

Art and Cultural Tourism for Sustainable Income: A Conceptual Framework for Senior Citizen Centres in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a conceptual framework that fully integrates the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) and Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) as it examines just how art and cultural tourism initiatives are able to support senior citizen centres throughout Malaysia in order to generate sustainable income. The framework identifies five factors, which is Social Engagement, Economic Growth, Environmental Effects, Operational and Technology. In order to assess each of the positive effects that each factor has had on income sustainability, some hypotheses are developed. An inclusive mixed-methods approach is proposed, a combination of quantitative surveys and regression analysis with qualitative thematic interviews. The expected results is a replicable empowerment model to guide cultural tourism as practical income strategy for senior centres, carefully balancing financial viability, social well-being, as well as environmental stewardship.

Keywords: *Art Tourism, Economic Empowerment, Senior Citizen Centres, Sustainability, Conceptual Framework.*



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1 INTRODUCTION

Malaysia's senior citizen centres do face difficulties which are rising in obtaining more lasting finance as the population now ages. Financial shortfalls cause public and private elder care centres often to battle as they rely upon donations for covering necessary costs. The proportion of Malaysians aged 60 and above is expected to rise very greatly indeed. Usual grant mechanisms are thus proving more and more inadequate (Balqis-Ali & Fun, 2024).

In the context, new potential avenues with regard to income generation are offered by way of leveraging Malaysia's rich cultural heritage and diverse arts scene. This study also aligns with research demonstrating how digital illustration can effectively promote cultural heritage exemplified in Kelantan's visual campaigns through vector and raster graphics (Mat Nashir@Mohd Nasir & Daimin, 2022). Cultural tourism, which includes visits and experiences based on local crafts, performances, and traditions, offers a valuable opportunity. It can help senior centres generate income while also preserving cultural identity and strengthening community ties. This type of tourism supports what is

known as cultural sustainable development model. The goal is to create programs that bring economic, social, and environmental benefits, often referred to as the “Triple Bottom Line” of sustainability in profit, people, and planet.

By including cultural tourism in their programs, senior centres can build new income streams while improving senior’s well-being and sense of purpose. Furthermore, research on community participation shows that local engagement is key to making these program successful. When seniors and other community members take part in cultural projects such as craft workshops or heritage performances. They helps build social connections and create more meaningful experiences for visitors (Nogales-Muriel et al., 2024).

This paper presents a conceptual framework that explores how art and cultural tourism initiatives influence five main areas which includes social engagement, economic growth, environmental effects, operational, and technology. These areas are expected to support sustainable income for senior citizen centres in Malaysia and offer a practical framework for economic empowerment that is tailored to the local culture.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study based on the integration of two established models, namely the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) and the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM). Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens to evaluate how art and cultural tourism initiatives can influence sustainable income generation in senior citizen centres.

2.1 Triple Bottom Line (TBL)

Elkington (1997) pioneered the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework which suggests balancing three pillars of sustainability: economic (profit), social (people), and environmental (planet). In the scope of senior citizen centres, TBL demands economic viability through tourism initiatives and social and environmental responsibility as well. For instance, revenues can be generated from the craft-making programs as well as community participation, while promoting the use of sustainable materials. TBL is widely used in sustainable tourism literature to evaluate initiatives aimed at long-term sustainability and preserving cultural and environmental heritage (Buhalis et al., 2023; Prakash et al., 2023).

Building on this, the Triple Bottom Line model offers holistic framework for promoting sustainable income generation in settings like senior citizen centres. By integrating the dimensions of People, Planet, and Profit, such initiatives can enhance social engagement and equity (Csikósová et al., 2020), stimulate local economies through tourism-related activities (Confetto & Covucci, 2021), and minimize environmental impact by adopting eco-friendly practices (Kirby et al., 2022; Mattera & Soto, 2022). In the Malaysian context, applying the TBL framework to art and cultural tourism presents an opportunity to empower older adults while preserving local traditions (Maduwinarti et al., 2024).

2.2 Socio-Ecological Model (SEM)

As the name suggests, the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) is a multi-level framework that allows the understanding of how diverse social and physical factors impact a given individual’s behavior and institutional outcomes. SEM incorporates five levels of influence: individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy. While described as a multi-level model, Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) in a senior citizen centre setting stresses the engagement of the elderly (individual level), the family or volunteers serving them (interpersonal), the centre's administration (organizational), the tourism industry (community), and policies made by the government (policy level). This model is particularly important for community-based tourism, where multi-stakeholder participation is paramount (Balqis-Ali & Fun, 2024).

Applying the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) in the context of art and cultural tourism provides a deeper understanding of how various levels of influence contribute to the empowerment of senior citizens in Malaysia. At the individual level, participation in cultural activities has been shown to improve quality of life and mental health by fostering social support networks (Zhang et al., 2020). Interpersonally, relationships formed through shared cultural experiences enhance emotional well-being and a sense of belonging. At the community level, involvement in tourism activities supports both cultural preservation and local economic development (Salman et al., 2021). Furthermore, policy-level support plays a critical role in ensuring fair access to resources and the equitable distribution of tourism benefits, which is essential for long-term sustainability (Trišić et al., 2019). This multi-layered approach highlights SEM's capacity to guide strategies that promote sustainable income and social inclusion for the elderly through cultural tourism.

2.3 Integrating Triple Bottom Line (TBL) and Socio-Ecological Model (SEM)

The enhancement of the senior citizen centres from cultural and tourism activities is examined in this research by providing a cohesive theoretical paradigm through the integration of Triple Bottom Line and Socio-Ecological Model. The Triple Bottom Line underscores balancing profit, people, and planet for sustainable stakeholder benefits (Dentoni et al., 2020), while the Socio-Ecological Model emphasizes the role of individual, interpersonal, community, and policy factors in shaping sustainable outcomes (Kirby et al., 2022). This combined framework comprises five key dimensions: Social Engagement, Economic Growth, Environmental Effects, Operational, and Technology. This blend permits assessing the economic as well as the socio-environmental impacts in a comprehensive, context-sensitive evaluation, while also enabling a nuanced understanding of cultural tourism initiatives aimed at empowering senior citizen centres in Malaysia (Wondirad et al., 2020).

3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The integrated Triple Bottom Line (TBL) and Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) form the basis of the conceptual framework of this research. It synergizes art and cultural tourism activities with income sustaining initiatives in the senior citizen centres using a system dynamics approach characterized by five drivers in which Social Engagement is grounded in SEM, Economic Growth is drawn from TBL, Environmental Effects emerge from the intersection of SEM and TBL, Operational and Technology are incorporated based on the broader literature review as an extension to the theoretical framework.

Art and cultural tourism are positioned as the primary catalyst, enabling senior centres to initiate community-based tourism activities that are socially inclusive, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable. These initiatives include cultural workshops, heritage tours, traditional craft enterprises, and performance-based engagements. Through such programs, senior centres can create value across multiple domains.

The framework assumes that each of the five identified factors in art and cultural tourism initiatives directly influence the income sustainability for senior citizen centres, especially in Malaysia context. Definitions of these five constructs are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Definitions of Conceptual Framework Variable

Construct	Definition
Social Engagement	Involvement of seniors and the community in cultural programs, which enhances social cohesion and volunteerism.
Economic Growth	Revenue and economic opportunities generated through tourism-related services, including craft sales and event hosting.
Environmental Effects	Sustainable use and conservation of cultural and natural heritage, improving the appeal and authenticity of tourism offerings.
Operational	Management capacity of senior centres to design, coordinate, and sustain cultural initiatives effectively.
Technology	Use of digital tools (e.g., websites, e-commerce, social media) to promote, manage, and innovate tourism experiences.

These factors are hypothesized to drive the central outcome variable: Sustainable Income Generation. The complete model is visually illustrated in Figure 1, which depicts the relationships between art and cultural tourism initiatives, the five constructs, and the outcome of sustainable income.

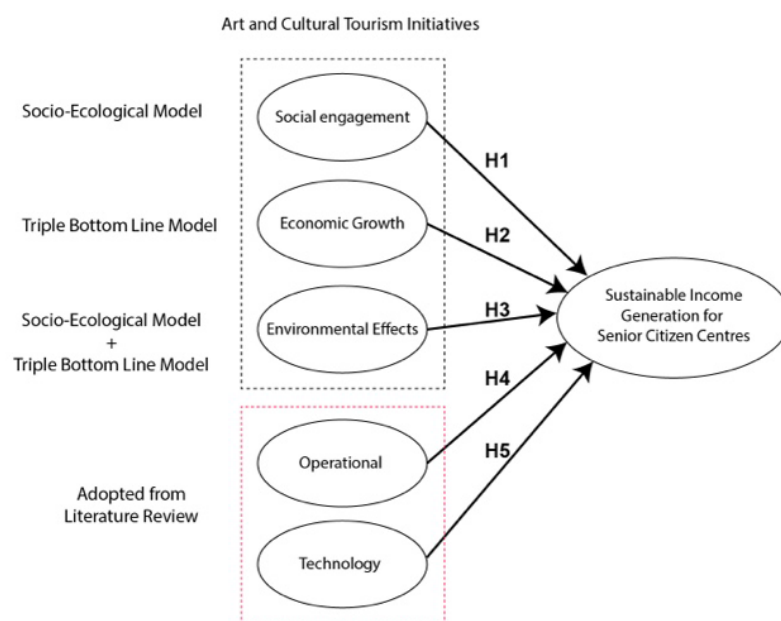


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

This framework serves as the theoretical basis for hypothesis development and empirical testing, contributing a novel perspective to cultural tourism and aging studies within the Malaysian context.

4 HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

By following the adjusted Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework alongside Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) integration, this research proposes five hypotheses assumed to have a sustainable positive impact on income generation through art and culture tourism activities at the senior citizen centres.

H1: Social engagement in art and cultural tourism initiatives has a significant positive impact on sustainable income generation for the senior citizen centres.

Social engagement through art and cultural tourism initiatives has a significant positive impact on sustainable income generation for senior centres. Hollands (2010) discusses how art and culture can engage populations and create new identities, thereby socially including local communities.

Furthermore, social engagement such as involving seniors and locals in cultural activities, fosters community identity and inclusion, which are foundations for collective success. In sustainable tourism research, engaging local populations ensures that benefits are shared, and community members take ownership of projects (Magdy, 2025). For seniors, meaningful participation in arts and culture can expand social networks and volunteer support. When tourists interact with engaged communities, they help preserve traditions and encourage local entrepreneurship (e.g. selling crafts), indirectly benefiting centre income. Thus, higher social engagement is expected to correlate with higher income sustainability.

H2: Economic growth driven by art and cultural tourism initiatives has a significant positive impact on sustainable income generation for the senior citizen centres.

Economic growth driven by art and cultural tourism initiatives has a significant positive impact on sustainable income generation for senior centres. Existing studies consistently show that tourism contributes to local economic development. For example, rural tourism has “stimulated economic growth, improved the viability of communities, and enhanced living standards,” yielding higher incomes and profits for participants (Liu et al., 2023). Cultural festivals or homestays involving seniors could similarly generate ticket sales, workshop fees, or product sales, injecting new income into the centre. The well-known tourism-led growth hypothesis posits that as tourism flourishes; it stimulates employment and generates resources that can contribute community welfare. Within this model, senior citizen centres that facilitate tourism-related business such as selling local foods, crafts, cultural performances are expected to experience measurable increases in revenues.

H3: Environmental effects resulting from art and cultural tourism initiatives influence sustainable income generation for the senior citizen centres.

Environmental effects resulting from art and cultural tourism initiatives positively influence sustainable income generation for senior centres. Tourism broadens perceptions and knowledge of different cultures and environments, which can lead to greater community support for sustainable practices (McLoughlin et al., 2018). A strong emphasis on culture often goes together with heritage preservation. Sustainable tourism literature finds that visitors who value nature and culture tend to support environmentally responsible practices. For instance, studies report that rural tourism can lead to improved natural environmental conservation, biodiversity and environmental awareness as communities invest in preserving scenic areas (Liu et al., 2023). In this context, initiatives like heritage site tours or organic craft materials encourage centres to maintain cultural and natural assets. A healthy environment enhances seniors’ well-being and makes a destination more attractive to tourists. Thus, projects that engender positive environmental outcomes such as clean-up programs and conservation education can indirectly boost income by sustaining the attractions that draw visitors.

H4: Operational factors in art and cultural tourism initiatives have a significant positive impact on sustainable income generation for the senior citizen centres.

Effective operational factors in art and cultural tourism initiatives have a significant positive impact on sustainable income generation for senior centres. Operational factors include the centre’s management efficiency, partnership networks, and integration of local resources. Well-managed initiatives such as clear roles, good training, and local collaboration are more likely to succeed. For example, when rural tourism operators coordinate local farms and cultural groups, the resulting “cluster of activities” stimulates cooperation and diverse revenue streams (Liu et al., 2023). In this situation, if a senior centre organizes resources effectively such as training seniors in craft skills, coordinating with tourism agencies, reinvesting earnings, it can magnify returns. Operational excellence thus underpins the scalability and longevity of tourism projects. It is hypothesized that centres demonstrating higher operational capacity will achieve greater income stability, as efficient operations reduce waste and amplify impact.

H5: Technology adoption in art and cultural tourism initiatives has a significant positive impact on sustainable income generation for the senior citizen centres.

Technology adoption in art and cultural tourism initiatives has a significant positive impact on sustainable income generation for senior centres. Studies on Malaysian tourism have shown that integrating 3D-design tools significantly enhances engagement with cultural sites, confirming the value of technology adoption in cultural-tourism frameworks (Noor Hishamuddin et al., 2024). Modern ICT tools can greatly enhance tourism experiences and outreach. Studies show that digitalization encourages tourism providers to optimize business processes, explore new business models, and effectively market their services (Zhou & Sotiriadis, 2021). For example, an online booking platform or social media campaign for a senior centre craft workshop can reach wider audiences than traditional flyers. Likewise, virtual tours or digital galleries can monetize cultural content. Technology also improves record-keeping and resource sharing among stakeholders. Thus, it is anticipated that centres embracing digital platforms such as websites, social media and e-commerce will attract more visitors and sales, strengthening financial sustainability.

5 METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

This study adopts a qualitative, theory-building approach grounded in an extensive literature review to develop a conceptual framework. The purpose is to identify and organize key constructs that explain how art and cultural tourism initiatives can support sustainable income generation for senior citizen centres in Malaysia. Relevant literature was systematically collected from academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar using carefully selected keywords related to cultural tourism, senior centres, sustainability, and empowerment. Selection criteria included peer-reviewed sources, relevance to the research scope. The reviewed studies were thematically analysed to extract recurring constructs, theoretical gaps, and observed relationships between tourism-related initiatives and sustainable income practices.

Thematic synthesis was employed to categorize the findings into five key variables: Social Engagement, Economic Growth, Environmental Effects, Operational, and Technology. These variables form the basis of the proposed conceptual framework, which integrates the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) and Socio-Ecological Model (SEM). The framework is intended to provide a theoretical lens to guide future empirical research and practical implementation. To enhance the model's validity and contextual relevance, preliminary feedback was sought from experts in art and community engagement studies. This expert input contributed to the refinement of the framework, ensuring logical coherence and applicability to Malaysian senior citizen centres.

Table 2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria Type	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings	Editorials, opinion pieces, blog posts, news articles
Relevance	Studies addressing art and cultural tourism, senior citizen programs, sustainability, or economic empowerment	Studies unrelated to cultural tourism, elderly programs, or sustainability
Accessibility	Full-text available through institutional or open access sources	Abstract-only publications or inaccessible full texts
Contextual Scope	Studies with relevance to community-based programs, senior centres, or tourism in developing countries	Studies focused only on private tourism enterprises or unrelated commercial sectors

5.1 Expert Review and Refinement

To ensure the academic rigor and practical relevance of the framework, preliminary drafts were shared with a panel of five subject-matter experts in the areas of arts and community engagement. Experts provided feedback on clarity, logical flow, comprehensiveness, and applicability. Based on their recommendations, refinements were made to strengthen the theoretical linkages and practical utility of the model. Future phases of the research will empirically test the framework using mixed methods.

6 CONCLUSION

In sum, this conceptual framework integrated Triple Bottom Line (TBL), Socio-Ecological Model (SEM), and extensive literature studies to address a practical challenge: empowering Malaysian senior centres through cultural tourism. The model contributes by articulating five actionable pathways (social engagement, economic growth, environmental effects, operational and technology) that bridge cultural initiatives and financial sustainability. In practice, policymakers and centre managers could prioritize community-led cultural program (H1), leveraging tourism markets for local crafts (H2), embedding conservation practices (H3), strengthening management processes (H4), and using digital platforms (H5) to diversify revenue.

If validated, this replicable empowerment model will enable senior centres to achieve financial stability and foster community well-being through culture. It extends the tourism-for-development literature by focusing on senior citizen centres, and it provides a roadmap for centres to transition toward self-sustaining, culturally vibrant environments. With aging populations worldwide, such a model could inform broader efforts to use culture as an engine of social inclusion and economic support for older adults. Therefore, this study recommends for future researchers to replicate and validate this conceptual model to assess its applicability across diverse contexts and strengthen its contribution to sustainable cultural tourism and senior citizen empowerment.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors played equal contributions towards the production of this paper.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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