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# Preserving Heritage, Ensuring Access: Accessibility Challenges in National Heritage Buildings

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## ABSTRACT

*This research is focussed on issues surmounting accessibility in heritage buildings. At present, heritage buildings are one of the highest, if not the foremost, tourist attraction across Malaysia. However, inadequate accessibility provisions have hindered some (including those with disabilities, the elderly and parents with wheelchairs) to visit and enjoy the heritage value. National heritage should be able to be viewed, explored and enjoyed by all without any discrimination or hindrance for anyone. However, inadequate accessible provisions in heritage buildings still prevail across Malaysia and is understood to be through the lack of many guises. This research adopts a qualitative approach to investigate and assess accessibility provisions, both those provided and those lacking, across Malaysia. The determinants of the indicators were preliminarily compiled from literature and previous studies on "heritage tourism" concepts. The initial construct of indicators was then further confirmed through face-to-face semi-structured interviews involving 8 National Heritage Building operators in Malaysia. Their views were required to obtain descriptors on the issues and challenges in providing necessary accessibility provisions in heritage buildings. The transcription and interpretation from the interview findings were carried out using Atlas.ti a qualitative software and is discussed.*

**Keywords:** *Accessibility, Disability, Heritage Tourism, Inclusive Design, Person with Disability Act, National Heritage Act.*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a protruding market nowadays. Tourism sector did donate economy call in every country in the world. In Malaysia, tourism had contributed about 72 billion Ringgit Malaysia to the national income in 2015. This amount, mounted more in 2016 by 82 billion Ringgit Malaysia (Ministry of Tourism and Culture, 2014). Cultural heritage tourism is among the tourism market that succeed to attract tourist these few recent years. According to some estimates, between 50 to 80 percent of all domestic and international travels involves in element of culture such as visiting the museums, historic site, enjoying music and art and living immensely within the cultures (Darcy et al., 2011). Realising the prospect in the culturally based tourism can boost the economy, many of heritage buildings been adapted to become museums, gallery, boutique hotels, a very fine and luxurious dining (Robiah Abdul Rashid et al., 2015). This cultural heritage-based tourism or so called as heritage tourism market

become bigger with another concept of tourism which is Accessible Tourism (Souca Maria Luiza, 2008). Accessible tourism enables all tourist to enjoy this market without any discrimination. Accessible tourism was defined to enables people with access requirements including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed products, services and environments. This definition is inclusive of all people including those travelling with children in prams, people with disabilities and seniors (Darcy and Dickson, 2009).

# 2 RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Heritage and Accessibility

Heritage is a sign and symbol of people's ethnicities, nationalities and identities but subject to different meanings and multiple interpretations (Park, 2010). Various literature pointedly concerns the fundamental reasons as to why and how heritage represents social identities, especially the implicit function of heritage institutions playing an official and formal role in representing and enhancing national identities (Blake, 2000; Dalmas et al., 2015; Lowenthal, 1998; Marsin et al., 2014; Zahari et al., 2019).

Heritage buildings and places are a significant asset, a unique and irreplaceable resource which reflects a rich and diverse expression of past societies and forms an integral part of local, regional and national cultural identity. This also supported by the Burra Charter which also emphasises that heritage conservation will become unsustainable without local community participation (ICOMOS, 2013). Among the significant requirements for an inclusive and sustainable society is that everyone should be able to participate in and enjoy the social, economic and cultural assets of that society (NDA - National Disability Authority, 2011). It further said that for some people, barriers exist which make visiting and using historic buildings and places difficult or sometimes impossible (Abdul Razak Mohd Kasim, 2017). It was well described in the Model of Disabilities. Model of Disabilities are developed to cater the needs of disabled individually in various aspects (refer to Table 1). Thus, in making the built heritage more accessible in an appropriate and sensitive manner can increase awareness and appreciation of its cultural, social and economic value, the main agenda is to provide equal access for all, as far as is practicable (Langston et al., 2008; NDA - National Disability Authority, 2011).

Heritage and Tourism

In the 1980s, researchers began examining the demographic characteristics, motives, and experiences of people who visit historic sites and museums and found some common patterns (Herbert, et al., 1989). These patterns include higher education levels, and higher incomes than the general traveling population. They also have a propensity to stay in the destination longer than non-heritage tourists and are slightly older in average age (Prentice, 1989). Some observers have suggested that different nationalities seek different heritage experiences, with Europeans tending to be more perspicacious about World Heritage Sites than other travelling nationalities, and Chinese tending to desire cultural experiences at the growing number of 'ethnic theme parks' in China (Di Giovine, 2009; Li, 2011). Contemporary researchers have moved beyond these more normative and descriptive accounts of heritage demand to include more experiential depth and outcomes of visiting. Yet, heritage consumers as a niche tourism market have yet to be explored by their motivations and experiences. One useful way of understanding the general demand for cultural heritage is the level of interest of visitors and how that translates into their motives for visiting.

Tourism destinations are in an increasingly globalised and challenging market. The new standards of tourism development are moving towards new critical issues such as quality, sustainability, image, innovation and accessibility (García-Caro, de Waal, & Buhalis, 2012). Sustainability includes economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability while social sustainability is with a focus on alleviating poverty, the promotion of human rights, equal opportunity, political freedom and self-determination (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008). From the point of view of promoting human rights and equal

opportunity, the tourism industry has been paying more attention to the needs and requests of tourists with disabilities, recognising that those people have the same needs and desires for tourism as others, thus leading to the concept of accessible tourism (Yau, McKercher, & Packer, 2004).

Since accessibility barriers can be considered as one major determinant that can affect the travel incentive and experience of the PwD, the term "accessible tourism" has been advocated in many tourism studies. Accessible tourism is a form of tourism that involves collaborative processes between stakeholders that enable people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services and environments (Buhalis & Darcy, 2010). Accessible tourism can be implemented if more details are allowed for understanding of the needs of PwD (Darcy, 2010). Furthermore, tourism for PwD is not only removing physical barriers (Yau et al., 2004), it should provide a meaningful experience to ensure their quality of life. PwD and researchers around the world have contributed to a growing change in social perceptions about disability. Even though the academic interest in the field of the disabled travellers has been growing, the studies for understanding the PwD as a consumer of tourism products are only a very recent phenomenon (Burnett & Baker, 2001).

PwD remains as a group which is to explore in relations to their interests in travelling and their attitudes towards their involvements in the tourism activities. Most of the scholarly studies attempt to look at this market from the general perspective, that is, they are a market group with low differentiation and little distinct needs. Most studies have an explicit or implicit focus on the mobility disabled group. However, as previously mentioned, the group of PwD that need accessibility as a requirement for participation include those with physical impairments (e.g., mobility and manual dexterity conditioned and / or wheelchair users), sensory, learning and mental impairments. Subsequently this market group come with various sub-segments, all of which have their own distinct needs and requirements. In addition, even people with the same disability may not have the same level of functioning. Burns, Paterson and Watson (2009) point out that people with disabilities are quite diverse group in terms of experiences, views and needs and nature of the disability. People with specific impairments may encounter specific barriers. As a result, it is necessary to identifying different customers' needs and provides more detailed information about accessible facilities. The tourism practitioners should be taken into consideration when designing and promoting various accessible tourism activities. Future studies should be more diversified and investigate various disability groups to determine the discrepancy in accessibility. The tourism practitioners should provide the tourism products that are accessible to this market by understanding well for the constraints and need of people with disabilities.

## 2.2 Managing the changes

Conservation was defined as an "action to secure the survival or preservation of buildings, cultural artefacts, natural resources, energy or any other thing of acknowledged value for the future", and where buildings or artefacts are involved, such actions "should avoid significant loss of authenticity or essential qualities" (BS 7913:1988).

Conservation was also considered as the art of managing change. The 20th Century and the beginning of the new millennium saw the development of legislation and regulation that introduced a range of modern amenities, services, upgrading of comfort and modern standards to suit contemporary lifestyle needs including the need for disabled people's physical access. Theoretically, a museum that was built in the 19th century still needed to change and adapt into a museum that complied with the requirement of the 20th century. In terms of physical access, this could result in many changes. Therein lies the conflict whereby the conservationists and the conservation professionals need to contend with.

In managing the heritage buildings, while adapting it to a new function, a lot of changes need to be made. In a broad review of UK conservation practice, Townshend & Pendlebury (1999) have argued that conservation needs to rethink its purpose and role if it is to maintain its place in the planning system

specifically and urban policy more generally. Similarly, the growing concern over the relationship between conservation and sustainable development (English Heritage, 1997, 2000; DCMS, 2001) has brought to the fore the degree to which urban heritage-based conservation can produce historic urban environments that are both socially inclusive and economically buoyant.

Both the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2001) and English Heritage (2000) argue convincingly for a focus on the 'health' of the historic environment if we are to manage successfully the future of our past, as well as improving our knowledge of how that environment contributes to the cultural, social and economic well-being of places.

(Strange & Whitney, 2003) in their paper entitled "The Changing Roles and Purposes in Heritage Conservation in the UK" discussed four key themes which are key debates of future roles of Conservation and Urban Regeneration. The four key themes are conservation-led regeneration; conservation and sustainability; conservation and the planning process; and the governance of conservation. The result draws some conclusions about the trajectory of conservation practice, and identifies a programme for future research.

Historic environments, representative of earlier cultural, technical and social conditions, were not designed with independent access for disabled people in mind. Understanding the factors which constrain or prevent disabled people from participating in visits to historic environments is therefore essential if heritage tourism property managers are to develop policies and implement plans to improve access for disabled visitors (Goodall et al., 2004). Although these factors affect disabled people's participation in services generally (Goodall, 2002; Goodall and Bright, 2002), their relative importance differs in the case of historic environments because conservation must be balanced against improved physical access (Goodall et al., 2004).

## 2.3 Conservation and Sustainability

To sustain the heritage property is very complex and contested issue (Landorf Taylor, 2009). He further examines that the relationship between the frameworks used to manage complex heritage sites and the emerging sustainable development paradigm. An initial review of the conceptual dimensions of sustainable development identifies two key principles the use of a long-term and holistic planning process, and the active participation of multiple stakeholders in that planning process. He argues, where heritage objectives are determined by formal collaborative partnerships, community participation in the decision-making process is limited. This ensures transmission of the physical fabric to future generations but limits the development of a sustainable local cultural economy.

Sustainability includes economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008). Currently, many developers, view urban heritage as some monetary resources for their field. Dalmas et al, 2015 further investigate that this view has led the developers to estimate the economic value of urban heritage as standard tools of economic analysis. As their definition of urban heritage is described as inclusive because it includes four series of interdependent economic, social, cultural and environmental elements. At the heart of the process of patrimonialisation is conservation and the transmission of heritage to future generations. As environmental economists advance an economic definition of sustainability, the definition of "strong sustainability" appears to be particularly relevant for the evaluation of urban heritage.

Social sustainability is with a focus on alleviating poverty, the promotion of human rights, equal opportunity, political freedom and self-determination (Holtorf, 2013). From the point of view of promoting human rights and equal opportunity, the tourism industry has been paying more attention to the needs and requests of tourists with disabilities, recognising that those people have the same needs and desires for tourism as others, thus leading to the concept of accessible tourism (Yau, McKercher, & Packer, 2004)(Mariani et al., 2015).

## 2.4 Conservation and Accessibility Policy

Heritage Act 2005 came to force in 2005 replacing two previous acts which were Treasure Trove Act (*Akta Harta Karun*) 1957 and Relics and Antiquities Act (*Akta Benda Purba*) in 1976. This act was enacted to provide the conservation and preservation of National Heritage, natural heritage, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, underwater cultural heritage, treasure trove and related matters (Heritage, 2005). As stated in section 23 of National Heritage Act, 2005, any site which has natural heritage or cultural heritage significance to be ca be gazetted as Heritage Site by the Heritage Commissioner while in section 67 of National Heritage Act, 2005 stipulated that any heritage site, heritage object and underwater cultural heritage site listed under in the registrar or any living person can be gazetted as National Heritage by the Minister. Only National Heritage are qualified to be forward to be inscribed by the UNESCO or to be conserve for different purposes including tourism.

Since the Disability Discrimination Act was put into force in 1995, conservation policies had been incorporated with accessibility and inclusive design values and principles. In the United Kingdom, the millennium started with extensive reviews of the historic environment, including appraisals of the legislative and regulative framework. This effort was conducted by the Department of Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (or previously known by the Department of the Environment (DOE) and Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) respectively), and other associated statutory bodies, including English Heritage and CADW: Welsh Historic Monuments (DCMS, DTLR, 2001; DCMS, 2003; English Heritage 2004; CADW, 2002; ODPM, 2004). In 2010, the equity Act come to force replacing a few acts including Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Equality Act 2010 of United Kingdom gives people from discrimination in ranges of areas including accessing the services, education and employment. An organisation cannot discriminate which means they need to provide or adapt their premises to allow disabled person to access services and employment. In pursuing the act, the Historic England recognises that everyone should be able to enjoy the access to the historic environment which later they introduced the guidelines of Easy Access to Historic Building to enable PWDs to enjoy their heritage environment (Historic England, 2012).

Malaysia Federal Constitution, Article 8 (2), stipulated that there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground only of religion, race, descent, place of birth or gender in any law or in the appointment to any office or employment under a public authority or in the administration of any law relating to the acquisition, holding or disposition of property or the establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation or employment (The Government of Malaysia, 2010). It clearly stated that all citizens have the equal rights of any trades. In 2006, Malaysia has signed the Convention of Rights of Person with Disabilities (CRPD) and put oath to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2015). Resulted from the convention, Person with Disabilities Act was put into force in 2008 to provide for the registration, protection, rehabilitation, development and wellbeing of persons with disabilities, the establishment of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities, and for matters related (Siti Zaharah Jamaluddin et al., 2017). This act recognised the importance of accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, to health and education and to information and communication, in enabling persons with disabilities to fully and effectively participate in society. To ensure full participation of disabled in the built environment, amendment to Uniform Building by Laws has been made in 1991 to include By Law 34A of the UBBL34A. It was gazette by the state governments between 1992 and 1996. Uniform Building by Law 1984 (UBBL 1984) By Law 34A stated that a building must be accessible to disabled persons. A few standards were introduced such as Malaysian Standard MS 1183 (Specifications for Fire Precautions in design and Construction of buildings Part 8: Code of Practice for means of Escape for PWDs), and MS 1184 (Code of Practice for Access for PWDs in Building) and MS 1331 (Code of Practice for Access PWDs Outside Building).

The tourism industry is driven mainly by private agencies with the prime motivation of generating profit. The are several issues that need to be reviewing to develop a success cultural heritage tourism industry especially in understanding different perspectives between tourism operators, cultural heritage managers and the communities itself. Tourism operator runs a tourism business and serve customer but have constraints in accessing to the site they want to visit and their products. Tourism operator depends on a market that can have strong seasonal variation such as holiday periods and yearly events. Tourism operators need a great deal of certainty in access, timing and facilities to deliver reliable and efficient service to domestic and international clients. Heritage managers have a primary duty to protect and conserve the site under their control. The cultural heritage such as arts performance, dance and events, may be not affected directly from development of tourism industry and increasing of tourist arrivals, but cultural heritage site may be affected. Because of the fragility of the site, public access to heritage site is not always appropriate or may have to be restricted. Other than that, heritage managers have obligations and strong ethic of providing education and recreation for public about the site in their care. Other than tourism operator and heritage managers, there is also local community where the heritage site located where they may be keen to develop tourism, but they may also protective of their privacy and wary of the effects that tourism might have. Therefore, it is important to establish early needs, interests and aspiration of the local community.

Local communities should be consulted with the tourism planning, development and operation of the heritage site. With the involvement of local communities, it will help ensuring that the tourism activity is sensitive to community purposes and ambition. It also will be able to capture the essence of the site and its people. Table 2 below showed the list of issues that arise in cultural heritage tourism industry faced by tourism operators, heritage managers and local communities. One of the issues and challenges in managing cultural heritage asset in Malaysia are in terms of
funding. Managing cultural heritage assets such as heritage building, is considered as expansive and costly to some people, which normally funded by government or private institution. (Ismail et al., 2014)

# 3 METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach is used to identify the issues and challenges in providing the accessibility in National Heritage building. Preliminarily, the issues are gathered through a thorough literature study on Heritage Tourism and Accessibility policy from other countries. The indicators or variables were then validated through face-to-face semi-structured interview technique involving curators in the National Heritage building. Inputs from the curator are needed to establish the current issues in practice to provide the accessibilities in National Heritage Building. The transcription and interpretation from the interview findings are carried out using Atlas.ti© qualitative software. To ease the face-to-face semi-structured interview process, the questions were prepared in an interview form. The initial process for the semi-structured interview is short-listing the potential participants based on list of National Heritage Building given by the National Heritage Department of Malaysia. The interview also includes with individual's demographic details' that include their designation, academic background, years of working experience and current responsibility and duty.

# 4 FINDING AND ANALYSIS

In this research, open-ended questions were asked to the participants relating to the accessibility in National heritage building in general, the management issues and currently their challenges in providing the accessibility in National Heritage Building. Since the interview session is semi-structured, probe questions were further asked thereafter, where necessary. Generally, all organisations state that financial become main challenge in providing the accessibility in their building. Monetary is a backbone to any organisational to provide good facilities and services to the end user regardless any category (L.N. Safiullin, I.R. Gafurov, R.N. Shaidullin, 2014). A network by Atlas.ti© is used to relate the participants' responses based on the listed main coding, as presented in Figure 1. Based on the network of relationship, as seen in figure 1, it depicted that there are three main challenges (coded in red) derived from the interviews. These three challenges are financial capability, building physical, organisational

structure and behaviour. Every one of these challenges will be discussed furthermore in next paragraph.

## 4.1 Financial Capability

According to the interviews, it is revealed that financial (coded in green) become main challenge to provide accessibility in National Heritage building. The funding received by these building is including all activities such as exhibition or carnival, overhead expenses such as staff salary, stationaries, and all outsource contracts and maintenance of the building example small rectification works. It is hard for the management used small amount of money to provide accessibility in the building. This provided from Participant 7, Quotation 5 (p7:q5) it is also verified by other participants in their quotations (p3:q5, p2:q7, p1:q11, p1:q6).

## 4.2 Building Physical

In order to provide accessibility in the National Heritage Building, the building physical need to be ready to be install the accessibility. The National Building Heritage was built decades before any guidelines, acts or by - laws even existed in Malaysia. Therefore, these buildings were not provided with disabled access. Thus, for these buildings to be equipped with accessibility, the building physical need to be ready to receive the accessible. This revealed by participant 3, quotation 8 and was verified by participant 5, quotation 2. As depicted in figure 1, to provide accessible in the National Heritage Building it is very associated with the available funding.

## 4.3 Organisation Structure and Behaviour

The behaviour or structure of an organisation always become backbone of any uprising matter. As mentioned by participant 3, quotation 7. The National Building Operators have conflict to provide accessibility for the disabled as there were no specific manual or regulation or procedure for them to refer to. They are aware that once that an old building gazetted to be National Heritage Building, there are acts, guidelines that need to be obliged before the building can be altered or renovated. As a National Heritage Building that been adapted to become museums or gallery, the building must have all current requirements including accessibility for the disabled as this building are opened to the public. It is revealed by participant 2, quotation 9 and was verified by other participants (p1,17: p3, q11). To provide this accessibility, the behaviour of the management also contributed to the ease of providing the accessibility. Persistence of wanting accessible for the disabled in the national heritage building within limited budget and strict acts are among the successful factors in providing it. It is revealed from participant 3, quotation 12 and was verified by other participants (p1,q16:p2,q8)

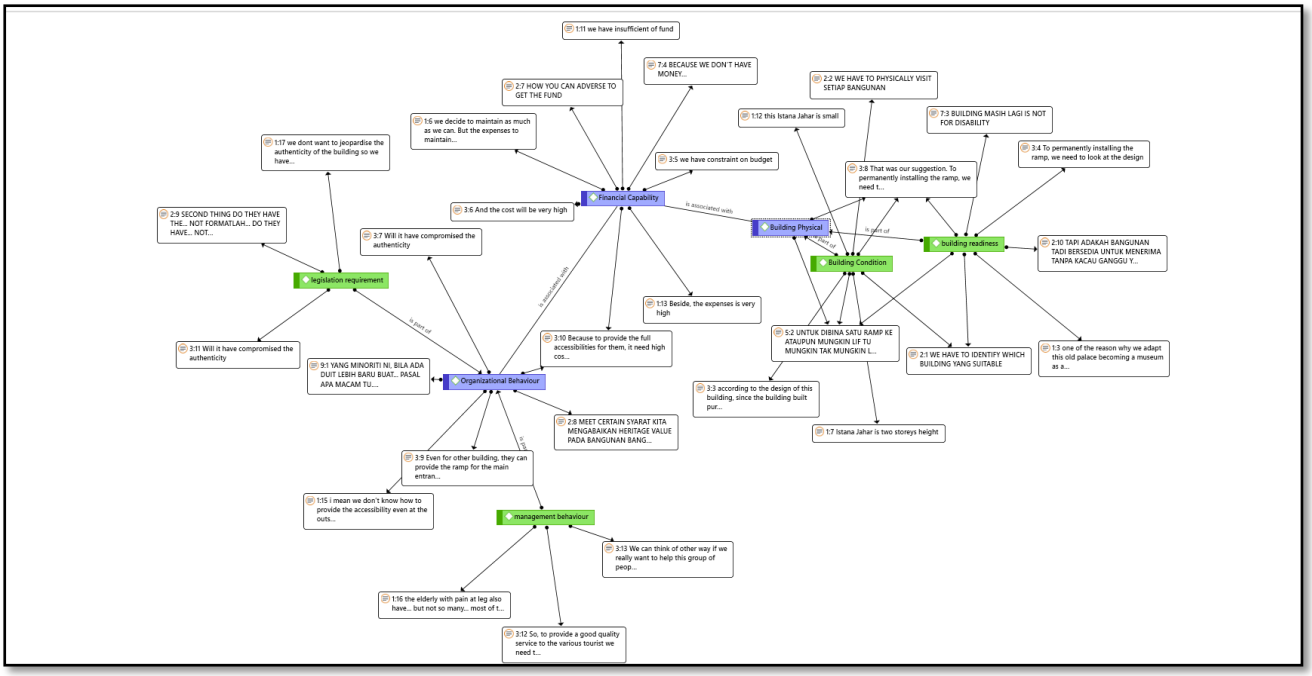



**Figure 1** Network of Relationship

## CONCLUSION

As Heritage tourism grow strongly in Malaysia, there are a lot of gaps in making this heritage tourism accessible to the tourist. According to the interviews done, a few issues arose. In making the national heritage building accessible, the building should be ready and in a good condition. It is not easy to make the heritage building accessible by the disabled. To install a lift, need a specification or guideline or a procedure so that the facilities installed will not compromise the authentication of the building. Besides that, financial become one of the main factors contribute to the challenge of providing the accessible in the building. Mainly budget was given by the government to pay all management affairs, maintenance (inhouse or outsource), exhibitions and events. If there is extra money or budget approval, then only the management can think of installing facilities for the disabled. In term of management organisation, conflict of principles and the attitude of management officers become obstacles to provide the facilities.

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