and material constraints would hinder the completion of such a project. Instead, they emphasized the need to improve the current textbook at the level of both form and content and encouraged the adoption of digitalized textbooks only as a supplement to printed school materials. Students, on the other hand, showed a positive attitude towards the adoption of digitalized textbooks. Hamoudou attributed this to the fact that this generation is born in the digital age and seems, therefore, more comfortable scrolling the screen than leafing through a book.

Hamoudou's Assumption Called Into Question

Hamoudou's study is a solid piece of work. However, like any scientific work, Hamoudou's work has some flaws. One of the major flaws in his research is that he took the cause-and-effect relationship between textbook digitalization and education reform for granted. He referred to no study that confirms the link. In fact, the true impact of educational ICT resources on learners' academic performance remains undetermined, especially as studies continue to cast doubts on the validity of this relationship.

For example, an investigation carried out in 2014 by the education reporter, Caitlin Emma, revealed that Finnish students didn't need laptops and iPads to do well in international tests. The reporter described a typical morning math class where the teacher is drawing circles on the chalkboard while the students are solving equations using calculators and graphing papers. This implies that technology plays a minor role in Finnish education. Finnish learners' academic success is ascribed, as Caitlin explained, to other factors instead. The most prominent of these are: free education, teachers government collaboration, teaching job valorization, quality-centered education, and absent competition spirit.

These conclusions were supported in a recent article by Larry Cuban. The writer reported the findings of the investigation carried out by the journalist Amanda Ripley more than a decade ago. Ripley found that the two countries that outperformed the US in international tests, namely South Korea and Finland, are having ‘low-tech’ classrooms.

The US government, however, deems investing in educational ICT resources vital to improving education. The former president of the United States, Barack Obama, stated once that “preparing American kids to compete with students around the globe will require ... learning experiences driven by new technology” (Cuban, 2023).

But the government’s education policies are not always approved by the parties concerned, including teachers, and are, therefore, not necessarily put into action. While visiting one of the notable schools in Washington, D.C., the journalist encountered teachers who decided to go low-tech. When asked why, one of the teachers replied, “If I were designing my ideal classroom, there’d be another body teaching. Or there’d be 36 hours in the day instead of 24” (Cuban, 2023). The subject made no reference to technology. Another teacher added that:

Sometimes low-tech simply facilitates goals more effectively. Take a lesson on thesis statements for example. Each student has a thesis statement prepared (in theory) and is ready to share it with their group. I would love to use my blog for students to share and critique each other’s work, but it’s not the most logistically effective strategy. Marisol left her computer at home, Jordan can’t remember his password, and Justin can login but can’t seem to figure out how to post a comment. Sure, schools should be teaching these skills, but they’re not tested on the California Subject Tests. Technology integration has left technology instruction up to content teachers, while I learned the basics of computing in my sixth grade computer class. What’s my main goal? Teaching thesis. In this scenario, technology actually impedes my main goal instead of facilitating it. It’s much easier and more effective to get out the black markers and the butcher paper and have students make group posters and present them (Cuban, 2023).

Supporting the American teachers remarks, Ripley and some observers of high-rate teachers concluded that

both low-tech and high-tech machines can surely help students learn but it is the teacher’s lesson objectives, knowledge of the subject, rapport with students, and a willingness to push and support them that count greatly in what students learn rather than anything intrinsic within the devices used.

A recent study carried out by Yaging Wang and Yashuang Wang yielded valuable results regarding this topic. The study attempted to explore the relationship between educational ICT resources, students’ engagement, and students’ academic performances. It targeted the five highest-achieving countries according to PISA test results, namely Finland, Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, and the United States. The study found that there is a negative association between educational ICT resources and students’ academic performance. The statistics revealed that the students with the lowest accessibility to school and home ICT resources—the Singaporean students—got the best scores in reading, mathematical and scientific literacies. They are followed by Hong Kong, South Korea, and Finland. The American students performed less well than all the four countries and regions, bearing in mind that the United States reported the highest rates of school and home connectivity. And this finding is obviously

in line with what has been stated earlier about the state's prioritization of educational ICT resources investing.

However, the study found that there is a positive correlation between educational ICT resources and ICT engagement. The latter is defined as “a crucial individual concept for developing and adapting ICT skills in a self-regulated way, which supports the acquisition of new knowledge and skills throughout the lifespan in both formal and informal ways using ICT” (Zylka et al., 2015, as cited in Wang & Wang, 2023). The concept of ICT engagement underscores the positive impact of educational ICT resources on students' academic motivation and engagement. Students' engagement is a key variable here because it mediates, as the study concluded, the relationship between educational ICT resources and academic performance. And this mediating impact varies by country and region. For example, one of the study findings revealed that the United States is the only place where the relationship between educational ICT resources and students' academic performance is positive. The writers ascribed this to the positive and mediating effect students' engagement exerts. This implies that ICT educational resources and students' engagement are two interdependent variables. The first contributes to learning when the second can serve its mediating function right. Similarly, educational ICT resources boost students' engagement when these are wisely used and well selected.

Overall, the Wangs' study reflects one of the rare scientific attempts to resolve the controversy around the nature of the relationship between educational ICT resources and students' academic performance. It remains, therefore, a valuable contribution to the field of education and technology, even though the writers questioned the validity of their own findings in other contexts.

Having said this, doubts over the positive impact of educational ICT resources on learners' academic performance continue to multiply as the universal pressure to digitalize schools increases. Paradoxically, even Mohamed Hamoudou, who's been vehemently advocating for school digitalization, did not seek to hide the dark side of textbook digitalization. The following is a list the writer formulated comparing the advantages and disadvantages of textbook digitalization.

Textbook Digitalization Advantages

- Enhances learners' motivation
- Promotes independent learning
- Ensures equal opportunities for all learners
- Allows textbook content fast updating

Textbook Digitalization Disadvantages

- Causes internet addiction
- Hinders learning because of technical issues and low connectivity
- Creates demographic discrepancies
- Causes mental skills decay
- Increases the risks of hacking
- Can lead to serious health complications

One important conclusion to deduce from Hamoudou's list is that textbook digitalization has got as many benefits as drawbacks. Worse yet, the disadvantages of digitalization are very

likely to outnumber its benefits, especially as technology continues to develop so rapidly, slipping out of human control.

Conclusion

It is important to remember that technology in general and educational ICT resources in particular are a means and not an end. Investing in them is, therefore, a good deal only in so far as it contributes to improving education. In addition to this, teachers set their own lesson objectives and are the most qualified ones to measure the efficiency of their teaching tools. Thus, the means they incorporate in class should remain their choice.

The Wangs were right in questioning the relevance of their findings to other contexts. Countries and regions are different, especially at the economic level. Wealthy countries, for example, are privileged enough to provide educational connectivity. Consequently, evaluating schools' academic performance by their ICT use frequency and their digital competence reinforces learning inequalities, nationally and universally, and constrains educators' teaching creativity.

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Contact email: elmoncefloubna@gmail.com

***Boosting STEM Engagement Through Sports-Themed Interventions:
Impact on Student Competencies and Skills***

Jolly Bhadra, Qatar University, Qatar
Moustafa Abdelaziz, Qatar University, Qatar
Ruba Ali, Qatar University, Qatar
Khouloud Jlassi, Qatar University, Qatar
Noora Al-Thani, Qatar University, Qatar

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Abstract

Students often face difficulties with engagement and performance in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields, which can have significant consequences, such as limited career opportunities and impeded technological innovation. Capitalizing on the increased interest in sports following events like the FIFA World Cup, this research aimed to assess how this enthusiasm could be used to enhance student engagement and performance in STEM. The study examined the effectiveness of a sports-themed intervention on the STEM competencies, cognitive abilities, and interpersonal skills of 107 preparatory school students in grades 8-9. Quantitative data were gathered through pre- and post-intervention questionnaires. Normality tests (Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov) indicated a non-normal data distribution, leading to the use of non-parametric analysis with the Mann-Whitney U test and Spearman's Rho correlation. The results showed significant improvements in students' STEM competencies, cognitive abilities, and interpersonal skills ($p < 0.05$), suggesting a positive overall impact on their STEM learning. Spearman's Rho correlation analysis also indicated a positive correlation between the intervention constructs. The findings suggest that sports-themed educational interventions can effectively boost students' interest and proficiency in STEM subjects, highlighting the need for further research to integrate innovative themed interventions in educational settings to enhance STEM education.

Keywords: STEM Education, Sports-Themed, Quantitative Analysis, Preparatory School Students, Qatar

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Introduction

The global shortage of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) field professionals is a critical issue for the economic and social development of the nations (Ali et al., 2020). A recent report by UNESCO highlights that the demand for STEM professionals is increasing day by day especially in cutting edge fields like renewable energy, biotechnology, Artificial intelligence (Ebzeeva & Smirnova, 2023). Despite these growing opportunities, there is a worldwide concern that the students are less interested in STEM disciplines. This issue threatens nations' ability to create and retain skilled STEM workforces (Alashwal, 2020; Ali et al., 2021). As the world faces increasingly complex challenges in STEM work field, creative and innovative solutions are more in demand. Educational systems worldwide have recognized the importance of addressing the issue and identified that strong STEM education is the best solution (AlMuraie et al., 2021). As the demand for STEM professionals grows, traditional methods of teaching STEM often fail to engage students or to demonstrate the practical application of STEM knowledge. This has resulted in a consistent disconnect between classroom learning and real-world problem-solving (Council et al., 2015).

It is crucial for Qatar to cultivate STEM professionals because the nation is heavily relying on expatriates to fill important STEM roles. In order to transform into a knowledge-based economy and achieve the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV2030) it is important to take STEM intervention initiatives (Ayuso et al., 2022). Although Qatari students have high aspirations, they are falling behind internationally in math and Science aptitude tests like Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Moreover, a significant number of students have less interest in STEM disciplines and choose to pursue non-STEM degrees (Council, 2012; Howells, 2018). Several factors contribute to this lack of interest in STEM disciplines. First, many educators and educational systems are struggling to engage students and demonstrate the real-world relevance of STEM field (Kiliánová et al., 2024). Moreover, most of the traditional teaching methods often focus on theoretical knowledge gain rather than providing practical experiences like hands-on learnings (López-Belmonte et al., 2022). As a result, students are struggling to understand the practical value of STEM education and how it connects to potential careers (Council et al., 2015). Additionally, as many other regions, Qatar faces a gender disparity in STEM fields especially in engineering. Even though the academic performance of Qatari women is good, they are less likely to pursue STEM careers because of cultural and traditional gender roles (Alashwal, 2020). These challenges underscore the importance of the urgent need for innovative and engaging educational interventions.

Recent studies show that integrating sports into STEM disciplines can boost students' STEM Interest (Drazan, 2020; Drazan et al., 2017). Football (soccer), with its global popularity, is particularly effective for this approach (Dyakova et al., 2017). It was historic milestone for Qatar to host the FIFA World Cup 2022 as the first Arab nation to host this international sporting event (Al-Emadi et al., 2022). Qatar gained global attention during the FIFA World Cup and achieved national pride and unity due to its association with football (Ishac, 2018). By leveraging the excitement of major events like the FIFA World Cup, educators can connect students' love for sports with STEM content, making lessons more engaging and relatable (Hill et al., 2014). According to Almarri (2020), large-scale events such as the World Cup represent a great opportunity for educational programs that incorporate real-world STEM applications to them (Almarri, 2020). Students' attention and enthusiasm can be captured through the FIFA activities in STEM workshops.

Additionally, integrating modern technologies like 3D printing and Arduino allow students to design and prototype can solve problems by promoting creativity and technical skills (Arvanitidi et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2018; Pabuçcu Akiş & Demirer, 2023). Moreover, to be successful in STEM fields requires strong 21st century skills such as critical thinking, teamwork, and communication (Quieng et al., 2015). These skills are essential for the personal growth of the students and their career readiness (Berkowitz & Stern, 2018). A sports-themed, project-based approach to STEM learning by connecting to the real-world can help the students to develop these skills.

The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of sports-themed STEM workshops to foster STEM Interest and Competency. The intervention leverages the widespread appeal of sports, particularly the FIFA World Cup 2022, as a platform to engage students. By integrating sports with cutting-edge technologies such as Arduino and 3D printing, the workshops emphasize experiential learning to enhance STEM Interests, Competencies, Cognitive Abilities, and Interpersonal Skills (Drazan et al., 2017; Kiliánová et al., 2024).

The significance of this work lies in its potential to transform STEM education. While addressing the specific challenges of Qatar, it offers an innovative and culturally relevant approach that aligns with global best practices. This intervention aims to improve STEM literacy by fostering STEM Interest and developing STEM Competencies, Cognitive Abilities, and Interpersonal Skills. This also seeks to prepare for their future career by giving early STEM learning experiences.

Research Question and Objectives

The following primary research question guiding this study:

- What is the impact of sports-themed STEM workshops on students' STEM Interests, Competencies, Cognitive Abilities, and Interpersonal Skills?

The objectives of the studies are:

- Assess changes in students' STEM competencies and interest before and after the Sports-themed STEM interventions.
- Explore the effectiveness of sports-themed activities to improve problem-solving, teamwork, curiosity and critical thinking skills.
- Provide culturally relevant recommendations for implementing STEM interventions in Qatar and beyond.

Methodology

To evaluate the effectiveness of the sports-themed STEM workshops, a quantitative research design was employed. The sample of study was selected through non-random sampling. This sample consisted of 107 preparatory school students from grade 8 and 9. These students participated in a five-day interactive STEM workshop that integrated sports-related activities. The activities included building sports gadgets with Arduino, designing sports equipment with 3D-printing, and solving real-life sports related engineering challenges. These experiences helped the students to foster STEM Interest and skills using sports and technology themes from the FIFA World Cup 2022 as educational tools.

This structured workshop was designed to student engagement in STEM fields, included hands-on, project-based activities. Technologies like Arduino were integrated to enhance

student engagement and understanding of the STEM concepts. Arduino, a microcontroller board, offers a user-friendly platform for hands-on project building and learning programming fundamentals alongside testing different sets of sensors (Sarı et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2023). This approach allows students to overcome the limitations of traditional classrooms, by offering practical experiences like sensor testing and 3D printing. These activities help students to deeper understanding of the subjects while fostering creativity and technical skills (Lin et al., 2018; Zadorozhnyi, 2020). As a result of this, students are better prepared to pursue careers in STEM and contribute to scientific and technological progress.

Throughout the program, the students got a chance for prototyping and testing using the engineering process for two weeks. These learning experiences can foster interest and engagement in STEM fields (Rogers, 2009). The results were documented in a poster showcasing the design process, material selection, and testing results. The following week, the projects were evaluated, and the best ones were selected to participate in the final competition with other schools. The total duration of the program was one month. A schematic diagram of the Science in Sports program has been shown in Figure 1.

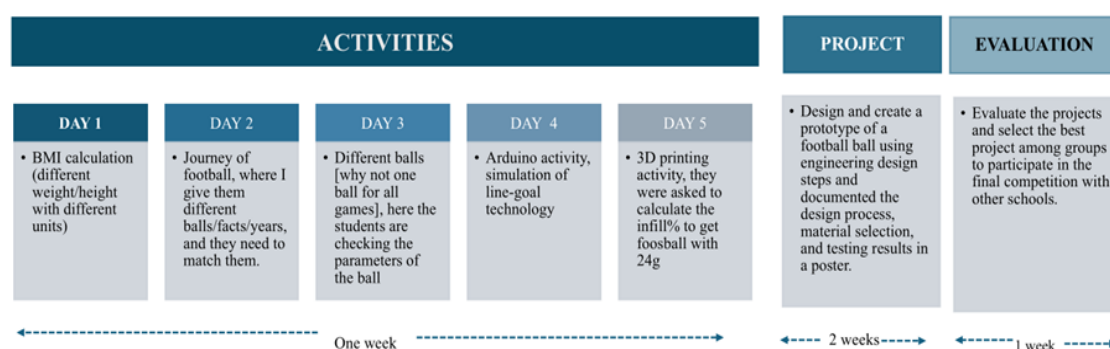


Figure1: The Schematic Diagram of the Science in Sports Program

Instruments and Measures

To assess the effectiveness of our intervention, a set of questionnaires were developed based on existing literature (Howells, 2018; Unfried et al., 2015). These questionnaires were used to measure both pre and post data based on factors such as STEM Interest (6 items), Technology Readiness (4 items), Hands-on Skills (4 items), Subject Knowledge (4 items), Curiosity (4 items), and Collaboration (4 items). A three-point Likert Scale (Yes, No, I don't know) was used to ensure clarity for students. The questionnaires were pilot tested with 107 students, and revisions were made to improve clarity. The factor analysis confirmed the reliability of the instruments, with a KMO measure of 0.792 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity being significant ($p < 0.001$). This value indicates that the data is suitable for further analysis and the factors were extracted meaningfully. The validated tool effectively captured the targeted constructs. Table 1 summarizes the key constructs assessed by the Questionnaire, the number of items associated with each construct and the response options used for each measure.

Table 1: Questionnaire Constructs, Factors, Items, and Response Options

Construct	Factors	Number of Items	Response Format
STEM Interest	STEM Interest	6	Yes/No/I do not know
STEM Competencies	Technology Readiness	4	Yes/No/I do not know
	Hands-on Skills	4	Yes/No/I do not know
	Subject Knowledge	4	Yes/No/I do not know
Cognitive Abilities	Curiosity	4	Yes/No/I do not know
Interpersonal Skills	Collaboration	3	Yes/No/I do not know

Data Analysis

To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha (α) was conducted for each factor. All the α values above 0.7 for both pre and post data indicating that internal consistency was high. This is because of strong agreement among the items within each factor (Field, 2024). Table 2 shows the Reliability Statistics of both pre and post questionnaires.

Table 2: Reliability Statistic (Pre- and Post-questionnaire)

Factors	No. of Items	Pre questionnaire Cronbach's alpha (α) value	Post questionnaire Cronbach's alpha (α) value
STEM Interest	6	0.713	0.703
Technology Readiness	4	0.828	0.805
Hands-on Skills	4	0.787	0.798
Subject Knowledge	4	0.876	0.703
Curiosity	4	0.715	0.847
Collaboration	3	0.763	0.866

Normality tests (Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov) were conducted to assess data distribution (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965). The non-parametric tests were conducted for further analysis because of non-distribution of data, which is confirmed by Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests (Field, 2024). The pre and post data were compared by conducting the Mann-Whitney U test (Mann & Whitney, 1947). Spearman's Rho correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between different variables (Spearman, 1987). This methodology evaluated the sports-themed interventions thoroughly. The findings indicated statistically significant positive correlations ($p < 0.01$) between several educational factors. Notably, Subject Knowledge was positively correlated with both Technology Readiness ($r = 0.64$) and STEM interest ($r = 0.51$). Additionally, significant correlations were found between STEM Interest and Skills ($r = 0.60$) and Curiosity ($r = 0.63$). According to Cohen's guidelines for interpreting effect sizes, these correlations can be considered large ($r > 0.5$), suggesting strong and significant relationship between these factors.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that sports-themed STEM interventions significantly enhance students' STEM Interest, Technology Readiness, Hands-on Skills, Subject Knowledge, Curiosity and Collaboration. By integrating experiential learning with sports and technology,

this approach offers a promising solution to increasing STEM engagement. The study quantitatively analyzed the main constructs STEM Interest, Competencies, Cognitive abilities and Interpersonal skills using the Mann-Whitney U test and Spearman's Rho correlation analysis. The correlation between the STEM factors suggests that enhancing one aspect of STEM education, such as Subject Knowledge or Technology Readiness could positively influence students' STEM Interest and related Competencies. These findings are particularly important in culturally relevant contexts like Qatar. The study highlighted the need to strengthen these connections to improve STEM programs and support students' development. The following sections discuss the Mann-Whitney U test findings in detail.

STEM Interest

STEM Interest increased by 19%, as the mean ranks rose from 98.04 to 116.96 with U value equal to 6737.00, after the workshop with a significant p -value ($p < 0.022$). These results suggest that incorporating sports into STEM education can make the subjects more interesting and engaging. By linking learning activities to students' personal interests, the intervention helped to maintain long-term enthusiasm for STEM field. This interpretation aligns with Middleton et al. 2019, who found that engaging students through everyday experiences and challenging tasks helps transition situational interest to long-term career aspirations (Middleton et al., 2019).

Technology Readiness

Technology readiness showed the most significant improvement, increasing by 73%, which means a substantial rise from a pre-workshop mean rank of 78.76 to 136.24 with U value=8799.50 with a significant p -value ($p < 0.001$). Hands-on activities with tools like Arduino and sensors gave the chance to the students to experience technology effectively, enhancing their technological confidence and competence. These findings supported the existing research on the importance of practical, technology-driven learning experiences (Organtini, 2018; Sarı et al., 2022).

Hands-on Skills

Hands-on skills improved from 96.89 pre-workshop to 118.11 post-workshop and a U value = 6859.50, with a significant p value ($p = 0.011$). Project based tasks such as designing foosball balls using 3D printing and recyclable materials helped students to apply theoretical knowledge, reinforcing their problem-solving and technical skills. These results aligned with the previous study conducted by Lin (2018), who explored the use of 3D printing in STEM project-based learning. This previous study showed that hands-on activities, like designing and creating models helped the students to improve their technical and problem-solving abilities (Lin et al., 2018). This supports the current study results, where the tasks like designing foosball balls with 3D printing and recyclable materials also improved students' hands-on skills and technical abilities.

Subject Knowledge

Subject Knowledge increased the mean rank from 83.86 to 131.14 with 56% improvements and a U value=8254.50, with a significant p value ($p < 0.001$). These results indicated that practical application of theoretical concepts deepened students' understanding of STEM concepts (Alashwal, 2020).

Table 3 illustrates the Mann-Whitney U Test Results for STEM Interest and Competencies including the factors, STEM Interest, Technology Readiness, Hands-on Skills and Subject Knowledge. Figure2: shows the visual representation of Mann-Whitney U Test Results for STEM Interest and Competencies.

Table 3: Mann-Whitney U Test Results for STEM Interest and Competencies

Construct	Factors	Pre-Mean Rank	Post-Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	p-value
STEM Interest	STEM Interest	98.04	116.96	6737.00	0.022
STEM Competencies	Technology Readiness	78.76	136.24	8799.50	< 0.001
	Hands-on Skills	96.89	118.11	6859.50	0.011
	Subject Knowledge	83.86	131.14	8254.50	<0.001

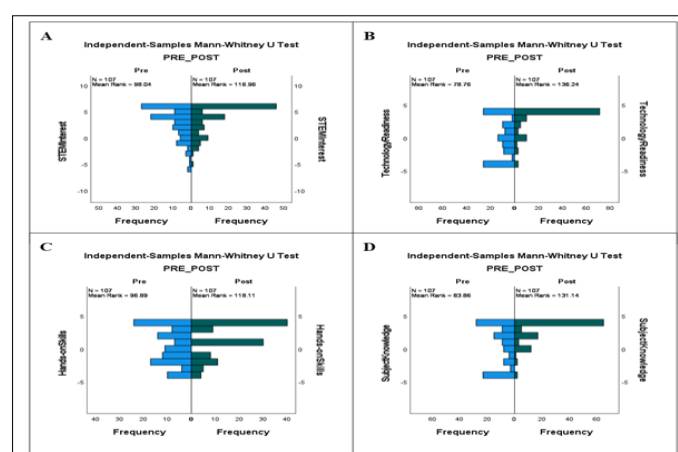


Figure 2: Mann-Whitney U Test Results for STEM Interest and Competencies

Cognitive Abilities

The Mann-Whitney U test revealed a significant improvement in curiosity following the intervention ($U=6844.00$, $p=0.008$). Pre-workshop, participants had a mean rank of 97.04 on curiosity, which increased to a mean rank of 117.96 post-workshop, with an increase of over 20%. These findings aligned with the study conducted by Abdurrahman and colleagues (2019), emphasizing that inquiry-based learning stimulates curiosity (Abdurrahman et al., 2019).

Interpersonal Skills

The intervention also led to positive results for interpersonal skills, particularly in collaboration, with a U value=6440.50, and a significant p -value ($p=0.060$). The participants' collaboration skills increased from a mean rank of 100.81 to 114.19 after the workshop. Even though the increase was not statistically significant, the increase in post mean rank after the intervention suggested the possible trend toward improved collaboration skills following the intervention. Group projects and team-based challenges might have fostered teamwork and communication, which are crucial for academic and professional success. These results

aligned with the study Zhang and Ma (2023) by highlighting the benefits of collaborative, experiential learning on interpersonal skills (Zhang & Ma, 2023). Table 4 shows the Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Cognitive Abilities & Interpersonal Skills. Figure 1 is the visual representation of Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Cognitive Abilities & Interpersonal Skills.

Table 4: Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Cognitive Abilities & Interpersonal Skills

Construct	Factors	Pre- Mean Rank	Post- Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	p-value
Cognitive Abilities	Curiosity	97.04	117.96	6844.00	0.008
Interpersonal Skills	Collaboration	100.81	114.19	6440.50	0.060

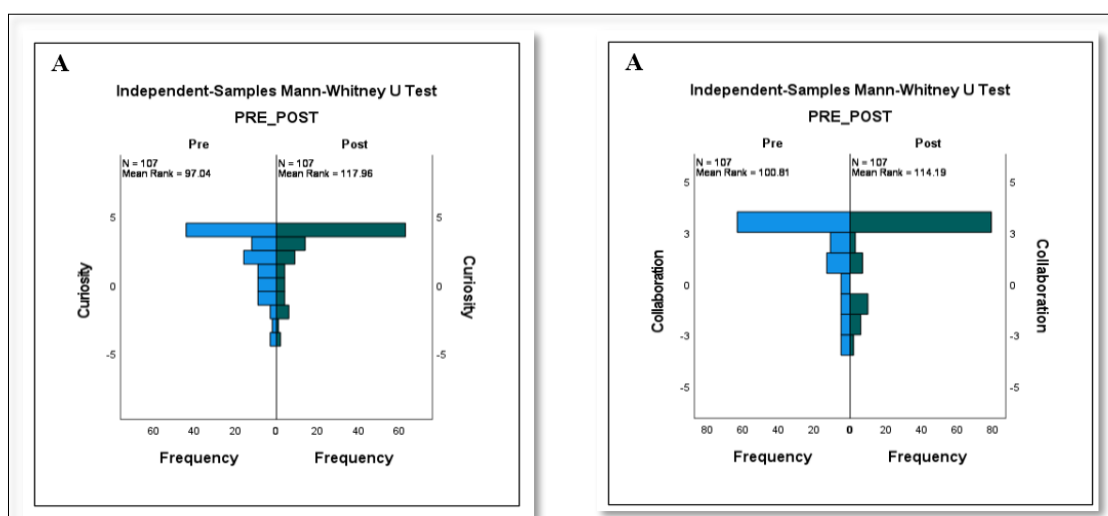


Figure 2: Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Cognitive Abilities & Interpersonal Skills

Implications of Findings

The findings have several important implications for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers who seek to improve STEM education. Integrating students' personal interests, such as sports, into STEM learning makes education more engaging and relevant. This approach helps to address the decline in STEM Interest during middle and high school. This approach demonstrates that students can engage in STEM activities and maintain their enthusiasm if they can connect the STEM subjects and problems with their personal interests.

Firstly, practical, hands-on learning helps the students to understand the theory in a better way and develops important skills such as problem-solving, creativity and technological skills. Educational institutes should focus on project-based learning in STEM to give real-world experiences. Also providing technological tools like sensors, microcontrollers and 3D printers can improve students' Technology readiness. By providing teachers' training to the educators to use this technology in students learning can help the students to prepare for the technological challenges by becoming experts in these fields.

Secondly, promoting curiosity through inquiry-based learning helps the students to build a mindset crucial for scientific discovery. Teachers should create environments that promote exploration and critical thinking. Including group projects in STEM education helps students

to better prepare for collaborative working environments, which are essential for today's workforce.

Limitations and Recommendations

Despite the promising outcomes, the limitation of the study also needs to be addressed. Firstly, the absence of a control group makes it difficult to determine whether the observed improvements can be exclusively attributed to the intervention. Future studies should include a control group to strengthen the validity of the findings. Additionally, even though the sample size ($n=107$) was sufficient for initial analysis, it may not be large enough to generalize the result. A larger sample size in future research would increase the reliability of the results.

The study only included male students, which may lead to the gender bias. Future studies should include female students as well to provide the complete understanding of the effectiveness of the intervention. These programs could help to create supportive networks, address cultural barriers, and feature female role models in STEM to inspire young women.

The participants of this study were from Qatar government schools. As it was conducted in a particular cultural and educational setting, the findings may not be easily generalized. To assess the broader applicability of the interventions in other environments, needs to be replicated in other environments including public schools and other countries. Furthermore, this research primarily focused on short-term outcomes. Further studies need to be tracked to understand the long-term effects. Monitoring students' progress over the period could help to understand the lasting impact of the intervention on STEM interest and career paths.

These findings indicate that STEM programs should include activities that align with students' personal interests. Encouraging inquiry-based learning will help to foster curiosity and critical thinking. Collaborative projects should be prioritized to develop teamwork and communication skills. To make the STEM education more inclusive, all students, regardless of gender or cultural backgrounds, need to get equal opportunities.

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Contact email: jollybhadra@qu.edu.qa

***Pursuing Desire: A Comparative Study of “La Peau de Chagrin” and “The Lotus Eater”
and Their Relevance to Modern Life***

Hoang-Nam Tran, Tokushima University, Japan

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Abstract

This study presents a comparison of Honoré de Balzac’s *La Peau de Chagrin* and W. Somerset Maugham’s *The Lotus Eater*, focusing on the theme of pursuing desire and its consequences. By examining the protagonists’ motivations, life purposes, and the outcomes of their actions, the analysis reveals how each story critiques the pursuit of desires in distinct yet complementary ways. Balzac’s narrative employs a supernatural element to illustrate the existential cost of unbridled ambition, while Maugham’s tale portrays the gradual decline resulting from a life dedicated solely to pleasure. The study highlights the enduring relevance of these themes to modern life, particularly in a world increasingly dominated by instant gratification and escapism. These stories offer valuable insights into the potential pitfalls of a desire-driven existence, urging a reflection on the balance between ambition, pleasure, and responsibility in contemporary society.

Keywords: Desire and Fulfillment, Existential Cost, Instant Gratification, Hedonism

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Introduction

The pursuit of desires and the consequences of their fulfillment are central themes in many literary works, reflecting timeless human concerns. Honoré de Balzac's *La Peau de Chagrin* and W. Somerset Maugham's *The Lotus Eater* are two such stories that explore these themes through the lives of their protagonists. Though written in different periods and contexts, both stories offer a deep exploration of human desire, ambition, and the pursuit of pleasure, each with its unique approach and moral implications. This manuscript undertakes a comparative analysis of these two narratives, focusing on how they critique the pursuit of desires and what they reveal about modern literature and contemporary lifestyles.

Published in 1831, *La Peau de Chagrin* (The Magic Skin) is a seminal work by Balzac, one of the most influential figures in French literature. The novel is part of his monumental series *La Comédie Humaine*, an ambitious collection of interlinked stories aimed at providing a panoramic depiction of French society during the 19th century. Drawing inspiration from the Faustian legend and the burgeoning Romantic and Realist movements of his time, Balzac masterfully blends philosophical inquiry with social critique in this profound tale. The novel was well-received at the time of its release, with critics lauding its originality and intellectual scope. Today, *La Peau de Chagrin* continues to be studied for its innovative narrative structure (Cohen-Vrignaud, 2015; Dickson, 2017) and its exploration of themes that remain timeless, including the corrupting allure of power (Knapp, 1998), the fleeting nature of youth (Cohen-Vrignaud, 2015; Sprenger, 2008), and the global context (Bhattacharya, 2017).

Published in 1935, Maugham's *The Lotus Eater* is a short story that masterfully explores themes of hedonism, choice, and the human condition. Set on the idyllic island of Capri, the story encapsulates Maugham's talent for portraying psychological depth and his keen observation of human nature. The title references the Lotus-Eaters from Homer's *Odyssey*, individuals who live in blissful detachment after consuming the narcotic lotus plant (Dubos, 1963). Maugham's writing reflects the ethos of the interwar period, a time when the rigid societal structures of Victorian England were giving way to a more existential questioning of purpose (de Onzoño, 2016). His exploration of Wilson's rejection of societal expectations aligns with contemporaneous works by authors such as Aldous Huxley, who also grappled with the pursuit of personal happiness in the face of societal judgment (Chakraborty & Islam, 2021). Critics have often highlighted *The Lotus Eater* as a quintessential example of Maugham's ability to blend irony and pathos, as Wilson embodies the tension between the yearning for liberation and the consequences of rejecting social norms (Calder, 1990).

The literary works *La Peau de Chagrin* and *The Lotus Eater* delve into the existential questions of human desire, fulfillment, and the price one pays for indulgence. While separated by time, geography, and cultural context, both texts provide timeless reflections on the human condition, particularly in relation to the pursuit of pleasure and the concept of a life well-lived. As we transition into an era where artificial intelligence increasingly influences human choices and behavior, these philosophical reflections become even more pertinent. This paper examines the central themes of these works, drawing parallels and contrasts, and explores their implications for contemporary life in the AI age.

Methodology

This study employs a comparative literary analysis methodology. The analysis focuses on thematic, philosophical, and narrative dimensions to explore how each text addresses the

pursuit of desires and their consequences. Each work was analyzed in detail, focusing on the portrayal of the protagonists, their desires, life choices, and the outcomes of their actions. Themes such as ambition, hedonism, existentialism, and the moral consequences of unrestrained desires were identified and examined in the context of each narrative. Special attention was given to the use of narrative devices, such as the supernatural element in *La Peau de Chagrin* and the realistic introspection in *The Lotus Eater*.

A framework was used to compare key aspects of the works, including their cultural and historical contexts, philosophical underpinnings, narrative structure, and character development. This framework was used to highlight similarities and differences in how the two authors critique the pursuit of desires. The study situates the texts within their respective historical and cultural contexts. This contextual analysis helps illuminate the societal pressures and philosophical movements that influenced the authors' depictions of ambition and escapism. The findings were synthesized to identify overarching themes and their implications.

Overview of Key Features

Table 1 provides a comparative analysis of *La Peau de Chagrin* and *The Lotus Eater*, highlighting differences and similarities across various aspects. While *La Peau de Chagrin* features Balzac’s detailed Realist prose, *The Lotus Eater* is a concise story with Maugham’s straightforward and introspective style. Written in French and English, respectively, the two works reflect different cultural and historical contexts: Balzac’s novel emerges from the Restoration era, addressing the ambitions and societal critiques of post-Napoleonic France, whereas Maugham’s story captures interwar concerns about pleasure and escapism. Both works pick on existential themes and the consequences of personal choices, with *La Peau de Chagrin* employing a supernatural element to explore the impact of unchecked desires, while *The Lotus Eater* adopts a realistic approach to portray the moral and psychological cost of hedonism. Each work influenced its genre, with Balzac shaping the development of Realism and philosophical fiction, and Maugham advancing modern short story techniques and psychological fiction. Despite their differences in length, style, and context, both offer profound reflections on human ambition, the pursuit of happiness, and the consequences of life choices.

Table 1: Comparative Overview of Key Features		
Aspect	<i>La Peau de Chagrin</i>	<i>The Lotus Eater</i>
Length	~ 350 pages (novel)	~ 60 pages (short story)
Writing Style	Detailed, descriptive, and elaborate prose typical of Balzac’s Realist style. Emphasizes psychological depth and social critique.	Concise, straightforward, and introspective prose characteristic of Maugham’s style. Focuses on character development and moral implications.
Language	French	English
Publication	1831	1935
Career Timing	Early in Balzac's career; part of his larger series <i>La Comédie Humaine</i> . Represents his developing Realist approach.	Mid-career for Maugham; reflects his mature style and thematic preoccupations with pleasure and existential themes.

Narrative Focus	Explores the psychological and existential impact of unchecked desires through a supernatural element.	Examines the consequences of a life devoted to pleasure and escapism through a realistic portrayal of character's life.
Cultural Context	Written during the Restoration era in France, reflecting the social and political changes of the time.	Written during the interwar period, reflecting contemporary concerns about pleasure, escapism, and societal expectations.
Genre	Realism / Philosophical Fiction	Short Story/ Psychological Fiction
Subgenre	Part of <i>La Comédie Humaine</i> (a series of interconnected novels and stories exploring various aspects of French society). Combines elements of philosophical and social commentary with supernatural themes.	Focuses on individual psychological and moral dilemmas, reflecting themes of hedonism and existential reflection. Often considered a key example of Maugham's exploration of modern moral questions.
Themes	Ambition, existentialism, the cost of desires, and the intersection of personal choices with societal expectations. The supernatural element (the chagrin) symbolizes the existential trade-offs involved in the pursuit of desires.	Hedonism, escapism, the consequences of living solely for pleasure, and existential reflections on the value of a life lived in indulgence. The protagonist's life of ease ultimately leads to a dramatic realization of the cost of his choices.
Characterization	Features a complex protagonist whose psychological development and interactions with other characters reveal societal critiques and personal struggles. The supernatural chagrin serves as a key plot device influencing his fate.	Centers on a single protagonist whose internal conflicts and personal choices drive the narrative. The story delves into his psychological state and moral dilemmas, with a focus on individual introspection and consequence.
Literary Influence	Influenced the development of Realist literature and philosophical fiction. Balzac's use of detailed social observation and moral commentary helped shape the genre and offer insights into the human condition.	Contributed to the genre of psychological fiction and modern short stories. Maugham's exploration of moral and existential questions through concise narrative forms influenced subsequent writers and readers' understanding of hedonism and its effects.

Comparison of Philosophies

La Peau de Chagrin is a novel that masterfully blends realism with fantasy, focusing on the life of its protagonist, Raphaël de Valentin. The central element of the story is a magical piece

of chagrin that shrinks with every wish Raphaël makes, symbolizing the direct correlation between the fulfillment of desires and the diminution of life itself. Balzac's work is a commentary on the human pursuit of power, wealth, and pleasure, and the existential cost that such pursuits entail. The novel delves into the concept of finite life energy and the consequences of unrestrained desires. The more Raphaël indulges his desires, the more the chagrin shrinks, leading to his eventual demise. This serves as a metaphor for the consumption of one's vitality through the relentless pursuit of material and sensual gratification. Balzac thus critiques the hedonistic and materialistic tendencies of his time, suggesting that unchecked desires can lead to self-destruction.

In contrast, *The Lotus Eater* presents a different perspective on the pursuit of pleasure. The story follows the life of Thomas Wilson, who decides to retire early and spend the rest of his life in idyllic Capri, living off his savings without the burden of work or responsibilities. Wilson's philosophy is one of deliberate, prolonged indulgence, avoiding the typical societal pressures to accumulate wealth or achieve success. However, his plan goes awry when his money runs out, leading to a tragic end. Maugham's story is a meditation on the dangers of living for pleasure alone, without consideration for the future or the complexities of human existence. Wilson's choice to live a life free from the anxieties of modern life ultimately leads to his downfall, highlighting the risks of a life centered solely around self-indulgence and the pursuit of an easy existence.

Both *La Peau de Chagrin* and *The Lotus Eater* present characters who pursue desires that ultimately lead to their ruin, but the philosophies underlying these pursuits differ significantly. Balzac's work emphasizes the intrinsic link between desire and life's finite resources, suggesting that every fulfilled wish comes at a cost. Maugham, on the other hand, explores the consequences of a life spent in pursuit of continuous pleasure, warning against the dangers of escapism and the neglect of life's inherent challenges. While Raphaël's desires are intense and immediate, leading to rapid depletion of his life force, Wilson's desires are moderate yet sustained, leading to a slow but inevitable decline. Both authors seem to agree on the peril of indulgence, but Balzac focuses on the existential cost of desires, while Maugham highlights the futility of a life dedicated solely to pleasure.

Table 2 compares the plots of *La Peau de Chagrin* and *The Lotus Eater*, illustrating distinct yet thematically aligned narratives. Set in Paris during the 1830s Bourbon Restoration, *La Peau de Chagrin* unfolds against a backdrop of economic instability and rising bourgeois power. In contrast, *The Lotus Eater* takes place on the idyllic island of Capri during the economically prosperous but politically charged interwar period under Mussolini's rule. Both stories center on male protagonists, Raphaël de Valentin and Thomas Wilson, whose life choices lead to tragic downfalls. Raphaël's acquisition of a magical talisman that shrinks with each wish symbolizes the existential cost of unrestrained desires, resulting in his rapid demise. Wilson's pursuit of a hedonistic retirement is devoid of supernatural elements but equally tragic, as his financial unpreparedness leads to his gradual decline. While Balzac's tale incorporates dark existential tones and a supernatural allegory, Maugham's reflective and tragic realism cautions against the unsustainability of a pleasure-driven life. Both works offer moral lessons: excessive desires and escapism ultimately lead to self-destruction, albeit through different narrative approaches and philosophical focuses.

Table 2: Comparing the Plots Across Various Aspects

Aspect	<i>La Peau de Chagrin</i>	<i>The Lotus Eater</i>
Place	Paris, France	Capri, Italy
Year	1830s	1920s-1930s
Political Situation	Post-Napoleonic France, Bourbon Restoration	Interwar period, Italy under Mussolini's rule
Economic Situation	Economic instability, rise of bourgeoisie, debt crisis	Economic prosperity in Europe, but financial uncertainty for individuals
Protagonist	Raphaël de Valentin	Thomas Wilson
Plot Summary	Raphaël acquires a magical skin that grants his wishes but shrinks with each desire, leading to his eventual demise.	Wilson retires early to Capri to live a life of pleasure, but his savings eventually run out, leading to his downfall.
Theme	The cost of unrestrained desires and the finite nature of life	The risks of a life devoted solely to pleasure and escapism
Philosophical Focus	Existentialism, the relationship between desire and life force	Hedonism, the consequences of a pleasure-driven life
Supernatural Element	Magical shrinking leather (chagrin) representing life's vitality	None (realistic fiction)
Tone	Dark, cautionary, existential	Reflective, tragic, cautionary
Outcome for Protagonist	Rapid decline and death due to his relentless pursuit of desires	Gradual decline and tragic end due to unpreparedness for life's realities
Moral Lesson	Excessive desires lead to self-destruction	A life focused only on pleasure is unsustainable

Comparative Analysis of Protagonists

Table 3 provides a comparative analysis of the protagonists, highlighting their similarities and differences across various aspects. Both male protagonists share a tragic arc but differ significantly in their age, circumstances, and outlook on life. Raphaël, in his early 20s, is an ambitious but despair-prone aspiring writer with noble ancestry, though financially ruined. In contrast, Wilson, a middle-aged former bank manager, is a laid-back and idealistic individual who chooses to retire early to live a life of pleasure on Capri.

The characters' financial trajectories are starkly different: Raphaël begins destitute but inherits a fortune, only to lose everything due to the curse of the magical *chagrin*. Wilson, initially secure due to his savings, becomes impoverished after failing to plan for the future. While Raphaël's noble background and existential ambition drive him to overreach, Wilson's simplicity and naivety lead to his unpreparedness for life's realities. Health and fate similarly

diverge: Raphaël's rapid physical decline is caused by the supernatural talisman, symbolizing the toll of unrestrained desires, while Wilson's deterioration results from poverty and psychological despair. Both characters meet tragic ends, underscoring the themes of excess and escapism. Ultimately, Raphaël embodies a passionate but doomed pursuit of life's fullest pleasures, while Wilson represents the risks of a hedonistic philosophy that neglects the future. Together, their stories caution against extremes in ambition and lifestyle.

Table 3: Comparative Analysis of Protagonists

<i>Aspect</i>	<i>Raphaël de Valentin</i>	<i>Thomas Wilson</i>
Gender	Male	Male
Age	Early 20s	Middle-aged (mid-40s)
Family Status	Unmarried, no children	Unmarried, has a daughter from a previous relationship, but estranged
Job	Initially unemployed, aspiring writer, later inherits wealth	Former bank manager, retired early
Income	Initially poor, later inherits a fortune	Initially secure due to savings, but eventually runs out
Property	Inherits a substantial estate but loses it all due to the chagrin's curse	Owens a small house in Capri
Family History	Noble ancestry, but fallen into financial ruin	No notable family background mentioned
Health	Deteriorates rapidly due to the curse of the chagrin, dies young	Initially healthy, but deteriorates due to poverty and depression
Personality Traits	Ambitious, passionate, prone to despair, driven by desires	Content, laid-back, idealistic, but ultimately naive and unprepared
Philosophy of Life	Desires to live life to the fullest, but is consumed by his wishes	Believes in living a life of continuous pleasure without concern for the future
Outcome	Dies young as his life force is drained by the shrinking chagrin	Dies impoverished and in despair after his savings run out and he faces harsh realities

Table 4 presents a detailed comparison of the protagonists' desires, philosophies, and outcomes in two stories. Raphaël is characterized by his intense and ambitious pursuit of wealth, power, and pleasures, driven by a magical talisman that grants his desires at the cost of his life force. In contrast, Wilson adopts a hedonistic approach, seeking a tranquil, carefree existence on Capri, free from societal pressures and work. While Raphaël grapples with existential dilemmas and the paradox of fulfillment leading to destruction, Wilson naively embraces the present, neglecting the future. Both protagonists face conflicts as their desires clash with reality—Raphaël confronts the shrinking of his life force, while Wilson's financial unpreparedness leads to poverty and despair. Ultimately, both stories serve as cautionary tales: Raphaël's narrative warns against unchecked ambition, and Wilson's highlights the perils of escapism and a pleasure-centric philosophy.

Table 4: Comparative Analysis of Desires, Philosophies

<i>Aspect</i>	<i>Raphaël de Valentin</i>	<i>Thomas Wilson</i>
Primary Desires	Raphaël desires wealth, power, knowledge, and sensual pleasures. He seeks to fulfill every wish and ambition he has, using the chagrin to achieve these ends.	Wilson desires a life of ease and continuous pleasure. His primary goal is to live without the pressures of work or societal obligations, enjoying a peaceful, idyllic existence in Capri.
Purpose in Life	Initially, Raphaël's purpose is driven by ambition and the pursuit of worldly success. After acquiring the chagrin, his purpose shifts to seeking as much pleasure and fulfillment as possible before his life force is entirely consumed.	Wilson's purpose is to escape the demands of modern life and live a life dedicated to personal pleasure and tranquility. He aims to enjoy a carefree existence without long-term planning or concerns about the future.
Approach to Desires	Raphaël approaches his desires with intensity and urgency. The magical chagrin allows him to achieve his goals quickly, but with the knowledge that each fulfillment costs him a portion of his life. He is aware of the consequences but is often driven by desperation and a need to experience life fully before it's too late.	Wilson takes a more passive and laid-back approach to his desires. He believes that by withdrawing from the pressures of society, he can enjoy a peaceful life. He deliberately chooses a path of ease and comfort, without considering the long-term consequences of his decisions.
Philosophical Outlook	Existential; he grapples with the meaning of life and the cost of his desires. His interaction with the chagrin forces him to confront the finite nature of life and the paradox of seeking fulfillment while hastening his own demise.	Hedonistic and somewhat naive. He believes in the value of living for the moment and enjoying life's pleasures without worrying about the future. His philosophy is centered on the idea that life should be enjoyed rather than endured.
Consequences of Desires	Rapid decline. Each fulfilled wish diminishes his life force, leading to a sense of existential despair as he realizes that his pursuit of desires is directly linked to his impending death.	Gradual decline. By choosing a life of continuous pleasure without consideration for future needs, he eventually faces poverty and despair, realizing too late that his chosen path was unsustainable.

Conflict Between Desires and Reality	Raphaël’s conflict lies in the realization that every wish he fulfills brings him closer to death. His desires, while intense and passionate, are ultimately self-destructive, leading to a tragic end.	Wilson’s conflict arises when his money runs out, and he is forced to confront the harsh realities of life that he had hoped to avoid. His desire for a carefree life ultimately leads to his downfall as he is unprepared to face the consequences of his choices.
Legacy and Moral Lesson	A cautionary tale about the dangers of unrestrained desires and the existential cost of pursuing life’s pleasures without regard for the future. The moral is that unchecked ambition and desire can lead to self-destruction.	A cautionary tale about the risks of escapism and the folly of believing that one can live a life of continuous pleasure without facing the consequences. The moral is that a life focused solely on pleasure is ultimately empty and unsustainable.

This manuscript provides a comparative analysis of two works, focusing on the theme of desires and their consequences. However, it is limited by its reliance on textual analysis and the absence of interdisciplinary perspectives. The psychological dimensions of the characters' decisions could benefit from insights drawn from behavioral economics or modern psychological theories. Additionally, the study did not explore non-Western perspectives, such as Buddhist ideas on desire and detachment. Future research could address these gaps by integrating interdisciplinary approaches. Comparative studies involving other works from different cultural and temporal contexts could also provide more nuance. Further exploring the modern relevance in the age of artificial intelligence, could offer new perspectives.

Conclusion

La Peau de Chagrin and *The Lotus Eater* provide compelling explorations of the human condition, each offering a different perspective on the pursuit of desires and their consequences. Through the comparative analysis of these two stories, this manuscript highlights the enduring relevance of their themes to modern literature and contemporary lifestyles. As society continues to grapple with the challenges of balancing ambition, pleasure, and responsibility, the cautionary tales of Raphaël de Valentin and Thomas Wilson offer lessons on the importance of considering the long-term consequences of our desires. In a world increasingly focused on instant gratification, these stories remind us of the value of restraint, foresight, and the pursuit of a meaningful life.

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Contact email: tran@tokushima-u.ac.jp

Impact Evaluation of APPGM SDG Solution Project: Empowering Communities in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur Through Sustainable Urban Development

Maslisa Zainuddin, Sunway University, Malaysia
Nurul Hidayat Ab Rahman, National University of Malaysia, Malaysia
Yuen Beng Lee, Sunway University, Malaysia
Mohd Firdaus Mohd Anuar, Sunway University, Malaysia
Tan Rann Han, National University of Malaysia, Malaysia

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Abstract

Since the 1970s, the rapid urban expansion of Kuala Lumpur (KL) has transformed this city into a bustling metropolis. This rapid urbanisation, while creating economic opportunities, has also brought significant urban challenges, including overdevelopment and its associated social issues. Cheras, one of the largest districts in Kuala Lumpur, is home to a million residents and encompasses residential, commercial, and educational facilities. The high population density has intensified urban challenges, including traffic congestion, overdevelopment, inadequate infrastructure, and flooding issues. As the communities in Cheras were prompted to seek effective solutions, a solution project to resolve and mitigate these issues was initiated by the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia Sustainable Development Goal (APPGM-SDG, 2021). In 2022, APPGM-SDG and a Cheras-based resident association (RA) launched an intervention campaign that led to the registration of the KLRA+SD society. The initiative that began with five RAs eventually grew into sixty. The objectives of KLRA+SD were to facilitate dialogue among KL residents, members of parliament and government agencies about methods by which urban issues caused by overdevelopment and overpopulation in Kuala Lumpur can be mitigated and resolved. This paper examines how KLRA+SD highlighted urban issues caused by overdevelopment in Cheras and promoted sustainable urban development by fostering collaboration among stakeholders and engaging the public, encouraging communities to commit to continuous engagement, education, and advocacy to address urban challenges and build sustainable environments for the future.

Keywords: APPGM-SDG, Cheras, Community Empowerment, Kuala Lumpur, Sustainable Development Goals, Urban Development, TVET

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Introduction

Founded in 1857 as a tin mining settlement, Kuala Lumpur (KL) has grown to become a significant hub for trade and commerce in Malaysia. Over the years, it evolved from a modest mining town into a bustling metropolis and was later designated as the capital of an independent Malaysia (Kozłowski et al., 2022). Strategically located on Peninsular Malaysia's western coast, Kuala Lumpur has always been a focal point for economic activity and migration. Its geographical location facilitated trade and connectivity, attracting settlers and investments from within and beyond Malaysia. Since its establishment, KL has consistently experienced population growth driven by a variety of factors, including urbanisation, economic opportunities, and the rapid development of infrastructure that supports its growth as a modern city (Wheeler, 2000).

Since 1950, Kuala Lumpur's population growth accelerated significantly, as highlighted in Figure 1. Today, the city is home to over 1.8 million residents spread across an area of 243 square kilometers. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) 2020 report notes that the urbanisation rate had reached a remarkable 75.1% by 2020, underscoring KL's role as a magnet for internal migration and urban expansion (Bernama, 2024). Its economy has become diverse and dynamic, driven by key industries such as finance, construction, electronic manufacturing, and tourism (ESCAP, 2020). These sectors have collectively contributed to Kuala Lumpur's prominence as an economic powerhouse in the region, attracting both skilled professionals and migrant workers seeking better livelihoods.

However, this rapid urbanisation and economic growth have not come without challenges. Kuala Lumpur now faces significant urban issues, including overpopulation, traffic congestion, pollution, and unchecked overdevelopment. These problems have escalated over the decades, making the city one of the most densely populated and highly congested urban centers in Southeast Asia. According to recent reports, KL has been ranked as Southeast Asia's fourth most congested city (Akhtar, 2024). The city's population continues to rise, with an increase of 193,906 people recorded since 2023, reflecting an annual growth rate of 2.25% (Shah & Iskandar, 2023). This sustained growth, while a testament to the city's economic vibrancy, also highlights the pressing need for more sustainable urban planning and infrastructural reforms to address the mounting challenges of living in a highly urbanized environment.

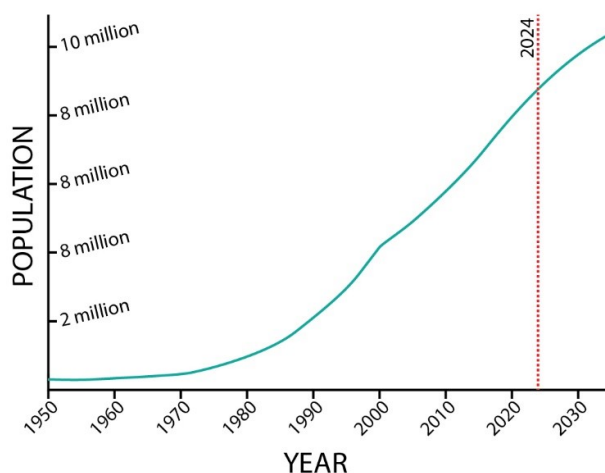


Figure 1: Kuala Lumpur Population 1950 – 2024
Sourced from World Population Review (2024)

As one of eleven districts in KL, Cheras is a suburb located southeast of KL, adjacent to Ampang and Kajang (Bupalan, 2018). Like KL, Cheras has been experiencing overpopulation and overdevelopment issues such as increased high-rise property developments and population imbalance. Caused by internal migration, the issue of overpopulation and overdevelopment in Cheras has caused its residents to worry about how their livability and quality of life are threatened (Lim, 2022). The increase of high-rises in an already saturated Cheras suburb would also cause significant impacts on the ecosystem, increased traffic congestion, elevated flood and landslide risks, and the safety and security of its residents. As the increase in high-rise properties also increases population density, residents are doubtful if the current infrastructure can cope, thus affecting their quality of life. As the issue of overpopulation reaches its “tipping point,” authorities need to rethink urban development in Cheras (Ibrahim, 2022). Increased traffic congestion and high-density living within reduced open spaces have led to questions on whether proper social impact or traffic assessment studies have been conducted.

Recognizing the seriousness of the overdevelopment crisis in Cheras, the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia Sustainable Development Goal (APPGM-SDG) approved a solution project proposed by a residents' association (RA) from Cheras (SP100). In 2022, SP100 launched the ‘Empowering Communities in Support of Sustainable Development in KL – Addressing Overdevelopment Issues’ project. The project addressed social and environmental issues related to overdevelopment in Cheras. The three-month project started as a grassroots intervention to create a coalition of residents and form a residents' association.

The association has grown from five to sixty RAs and is registered as KLRA+SD. KLRA+SD is a coalition comprising sixty RAs, one (1) non-governmental organisation, and one (1) higher education institution. Its objective is to invite KL residents to work with members of parliament, local councils, and other government agencies to create a sustainable city by contributing feedback and professional expertise. Despite the growth in numbers, their objectives remain unchanged: to address specific overdevelopment issues such as flooding, traffic congestion, and parking problems caused by overdevelopment within the KL area.

This paper employs the methods of document reviews and focus group discussions to evaluate the impact of the solution project using the framework of SDGs 11, 16, and 17, and to analyse the outcomes in six domains, namely Deep (Personal), Clear (Skills), Wide (Network), High (System), Gender, and SDG. This paper also discusses how KLRA+SD drives sustainable urban development through stakeholder collaboration and public involvement, and inspires communities to prioritise ongoing engagement, education, and advocacy for creating sustainable urban environments.

Sustainable Urban Development and KLRA+SD

Urban development has a detrimental effect on the well-being of city residents, highlighting the importance of implementing sustainable urban planning strategies to enhance the overall quality of life (Yigitcanlar & Kamruzzaman, 2015). The construction of more malls, highways, and residential areas leads to urban sprawl. It promotes car dependency, leading to increased traffic congestion, longer commute times, higher greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, and ultimately undermining environmental sustainability (Wheeler & Beatley, 2014). The challenges arising from extensive urbanisation in KL suggest the execution of green infrastructure and active community involvement in urban planning as potential solutions for conserving and enlarging green spaces (Sa'adu Danjaji & Ariffin, 2017). There

is, therefore, a pressing need for comprehensive sustainable urban planning in Malaysia, including inclusive planning methods aligning development with environmental sustainability (Behrang et al., 2019).

As Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) gains more focus, initiatives have simultaneously increased to develop indicators, assessment methods, tools, and rating systems to integrate sustainability into urban planning and development (Sharifi, 2021). SUD means development that satisfies community needs without jeopardising the ability of future generations to satiate their own needs, hence it prioritises sustainability in the social, environmental, and economic spheres. Consequently, sustainable cities are designed with a focus on long-term environmental and social outcomes, ensuring that residents can enjoy a high quality of life even as urban populations continue to expand. There are several strategic ways that cities can use to attain sustainable urban development. The first is through integrated urban planning, which entails coordinating activities from many sectors to satisfy local needs while taking environmental effects into account. By interacting with stakeholders, planning is guaranteed to represent the priorities of the community. The second is by integrating green infrastructure into urban planning to enable citizens enjoy recreational areas and manage environmental issues. Last but not least, is the addition of public education campaigns that increase knowledge of sustainability issues and promote community involvement, effective legislation that support sustainable practices must be implemented.

Despite the strategies mentioned, local initiatives are increasingly crucial to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), emphasising the need for localization. Despite the abundance of indicators, their ability to evaluate progress toward SDG11 research still needs to be improved (Thomas et al., 2021). It calls for future research to prioritise geographically disaggregated data collection to measure distributional equity effectively and establish locally relevant benchmarks and targets for urban sustainability indicators. SDG 11; ‘Sustainable Cities and Communities’, is aimed at ‘making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.’ This goal recognizes the critical challenges faced by urban areas, particularly in developing countries, where issues such as extreme poverty, environmental degradation, and vulnerability to climate change are prevalent. Among its targets, SDG 11 seeks to ensure adequate housing, promote sustainable transport systems, foster inclusive urbanization, protect cultural and natural heritage, manage natural resources efficiently, and provide universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible green public spaces.

To tackle these challenges, KLRA+SD was established to provide essential oversight on projects and ensure that the government and local councils maintain proper checks and balances when approving projects or developing areas that directly impact residents. The aim is to create a more coordinated and responsible approach to urban development, addressing the root causes of these pressing issues. Other than that, it also plans to increase the involvement of local leaders in town planning through conferences, policy, and roundtable discussions. As such, with the funding provided by the APPGM-SDG, KLRA+SD have organised the KL Conference for Sustainable Cities (KL SDG2020) aimed at localising SDGs and creating a public narrative and awareness about the issue of overdevelopment in the city.

Methodology

APPGM-SDG impact evaluators used the Impact Identification documents to comprehensively assess various dimensions of the project’s influence. This evaluation encompassed four key areas. First, personal skills, which involved identifying how the

project facilitated skill enhancement or capacity building for participants. Secondly, network systems, where the evaluators assessed the project's effect on creating or strengthening connections among stakeholders, organizations, or institutions. Third, the contribution of the project to specific SDGs was evaluated. Lastly, the evaluators examined the project's impact on gender equality and inclusivity, including analyzing whether the project addressed or reduced gender disparities and promoted equal opportunities. To conduct this analysis, the evaluators meticulously reviewed three key sources of information provided by the Solutions Providers (SP), the project proposal, monthly reports, and the final report.

The next phase, Impact Verification which involved a focus group discussion (FGD) conducted in January 2024 at Cheras to gain in-depth participant insights. Four respondents, aged between 57 and 73 years, who are members of KLRA, attended the FGD. Impact verification is a key method to validate and refine the findings from the earlier evaluation phase. The FGD provided an interactive platform where stakeholders, including project participants, beneficiaries, and relevant partners, were brought together to share their insights, experiences, and feedback regarding the project's outcomes. The FGD questions were based on six domains: Deep, Clear, Wide, High, Gender, and SDG. Table 1 below provides a clear and concise overview of each dimension and its focus areas.

Table 1: The Six Domains Assessed During the Impact Verification Process

Dimension	Focus	Key Points
Deep Impact (Personal)	Individual transformation in terms of knowledge, self-awareness, and behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge gained - Satisfaction with the project - Changes in self-awareness and behaviour towards SDGs
Clear Impact (Skills)	Development and practical application of skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skills acquired through the project - Utilization of these skills to improve performance
Wide Impact (Networks)	Creation and maintenance of new relationships and networks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New connections (friends, mentors, agencies, etc.) - Relationship or partnership sustainability
High Impact (Systems)	Broader organizational or systemic changes introduced by the project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creation of systems (e.g., SOPs, organizational structures) - Effectiveness and challenges of these systems
Gender Dimension	Contribution to gender equality and addressing gender-specific issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender inclusivity in project participation - Addressing gender issues (education, health, employment) - Metrics like women's participation rates
SDG Dimension	Alignment with and contribution to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SDG knowledge imparted - Achievement of SDG indicators - Prominence of specific SDGs addressed

The FGD session was divided into three areas, (1) A fifteen-minute portion of the presentation covered program knowledge, attendance reasons, skills, and benefits; (2) a fifteen-minute portion of the presentation addressed Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) knowledge, application, extra information, procedural adjustments, and feelings; and (3) a five-minute (5 minutes) portion of the presentation featured exit questions on keeping contact. The evaluators took photographs, made written records, and made audio recordings

to document the session. They then uploaded all of the documents to Google Drive and prepared a transcription of the session. Data pertaining to the impact were incorporated into a consolidated report.

Discussions and Analysis

This paper uses the SDGs 11, 16, and 17 frameworks to evaluate how the solution project (SP100) addressed overdevelopment in Cheras. SDG 11 focuses on providing affordable and adequate housing while addressing urban living challenges, such as slum development and inadequate infrastructure (11.1) and to preserve cultural and natural heritage amidst urbanization and development (11.4). SDG 16 promotes governance and institutional accountability to ensure inclusivity and justice in decision-making processes (16.6). SP100 especially, had encouraged collaboration between residents, local councils, and government agencies, promoting transparency and accountability in urban planning decisions. It empowered communities to contribute their voices and hold institutions accountable for addressing overdevelopment issues. Lastly, SDG 17 focuses on mobilizing resources for sustainable development through effective taxation and revenue generation (17.1), promotes partnerships across sectors to achieve sustainable development goals (17.16), and emphasizes the role of collaboration between governments, private sectors, and civil society in sustainable development (17.17).

Several case studies from Malaysia have demonstrated both the positive impacts and challenges associated with initiatives focused on localising SDGs (e.g., Lee et al., 2024; Lee, Ab Rahman, & Tan, 2024; Puteh & Wan, 2023; Ab Rahman, Lee, & Tan, 2023; Rahman et al., 2023; Syahirah et al., 2023). This paper discusses how the SDGs localization frameworks were applied to empower local communities in Cheras, specifically in addressing issues of overdevelopment and improving the quality of life, ultimately contributing to the goal of transforming Kuala Lumpur into a more sustainable city.

SDG11: Sustainable Cities and Communities Through SP100 Initiative Issues and Problems Encountered

SDG 11 aims to create a sustainable city focused on creating a safe, harmonious, and liveable environment that future generations can inherit. However, the overdevelopment in Cheras posed a threat to the natural and built environment. Therefore, SP100 project advocated for a balanced urban planning approach to safeguard natural spaces and cultural identity, ensuring development does not compromise the area's heritage and ecosystem. The initiative sought to mitigate issues like flooding, traffic congestion, and infrastructure inadequacy that directly affect the quality of housing and living standards in the area. Through engaging residents and forming a coalition with other resident associations (RAs), the project emphasized sustainable housing developments and improving basic infrastructure with similar concerns about the increase in high-rise developments in Cheras. Furthermore, the RAs stated that overdevelopment has increased flash floods and landslides caused by a significant increase in high-rise properties over the past decade. This drive to increase demand for residential areas mirrors broader trends in other cities (Lim, 2023).

During the FGD, the beneficiaries also voiced their concerns regarding the increase in high-rise condominium constructions. They raised worries regarding the necessity of more condominium projects and inquired about a viable buyer market to support such developments. They expressed concerns about the potential surge in traffic resulting from the

vehicles of new residents, highlighting that the main roads in Cheras needed to be constructed to handle such a substantial increase in traffic flow. Additionally, they highlighted the problems of condominium owners with multiple cars but only owning one parking spot. As such, these owners park their other vehicles illegally outside the condominium premises. This increase in roadside parking would worsen the existing congestion.

Solutions and the Way Forward

In line with the Target of SDG 11.8: vital national and regional development planning, SP100 also aimed to equip more residents with relevant skills and knowledge to advocate for the sustainable development of Cheras. This increase in numbers would ensure that stronger development planning at the national and regional levels has positive economic, social, and environmental links at the urban level to support sustainable development and improve the community's lives.

The beneficiaries mentioned that the “massive developments” are not sustainable development projects that would benefit the residents of Cheras as these projects would increase traffic congestion, parking issues, and pollution. Their main concern concerns the disruption of their communities and facilities' established systems and functions and its impact on the environment caused by landslides, soil erosion, and flash floods.

SDG 16: Promoting Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions: Empathy and Community Engagement Emerging Issues

To promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the beneficiaries highlighted the pressing need for greater public participation in decision-making processes related to development projects in Cheras. They emphasized that inclusive community engagement is not merely a token gesture but a pivotal strategy for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This has been demonstrated by the positive outcomes in Malaysian communities where active participation has led to better governance and more sustainable urban solutions (Salleh et al., 2023). Through meaningful involvement, communities can voice their concerns, contribute ideas, and play a critical role in shaping the development projects that directly impact their living environments.

The SP100 project stands as a prime example of this approach, having actively encouraged collaboration between residents, local councils, and government agencies. This collaborative framework promoted transparency and accountability in urban planning decisions, ensuring that stakeholders across all levels had the opportunity to engage and contribute. By empowering communities to raise their voices, the project enabled them to hold institutions accountable for addressing critical overdevelopment issues. This empowerment is not only about participation but about ensuring that decisions are fair, inclusive, and responsive to the real needs of the people affected.

Furthermore, the increased focus on public participation has the potential to shift societal attitudes, fostering public empathy in place of public apathy. When people are actively engaged in planning and decision-making for their communities, they develop a sense of ownership and responsibility. This, in turn, reduces the disconnect often seen between policymakers and residents. Empowered communities can communicate their feedback more effectively, providing valuable insights that ensure development projects align with the needs, priorities, and values of the local population.

By fostering a culture of inclusion and accountability, projects like SP100 demonstrate that sustainable urban development is achievable when communities are given the tools and opportunities to take part in shaping their futures. This approach not only enhances trust and collaboration among stakeholders but also lays the foundation for creating vibrant, resilient, and sustainable urban environments for generations to come.

Strategies for Progress and Future Directions

When the solution project started, public participation in the discussions of approvals for new developments in KL needed to be improved. To ensure that KL residents have equal access to resolving disputes and that individual rights are protected, public involvement in the planning of development projects in KL will ensure better checks and balances. To ensure that elected officials are held accountable and transparent, the public's opinion regarding the matter of development in Cheras would ensure that good governance is practised.

During the FGD, the beneficiaries mentioned that local authorities should invite KLRA+SD to provide input and suggestions. According to them, this is “in line with the law, for citizens' input is required before matters proceed.” To promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, input from the Cheras community is needed to ensure that Kuala Lumpur becomes a liveable city for future generations.

Target 16B encourages promoting and enforcing non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development. The increased participation of Cheras residents in public affairs directly ensures that their rights to a standard of living are met. Therefore, KLRA+SD has become the platform for inter-governmental agencies, local governments, and resident associations to discuss and understand sustainable development.

SDG 17: Strengthening Partnerships for Sustainable Development Current Challenges

In line with SDG 17, the various activities planned throughout the solution project were conducted so that the government agencies would better understand the roles, contributions, and efforts of the RAs in building a sustainable community in Cheras. Despite being inexperienced in advocacy or managing NGO-funded projects, SP100 and the RAs collectively objected to constructing four large-scale housing development projects planned in Cheras. One such project was a high-rise and high-residential condominium to be built on steep slopes (Lim, 2023). Although not directly focused on tax or revenue collection, SP100 highlighted the need for efficient resource allocation in urban planning. The emphasis on sustainable development encouraged responsible financial practices and resource mobilization for long-term solutions. In addition to that, their efforts started with building awareness and coalitions among the resident associations in Cheras, eventually leading to the establishing a coalition of resident associations and task forces in KL. This became a platform for collective action towards a sustainable KL city by pushing for local council elections for councillors and the mayor. The project exemplified this target by fostering partnerships among residents, NGOs, local authorities, and educational institutions. This collaborative approach ensured that diverse expertise and resources were leveraged to address overdevelopment challenges effectively.

Advancements and Future Perspectives

To push for open governance and empower the community, SP100 emphasized their adoption of best practices from other SDG groups as a key strategy. One notable example is their engagement with a Korean SDG group, from which they gained valuable insights into shaping policies and collaborating effectively with municipal councils. This collaboration allowed them to understand how strategic policy-making processes can be enhanced through cross-learning. Similarly, SP100 drew inspiration from an SDG group in Singapore, where they learned practical approaches to initiating and achieving policy changes. These learnings were instrumental in helping SP100 refine their methods and establish a stronger foundation for community engagement.

To further their goals, SP100 now holds regular monthly meetings with Members of Parliament (MPs) and local councils. These meetings aim to consolidate efforts and build a formidable coalition that serves as a strong voice for the community. In addition, SP100 has worked closely with local councils to address pressing carbon-related issues by developing and sharing baseline information on low-carbon plans. By doing so, they have actively contributed to the development of sustainable urban strategies that prioritize environmental concerns. Furthermore, SP100 organized a voluntary local community review, which included a multilateral session bringing together local authorities, local communities, NGOs, and a private university. This session fostered meaningful dialogue and collaboration among various stakeholders, strengthening their collective commitment to sustainable development.

The impact of these efforts was evident in the expansion of the beneficiary base, which initially began with five resident associations and eventually grew to nine and later to sixty associations. Despite this rapid growth, SP100 maintained consistent communication with all members, leveraging social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram to ensure seamless connectivity and coordination. Over time, these efforts culminated in the formation of KLRA+SD, a resident association formally recognized by the Registrar of Societies. KLRA+SD is managed by an executive committee (exco) and has established an online presence through its official website, KLRAplus.org, as well as active social media accounts on Facebook and X. The creation of KLRA+SD marked a significant milestone in institutionalizing public participation, ensuring that local authorities actively seek input and suggestions from the public before implementing further building and development plans.

In alignment with Target 17.17, which emphasizes the importance of fostering partnerships between public, private, and civil society actors, the institutionalization of public participation is a crucial step toward advocating for sustainable development. This approach encourages the establishment of effective collaborations that build on the collective experience and resource strategies of various stakeholders. Beneficiaries expressed their satisfaction with the recognition they have received from local councils, state authorities, the Federal Government, and other resident associations across Kuala Lumpur. They view this recognition as a testament to their efforts and remain committed to working collaboratively to sustain Cheras and KL as thriving urban areas. By maintaining strong partnerships and open communication channels, they aim to enhance the quality of life for their communities.

The formation of this partnership not only addresses immediate urban challenges but also ensures long-term objectives, such as educating the public about the significance of good city planning and sustainable development. By fostering awareness and advocating for liveable

cities, they hope to create environments that are better suited for future generations, ensuring that sustainability and inclusivity remain central to urban development.

Conclusion

Through public participation, meaningful discussions with the local authorities and city council, and empowering local authorities, the SP100 solution project has demonstrated its effectiveness in empowering the Cheras and KL communities to promote sustainable urban development. Moving forward, it is essential to maintain ongoing public involvement through workshops, community meetings, and educational and awareness programs. The success of SP100 and KLRA+SD should be a model for other communities nationwide. More collaborations between NGOs, educational institutions, and the private sector can diversify expertise and resources in discussing overpopulation and overdevelopment. Community engagements have been pivotal in achieving SDGs, as evidenced by the positive outcomes in several Malaysian communities (Salleh et al., 2023).

Education and training are crucial in addressing the challenges of rapid urbanisation in Kuala Lumpur. As the city grows, there is a growing need to educate residents, urban planners, and policymakers about sustainable development. Education can raise awareness about environmental conservation, sustainable urban planning, and the value of community involvement. Training programs for local leaders and government officials are essential to enhance their ability to implement effective policies that promote sustainable growth. Investing in education and training empowers KL residents to actively participate in shaping the city's future and fosters a shared responsibility for building a resilient and sustainable urban environment.

The experience gained from this solution project proves that the cohesive involvement of the public and collaborative effort from relevant stakeholders is essential to achieving the SDGs. The valuable opinions from the project beneficiaries emphasise the importance of meaningful collaborative efforts involving public engagement and continuous advocacy efforts to ensure a more livable and sustainable city for future generations. On a broader scale, the project paints a picture of how the SDG-based approach can be suited to better the quality of life in urban communities while emphasising the importance of bringing public awareness and preparing continuous education to smoothen inclusive and sustainable urban development.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

Authors declare the use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process.

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Contact email: lisaz@sunway.edu.my

*Research Communication at the Crossroads of Cultural Flows:
Perspectives From Practice*

Vikas John, Indian Institute for Human Settlements, India
Tanvi Bhatikar, Indian Institute for Human Settlements, India

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Abstract

Research Communications is an integral component of Research practice, enabling the amplification of societal impact. The epistemic frameworks of this practice have been long set and provide useful guidelines, often set in the language of ‘best practices.’ An important layer in understanding research communication is to also reflect on inherent tensions that emerge in the flows of communication. This is especially pertinent as research itself - particularly international and comparative research, now finds its space in multiple intersections. In this paper, we draw on the idea of “Cultural Flows” to highlight how Research and practice of communicating research flows across multiple geographic and disciplinary divisions, and cultural contexts, implicating institutions as well as researchers. We reflect on the agential opportunities and the structural challenges faced by institutions and individuals while defining effective impact-led interventions. We draw on frameworks provided by critical cultural studies, and our own practice of having worked in interdisciplinary global research projects and focus on three key aspects - the evolving Media landscape in the Global North and South; the various cultural frameworks and structures in which the process of communication unfolds in these geographies; and the structural challenges in defining impact strategies. We argue that Research Communication frameworks and by extension impact-led interventions, differ across both geographies and disciplines. Facets such as digital penetration, access, language, medium, as well as the current political climate play a key role in how effective communication practices and allied strategies emerge, allowing for newer ways of thinking about impact.

Keywords: Research Communications, Cultural Flows, Interdisciplinary, Urban, Global South, Impact, Communication Practices

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Introduction

Research communication has a long and storied history, aligning with the very act of knowledge production. The dissemination of research in its varied forms is integral to the practice of research, and in recent years has become essential to research design itself. In the social sciences broadly, and in particular development studies, the role of research communications is especially crucial as it is tasked with dissemination that has impact and fosters change.

Cities particularly in the Global South are undergoing rapid urbanization that brings opportunities as well as the challenges of inequality, extreme deprivation and environmental degradation. A significant amount of new research is located at these sites that calls for newer ways of situating urban futures. A growing academic subdiscipline looks at theorising and predicting the shape of the future city (Moir et al., 2014). Building on this subdiscipline, Keith et al, call for a ‘new urban science’ that addresses the potential of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary scholarship to build capacities of cities to tackle the increasingly complex challenges associated with urbanisation (Keith et al., 2020) This paper draws on the authors’ experience of having been part of Communication teams of two global interdisciplinary projects, to propose an investigation of Research Communications as practice and suggest ways of a deeper understanding of a grounded and reflexive practice.

The paper is laid out in the following manner. First, it lays out the background of this research, highlighting particularly on the idea of interdisciplinary and internationalization of research. Second, it talks about the concept of flows and their relevance to Research Communications. Third, the authors reflect on their practice, highlighting the approach, and the structural challenges that they face as Research Communicators. The paper concludes by situating the practice of Research Communications within the contested spaces of these flows and discuss our way forward.

To begin with, the paper looks at two important phenomena in research practice that inform this investigation - the idea of interdisciplinarity, and the internationalization of research.

Interdisciplinarity: Interdisciplinarity is a much-contested term, even though the calls to engage in it have been persistent over the past few decades. Part of the challenge has been in defining it. Jacobs and Frickel (2009), in their critical assessment, provide a useful roadmap that helps in thinking through the term. Interdisciplinarity, while acknowledged as an important step in the process of knowledge production, is beset by rooted disciplinary and institutional challenges. As Jacobs and Frickel suggest, “Whether basic or applied, interdisciplinarity is supposed to integrate knowledge and solve problems that individual disciplines cannot solve alone.” Yet there are existing barriers embedded in established structure that hinder this promise. These include epistemic barriers like incompatible styles of thought, differing methods and methodologies, legacy research traditions, techniques and language that make it difficult to translate across disciplinary domains. Added to this are factors like specialized journals, conferences and departments, and institutional administrative barriers (Jacobs & Frickel, 2009). Given the prevalence of and continued call for interdisciplinary work, research communications for social impact and change then finds itself with added brief of being in service of multiple categories of stakeholders including but not limited to lay audiences, policy makers, and other researchers, who were hitherto relegated to their own disciplinary silos.

International research: Research itself has expanded beyond the confines of geographic boundaries. International work, from being confined to disciplines like Anthropology, is now the remit of almost all knowledge areas – particularly in the social and developmental domains. With this comes a series of opportunities and challenges including the conversations on the tensions between local and global, the relevance of methods and methodologies, research on who's dime and for whose benefit. Further, the unequal development of research ecosystems in various geographies lead to differing imperatives for research. As Sami (Sami, 2023) suggests, drawing on the experiences of international research funding flows, there are implications on research structure, output production, researcher time and added precarity of practice. In such a scenario, it is important to look at the role and understand the possibilities of research communications.

Understanding Flows

Research Communications as a practice therefore finds itself in tensions between, and negotiated spaces of, local and global, and the need for heterodox disciplinary approaches. A central imperative here then is to think about the practice informed by 'Flows.' Rockefeller (2011) details the multiple genealogies of the term highlighting the contributions of Arjun Appadurai (along with Carol Breckenridge), Ulf Hannerz and Manuel Castells.

Arjun Appadurai's seminal work on flows and scapes provides a theoretical frame that can help navigate this practice. His article 'Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy' (1990) presents a theoretical exploration of the dynamics of cultural globalisation in the late twentieth century. He proposes a new framework based on the idea of 'scapes,' which are fluid, irregular, and contextual flows of cultural elements across national and regional boundaries. In his articulation the space of the flows is a series of scapes that he called "ethnoscapes," "mediascapes," "technoscapes," "financescapes," and "ideoscapes." In this paper, authors argue that the complexity of communicating research informs and is informed by these scapes encompassing different flows – of researchers, research, funding, embedded ideas and ideologies, the technical tools available. A key concept introduced by Appadurai is that of 'deterritorialization' – in essence the increasingly ephemeral nature of boundaries in a globalized world.

Manuel Castells in the Informational City (1989) situates the 'spaces of flows,' created by the then newly evolving information technology paradigms, characterised by global interconnections, against the traditional spaces of experiences – the 'space of places' (cited in Rockefeller, 2011). Similar to Appadurai's articulation, the 'space of flows' is unbounded, and made possible by a network of connections. However, in articulating the 'spaces of places', Castells also recognizes the rootedness of experiences, even though they are both generally in opposition with inherent logics of power.

Ulf Hannerz's work is important here to note as it moves the conversation on 'spaces' and 'flows,' from the oppositional to a collaborative negotiation. He argues that we move into a space of 'global ecumene,' where transnational cultural flows are bridging and transforming cultures that were once less intensively connected (cited in Rockefeller, 2011). An important point here is the question of scale. Hannerz's work, while looking at flows, recognized the importance of scale, therefore moving beyond the traditional 'small scale' to encompass regions, cities, networks and international connectedness (Rockefeller, 2011).

The paper tries to situate the role of the research communications at a particularly challenging crossroad, that is informed by the increasing interdisciplinarity and challenges of internationalizing research practice. At this moment of inquiry, frameworks on flows, drawing on the work of Appadurai, Castells and Hannerz, help make abstract sense of the authors' emergent practice. In the sections that follow, the authors establish the context of their work, provide examples from their reflexive practice drawing on two major international research projects, and provide ways forward for both practice and inquiry. Coming from an institution situated in the Global South, working on international projects with a team with cross sectoral and cross thematic expertise on the projects, across different age groups, provided a way to think through some of the challenges with research communications across different scales - Individual, Project and the Institution.

Reflections From Practice

The authors were part of the Management and Communications team of the two global, collaborative, interdisciplinary projects - PEAK Urban and KNOW.

The PEAK Urban project (Prediction and projection, Emergent urbanisms, Adopted knowledge, Knowledge exchange) brought together institutions from geographies in the Global North and Global South namely, University of Oxford (UK), Peking University (China), African Centre for Cities (South Africa), Eafit University (Colombia), and Indian Institute for Human Settlements (India). The project was grounded in the concept of 'interdisciplinarity,' maintaining that interdisciplinary studies are the way to understand challenges of urbanisation in the 21st century.

The Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) project investigated urban planning education in the Global South and its role in addressing inequality. The team was divided across 6 work packages and 12 cities across Asia, Africa and Latin America. IIHS co-led Work Package 5 with the Development Planning Unit (DPU), University College London (UCL).

Communications for both these projects was decentralized but planned collectively. There was a central Communications team anchored within the Lead University, supported by teams within individual institutions.

Communications Approach

In these projects, the approach to achieving the Pathways to Impact was to focus on key stakeholders involved in knowledge production on the central issues of the projects. These were categorized across three key aspects: Project; Individual/Researcher; and the Institution. The table below indicates the different mediums of communications that were used, and the scales at which they were used.

Table 1: Mediums and Scales of Communications Used for Publicity

Channels	Sub-category	Individual	Project	Institution
Website		X	X	X
Newsletters	Project	X	X	
	Institutional	X	X	X
Researcher Videos		X	X	
Social Media	Twitter	X	X	X
	Instagram		X	X
	YouTube	X	X	X
Publications	Journal papers	X	X	X
	Essays and blogs	X	X	
	Impact Briefs		X	X
	Country Reports		X	X
	Global Reports		X	X
MOOC			X	X
Seminar Series		X	X	
Working Groups		X	X	X
Conferences		X	X	X

These ranged from social media, mailers, newsletters, to a MOOC – Massive Online Open Course – that was developed based on the research that emerged from the project. All these mediums eventually fed into the publicity at the three scales, but some to a more degree than the other. For example, the website was a tool to showcase the individuals, projects and the institutions; but the researcher videos focussed on the individual and the project. For publications, one had to think about the specific audiences. In addition, project retreats were hosted in different institutions bringing together younger and newer scholars, encouraging collaborative research. An online seminar series to share work in progress research was initiated, particularly during COVID that hampered travel between institutions.

At IIHS, specific campaigns were designed that would talk to different scales focussing on the individual, project and institution, that included a combination of media channels. It is critical to note here that large, global, interdisciplinary projects mean that communication is taking place at different scales, with multiple campaigns running simultaneously. For example, while there was a larger mandate towards the Project, each institution also had a mandate to publicise projects and people within their own institution.

Research on the PEAK project within IIHS covered 6 thematics focussing on Governance, Health, Energy, Deindustrialisation, Land and Spatial Inequalities and Water. Research emerging from these streams not only fed into the larger goal of promoting the project, but also provided institutional visibility to IIHS. A key event curated to showcase the PEAK research at IIHS, was ‘Nakshe Kathe,’ an exhibition that brought together research on Bangalore. The exhibition used Maps, Audio Visual and text to demonstrate Bangalore’s urban transition over the years. Emerging research was also shared in the IIHS newsletters, through specific social media campaigns around publications, and presented at conferences.

The team used existing structures that were in place at the institutional level - newsletter, videos, support from specific Labs; but also tapped into newer spaces that led to the emergence of new kinds of knowledge and ways of communication such as the exhibition, and MOOC called 'Shaping Urban Futures,' that is available on Coursera.

Case Studies

Using two examples of output, the authors illustrate the ways in which the complexities of flows and the challenges of heterodox, cross national approaches played out - The website and the policy briefs. The website was meant to showcase the overall project and became a portal both for international as well as local regional audiences. The imperative, as partners in this project, was to balance the needs of the local audiences with the needs of the project to be visible internationally. What this meant was that messaging and strategies were crafted at all three scales (individual, project and institution), to showcase both the diversity of researchers from various disciplines that came together, as well as snippets of work that were region specific. The website as a mode of communication had to hold together messaging that informed local as well as cross boundary issues.

The policy briefs, which were a central component of the multiple research outputs, on the other hand had to be unidirectional in one sense - that is, to inform local issues and provide pathways to impact, emerging from research done locally. The research communications team had to translate complex research in easily understandable terms keeping in mind the audiences referred to, which in this case was imagined to be policy makers.

Challenges of Thinking Through Impact

Impact strategies require careful choice of mediums, considering access, language, and digital reach. In the last couple of decades, the media landscape has changed globally with an increased dependence on social media for communication. There is competition from communicators and content creators across different spaces, thematics and genres. Engagement, click rates, followers are seen as ways through which impact is measured. In India, the internet penetration rates stand at 52%, which means half of the country is yet to receive digital access. When you design a campaign here, social media, despite its relevance, cannot be the only medium of communication in such cases.

The socio-economic and political landscape also plays a critical role in shaping communication effectiveness. The Policy Briefs for the PEAK projects were seen as key instruments to drive and support policy interventions within each country where the partner institution was located. However, much of this depends on the political climate in which each country operates, particularly the network or the leverage that an individual or a collective would have with the agencies in that city/country.

Communication strategies also need to consider the language barriers or needs in communicating research as these barriers impede the broad understanding of research. PEAK Partners at EAFIT and Peking University published significant material in Spanish and Mandarin that meant translating content into English to make it accessible to all.

Research Communications is often seen as the final step of the research process and not as an integral component of the actual process of conducting research. More importantly, at an individual level, personal preferences of media usage, particularly the choices and

preferences of social media platforms, the willingness to disseminate your research as well as engage with other research plays a significant role in easing the Communication process.

Conclusion

As illustrated through the examples, the multidirectional and unidirectional intent of the two outputs - Website and policy briefs - illustrate the ways in which Research Communications practice considers the heterodox interdisciplinarity and the flows in which they propagate.

Creating an impact-driven strategy, requires the dismantling of the communications needs of individuals, projects, and institutions, and delivering on a reflexive practice that considers not only the fragmented nature of media but the multiplicity of needs that are embedded into it. It also requires a deep understanding of the socio-economic-cultural and the political landscape in which the research operates. Doing so allows for a practice that can translate complex research, as well as enable transformative and just paths to change.

The paper concludes by reiterating the central logic, that the role of research communications tends to be looked at as one that delivers impacts on the needs of the project and therefore in some senses is outwards facing. However, a deeper and self-reflexive practice can be imagined if one were to critically examine the positionalities of the different stakeholders connected to practice of knowledge production. The stakeholders operating at the scales of individual, project and institution, in global research practice, find themselves at the crossroads of interdisciplinarity and internationalization of research, and therefore are impacted by relevant flows. This work aims to further the understanding of this intersection.

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Contact emails: vikas.john@iihs.ac.in
tanvi.bhatikar@iihs.ac.in

Public Library: Aggregator of Cultural Assets for Sustainability Through Shared Knowledge and Co-creation

Ioana Cornelia Cristina Crihană, The National Association of Public Librarians and Libraries in Romania, Romania

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Abstract

This paper aims to extrapolate the approach initiated by Paul P. Maglio regarding the service systems theory seen as "a configuration of people, technologies and other resources that interact with other service systems to create mutual value", through a customisation and theoretical-operational localisation in the specific field of public libraries. The concept of resilient communities denotes a complex theme with multiple social, economic, political and environmental implications, which today dominates the stage of debates on the preventive and responsible approach to the future's challenges. From the point of view of public libraries, the concept is even more diffuse, integrating a multitude of perspectives regarding the nature and complexity of the challenges faced by the librarian ecosystem in order to remain relevant in terms of the services offered to their users. It also reflects the adaptive response of knowledge communities and their desirable response regarding flexibility, sustainability and the ability to assimilate change and enable progress. Starting from a recent use case from Romania, developed in the context of the Horizon 2021-2027 project SHIFT: MetamorphoSis of cultural Heritage Into augmented hypermedia assets For enhanced accessibiliTy and inclusion, the author proposes a conceptual article about the abstracting process of the service system, to exemplify how in which cultural value can be created for the community through the co-participation of the final beneficiaries, bringing together in this sense examples from the real work environment of public libraries network in Romania, but also scientific foundations validated by the SHIFT European project consortium.

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Introduction

Public libraries play a major role in supporting resilient communities and in creating cultural value for the community through co-creation and sharing of knowledge (Stenström et al., 2019; Summers & Buchanan, 2018; Edwards, 2018). They can contribute to sustainable development by providing information and facilitating democratic access to knowledge, as well as by promoting cultural participation, especially in disadvantaged communities (Summers & Buchanan, 2018; Edwards, 2018).

Through their encyclopedic profile, public libraries facilitate the interaction of different audiences with technology and can provide valuable information about how educational materials and technologies influence people's behavior and experiences. In this regard, libraries can be considered privileged spaces for interdisciplinary research, with direct benefits in increasing the accessibility of knowledge among different categories of library service users.

Librarians can also play an active role in knowledge creation and sharing, both through involvement in research activities (Wilkes & Miodownik, 2018; Rahmah & Marlini, 2020), and through the mediation of various co-creation and innovation initiatives carried out in the library ecosystem. Cultural sustainability has become a real priority in recent years, with the 2030 Agenda reserving a central place for sustainable development, and the Council of Europe Recommendation 2023 granting public libraries an important mission in terms of fulfilling the SDGs and encouraging socio-cultural vitality on a responsible and ethical basis, with the support of emerging technologies.

Effective management of library assets is essential to ensure the sustainability of public libraries. They can play an important role in the preservation and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, in particular through the use of information and communication technologies. They can also contribute to increasing social inclusion, making the heritage of collective knowledge accessible and meeting the specific cultural consumption needs of communities.

Sharing resources and knowledge through large consortia and different online platforms has the potential to increase the efficiency and relevance of public libraries (Odede, 2020; Jun, 2022). In addition, public libraries have the capacity to become key actors in promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, as well as in cultivating the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the needs of communities in the digital age (Bashir, 2020; Kim & Copeland, 2021). Through an appropriate pro-resilience approach, public libraries can transform themselves into true "vital centers" that contribute to the creation of cultural value through co-creation and sharing of knowledge, the preservation of cultural heritage, social inclusion and sustainable development.

Professionals in the Romanian public library system have understood in recent years the importance of partnerships, which contribute to better resource management and have a significant impact on communities. These partnerships involve a variety of social actors, from public administrations to non-profit organizations, public entities, private companies, such as certain developers of technological solutions, etc.

Public libraries have engaged in a complex process of preserving and disseminating cultural heritage, promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, and cultivating the skills necessary to integrate the use of technology into current library activities (Kim & Copeland, 2021).

The fact that public libraries can contribute to the resilience of communities in crisis situations by providing essential information and services, or that they can facilitate sustainable development initiatives by providing access to validated information and knowledge make them indispensable in a knowledge society.

Public libraries are experienced curators of complex knowledge bases and vast competencies, allowing users to navigate through different knowledge experiences in a collaborative manner (Wilkes & Miodownik, 2018; Rahmah & Marlini, 2020). Specialized studies have revealed that public libraries are knowledge institutions that operate with knowledge, heritage assets and open resources, thus contributing to the lifelong education of heterogeneous categories of users (Shen, 2023; Loach et al., 2019). Librarians are most often perceived as knowledgeable managers of information, but also experienced facilitators in guiding users in identifying and exploring quality information resources (Bagnall, 2021; Odede, 2020).

In an era of digital transition, public libraries are re-emerging as essential nodes in cultural sustainability networks. They are no longer just ecosystems for accessing knowledge, but are developing as hubs for co-creation, community participation and the preservation of cultural heritage. Their role in facilitating access to shared knowledge and digital resources positions them as central actors in promoting resilience and achieving the SDGs.

Digitization: Essential Pillar of Cultural Heritage Preservation

Digitization is becoming a pressing necessity for the accessibility and preservation of cultural heritage. Public libraries, by transforming physical resources into digital formats, preserve the integrity and value of humanity's cultural treasure trove (Smith et al., 2022). Recent studies emphasize that this transition supports the democratization of knowledge, reducing access barriers for vulnerable communities (Johnson, 2021).

Library Resilience: Adaptability and Sustainability

The concept of resilience is essential in understanding the role of libraries in the modern era. These institutions demonstrate a remarkable capacity to adapt to socio-economic changes, providing innovative solutions to the evolving needs of communities. For example, through the efficient management of resources and the active involvement of the public, libraries contribute to social cohesion and long-term sustainability (Taylor & Green, 2023).

Co-creation and Community Participation

Another central aspect of research is the ability of libraries to facilitate co-creation and community participation. They become catalysts for cultural regeneration, promoting active public engagement in preservation and innovation initiatives (Brown, 2020). Research shows that libraries that implement co-creation programs achieve better community integration and greater cultural sustainability (Lee et al., 2021).

Key Challenges and Future Perspectives

Despite their success, modern libraries face multiple challenges, including limited resources and the pressure to rapidly adopt digital technologies. The solution lies in extensive collaboration between cultural institutions, non-governmental organizations, and communities, as well as in continuous innovation (Martin & Edwards, 2022).

SHIFT Use Case – Increasing the Accessibility of Cultural Heritage Through Technology

SHIFT: MetamorphoSis of cultural Heritage Into augmented hypermedia assets For enhanced accessibility and inclusion project, funded by the Horizon 2021–2027 programme, exemplifies the transformative power of cutting-edge technology in the democratisation of cultural knowledge. This research-innovation initiative integrates cutting-edge tools such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, multimodal data processing, digital content transformation methodologies, semantic representation, linguistic analysis and haptic interfaces. These innovations are designed to increase the accessibility of cultural heritage (CH) institutions, in particular libraries and museums, opening them up to new and diverse audiences.

Promoting Inclusion by Empowering User-Generated Digital Stories

The National Association of Public Libraries and Librarians of Romania (ANBPR) as a use case provider in the SHIFT project, contributed an extensive collection of digital stories that reflect the cultural identity of ethnic communities in Romania. These narratives served as training resources for AI-based solutions developed by technical partners, allowing the refinement of technologies such as Text-to-Speech (TTS) Image-to-Text synthesis or Natural Language Processing (NLP). These tools were empowered to create emotionally engaging and accessible narratives that address a more inclusive audience.

By creatively transforming these digital stories with the help of emerging technologies, the SHIFT project redefined their use, ensuring that they resonate with people with special needs. This effort aligns with the broader goal of promoting inclusion in libraries and museums, contributing to better inclusion of people with various disabilities, especially people with visual and hearing impairments.

The technical approach within the SHIFT project focuses on two main objectives: 1) Harnessing cutting-edge technologies to make cultural heritage more accessible to all; 2) Establishing acoustic correlates of emotions to amplify the vitality and emotional impact of digital stories. This dual approach led to the concept of revitalizing pre-existing digital stories, transforming them into successive iterations of audio-visual constructs, enriched with the contribution of new technologies, with the aim of improving the accessibility of cultural heritage, especially for people with visual and hearing impairments. Advanced technologies such as emotional speech synthesis, machine translation and style transfer are used to transform static cultural heritage elements into dynamic, impactful constructs that foster authentic emotional connections with diverse audiences, including people with various disabilities.

Inclusive Digital Stories – An Approach to Increasing Retention of Vulnerable Users

The use of TTS technologies enriched with NLP models appears as a promising solution to engage people with disabilities in cultural and creative institutions. These technologies help overcome barriers such as linguistic constraints and the lack of emotionally compelling narratives, allowing vulnerable groups to access and connect with cultural assets in libraries in meaningful and participatory ways.

The SHIFT project's inclusive approach resulted in the production of audio-visual compositions adapted to both the cultural and linguistic context of the original storytellers. Thus, the resulting materials post-processed with the contribution of new technologies are not

only accessible, but also authentically representative of the cultural identity and cultural consumption specificities of users belonging to vulnerable groups.

Impact and Future Developments

The meticulous processing of pre-existing digital stories by the technical partners of the SHIFT project consortium - using techniques such as summarization, translation, style transfer and semantic analysis - led to the obtaining of audio-video constructs enriched in terms of content and emotions embedded in the message transmitted to users. These results allow vulnerable groups, especially people with visual and hearing impairments, to fully explore the cultural heritage assets in the Romanian area. The project results highlight the potential of new technologies to reconfigure and diversify the service offers of libraries and museums, opening new avenues for innovation in the field of cultural and creative industries.

SHIFT's technological interventions reflect a broader trend towards inclusion and democratization in cultural institutions. By adopting advanced tools and methodologies, libraries and museums can better serve specific communities, some of them vulnerable, thereby stimulating the participation, co-creation, and long-term engagement of library users with the artifacts curated by libraries.

Conclusion

Public libraries are not only repositories of knowledge, but also active agents of community transformation. Through digitization, collaboration and co-creation, they make a crucial contribution to the preservation of cultural heritage and the development of resilient and informed communities. As they adapt to new technological and social demands, libraries are strengthening their role as key actors of sustainability in the field of cultural and creative industries.

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The International Academic Forum (IAFOR)
Sakae 1-16-26-201
Naka Ward, Nagoya, Aichi
Japan 460-0008
www.iafor.org