

Visualising Resilience: Aesthetic Narratives and Community-Driven Conservation of Jami Mosque of Mentok, Indonesia

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Future resilience in heritage-rich urban environments requires approaches that integrate cultural continuity, community agency, and adaptive design thinking. Situated within the Global South, where colonial legacies, rapid urban change, and community-led heritage practices intersect, this study critically examines how aesthetic narratives can catalyze participatory heritage conservation. The focus is the Jami Mosque of Mentok—a religious and cultural landmark in West Bangka Regency—positioned within the 2025–2029 Cultural Advancement Strategy (CAS). This study not only reconstructs the heritage narratives of the Jami Mosque of Mentok but also critically situates them within a comparative framework of Western heritage theories and Global South praxis, highlighting the tensions and adaptations that emerge. Historically and architecturally significant, the mosque also functions as a living space for the spiritual and social life of the local Malay community, embodying a cultural sign that articulates the semiotics of *tawhīd* (Islamic principle of divine unity) in its spatial and symbolic fabric. Building on this significance, the research employs an interdisciplinary qualitative approach using Pictorial Narrative Mapping (PNM) as a qualitative visual tool that combines community storytelling with diagrammatic representation to trace spatial memory and symbolic meaning. Findings indicate that participatory conservation fosters collective ownership and transmits values across generations, reinforcing cultural identity as a foundation for resilience. Field evidence from the Jami Mosque of Mentok shows how locally embedded practices both affirm and extend Western semiotic frameworks, reframing them through a Global South perspective. The study positions the mosque as a pilot project for sustainable cultural policy through formal heritage designation, digital documentation, scholarly engagement with colonial-era Malay architecture, and educational religious tourism. By integrating narrative, participatory, and visual strategies, this research offers a transferable model for heritage policy

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Abstract



that is responsive to social change and technological innovation, aligning with global discussions on resilient, inclusive, and citizen-driven urban futures.

Keywords: adaptive design thinking; Global South heritage; Jami Mosque of Mentok; participatory conservation; Pictorial Narrative Mapping (PNM).

Introduction

In the discourse on sustainable urban futures, heritage conservation is often framed through technical preservation and regulatory compliance, leaving the narrative and participatory dimensions underexplored. This omission is critical, as the resilience of historic religious sites depends not only on their physical integrity but also on the living cultural meanings sustained by their communities. The Jami Mosque of Mentok, although recognized as a protected cultural heritage building in Bangka, has not yet been supported by a formal conservation guideline. This absence underscores its role as a living civic space where cultural identity and resilience are sustained through everyday practices rather than through established preservation protocols. As part of the West Bangka Regency Cultural Advancement Strategy (CAS) 2025–2029, the mosque provides a critical context for examining how aesthetic narratives can function as instruments of participatory conservation and as vehicles for integrating cultural policy renewal. Accordingly, the mosque is examined here not as a completed conservation project but as a heritage site of contested status, analyzed retrospectively within the policy framework of the forthcoming CAS 2025–2029.

This local case must also be situated within broader debates on heritage conservation. Within this discourse, scholarship remains dominated by Western frameworks that prioritize material authenticity and regulatory compliance, while Global South praxis emphasizes community agency, cultural continuity, and adaptive participation. This divergence has not been systematically examined in Indonesian mosque conservation, creating the gap this study addresses. In response, this study positions aesthetic narrative as both a preservation tool and a mechanism for civic engagement, challenging conventional conservation models that marginalize local voices in favor of expert-driven approaches (Brittain et al., 2021). By interpreting and visually documenting architectural forms, materials, symbols, and design patterns (Ebrahimbaysalami, 2024), aesthetic narratives enable the rearticulation of local histories in ways that resonate with contemporary needs. Building on cultural storytelling and place-based identity (Duan et al., 2025; Lu et al., 2020), this approach mobilizes community participation not as a supplementary activity but as a core driver of cultural continuity and adaptive capacity (Saad, 2022). Visual documentation thus operates as both an archival and an advocacy medium, particularly for heritage-listed buildings of high historical value (Wahab ahmed et al., 2024; H. Wang et al., 2024). By integrating narrative, visual, and participatory strategies, this model establishes a framework for future resilience that is both locally grounded and globally relevant.

Within this broader critique, previous scholarship has tended to overlook the critical role of aesthetic narratives in CAS, particularly in the conservation of historic mosques as embodiments of living heritage. Within the emerging discourse on resilient heritage futures, three dominant applications of aesthetic narratives can be identified. First, aesthetic narratives function as a conservation strategy that integrates the symbolic, historical, and visual values of heritage buildings (Yan et al., 2024), constructing cultural meaning through community stories, collective experiences, and local traditions (Ren et al., 2025). Visual documentation—such as photographs, architectural drawings, and illustrative renderings—serves to bridge historical values with contemporary functions in a harmonious manner (Devitasari et al., 2021). Second, aesthetic narratives are advanced through three-dimensional modeling to accurately reconstruct architectural elements (González et al., 2024), supporting sustainable restoration practices and reinforcing the community's collective memory (Buragohain et al., 2024; Kallus & Shamur, 2015). Third, aesthetic narratives operate as interpretive media in cultural tourism, shaping perception, reflection, and

emotional engagement (Noy, 2012), thereby strengthening place identity and destination appeal (Ebejer, 2021; Sari & Putra, 2020). Considered together, these trends enrich the cultural policy toolkit by linking heritage preservation, community participation, and locally grounded tourism development—yet their potential to systematically enhance adaptive capacity and future resilience remains underexamined.

Diverging from prevailing trends in the use of aesthetic narratives for cultural conservation, this study applies a multidimensional analytical framework to examine how participatory conservation of historic buildings—particularly mosques—can be integrated into regional CAS. Importantly, the framework of aesthetic narrative was not consciously adopted by stakeholders. Instead, this research applies it retrospectively as an analytical lens to interpret community practices, narratives, and spatial experiences associated with the Jami Mosque. Using qualitative thematic analysis of interviews, participatory observations, and community-led documentation, it operationalizes aesthetic narratives through visual media to reveal the symbolic, aesthetic, and spatial functions that articulate local identity. Through semiotic and historical analyses, the research traces the evolution of narratives within the mosque's history, linking processes of meaning-making to broader social contexts and policy frameworks. By framing the mosque as an “unwritten archive” (Foster, 1996; Hall, 1997), the study reveals how the Tanjung Malay community actively produces and re-contextualizes the meaning of sacred space in response to the intersecting forces of colonialism, modernity, and social pluralism. The core argument is that methodical, contextually grounded PNM—via photography, illustration, and spatial mapping—serves not merely as a record but as a narrative medium that reinforces cultural values, strengthens identity, and clarifies symbolic meaning. By aligning past values with present functions, this approach becomes a strategic tool for sustaining heritage and socio-cultural resilience, exemplified in its application to the West Bangka Regency CAS 2025–2029.

Aesthetic Narratives

Aesthetic narrative is a documentary and storytelling method that captures the aesthetic dimensions of everyday environments—buildings, colors, textures, and human activities—through symbolic language, emotionally resonant storylines, and compelling characters (Quaye et al., 2023; Sari & Putra, 2020). It documents a place's authentic visual character, informs conservation decisions, and reveals the continuity between present functions and past values (Hromada et al., 2024). Narrative characters interpret the link between physical form and cultural meaning, record community practices, and affirm collective identity and memory (Kallus & Shamur, 2015; Ren et al., 2025), while researcher-practitioners use them to build shared understandings of the past (Groth et al., 2024). Aesthetically informed visual documentation strengthens the image of heritage buildings as cultural icons and tourism assets (Yan et al., 2024), enriches visitor experiences, and reconstructs a place's social and cultural image (Luo et al., 2022). As a conservation method, it integrates historical values, local identity, and spatial experience in visual and emotional terms, advancing community-based cultural development and enhancing heritage resilience.

Participatory Conservation

Participatory conservation engages local communities directly in decision-making and planning to safeguard cultural landscapes, ensuring that choices on architectural form, traditions, and functional adaptation—such as in mosque preservation—are reached through consensus rather than imposed top-down (Ajar, 2025). Balancing policy directives with grassroots initiatives is vital for sustaining Islamic heritage, reinforcing identity, and supporting sustainable urban form (Saad, 2022). Such approaches build collective awareness, mobilize action, and strengthen local identity (Ataöv et al., 2022). Participation is either institution-based or actor-based, with three main forms: community-located, community-based, and community-driven initiatives (Matarrita-Cascante et

al., 2019). The participation also supports sustainable tourism that aligns cultural preservation with economic growth (Rahayu et al., 2023; Wani et al., 2025), and local involvement in ecotourism fosters ownership, responsibility, and more effective conservation (Kia, 2021; Salimi et al., 2025). Overall, participatory conservation integrates preservation, empowerment, and sustainability into an inclusive, adaptive framework for community-driven futures.

Historic Mosque Conservation

The conservation of historic mosques seeks to extend the lifespan of cultural heritage assets by safeguarding their historical, intellectual, educational, religious, spiritual, cultural, and social values. Such efforts ensure that these legacies remain relevant and beneficial to both present and future generations. Beyond preventing the loss of irreplaceable assets, conservation also supports sustainable cultural tourism. Strategies for preserving Islamic cultural heritage are grounded in sustainability principles that align with the spiritual and aesthetic values of Islam (Aboul-Enein, 2017; Alokun et al., 2024; Mazzetto, 2023; Rassool, 2021). Symbolic reverence for nature further reinforces sustainability as a guiding principle in mosque conservation (Abedi-Sarvestani & Shahvali, 2008; Alnajjar & Dinçel, 2024; Nwosu, 2022). Multidimensional preservation practices not only prolong the physical integrity of the structures but also strengthen cultural identity and enhance the appeal of religious tourism. Visual documentation, digital technologies, symbolic theory, and Islamic aesthetic principles together form the foundation of a holistic and sustainable conservation model (Alghamdi & Al-Ashwal, 2025; Çakiroğlu et al., 2025; Mahmoud et al., 2024). Through this approach, the conservation of historic mosques safeguards not only the material fabric of the buildings but also the spiritual meanings and cultural narratives they embody—thereby nurturing active public stewardship and ensuring heritage can thrive amid future challenges.

Cultural Advancement Strategy (CAS)

CAS is a systematic approach to preserving and adaptively renewing Cultural Heritage Buildings (CHBs) so that they remain relevant to contemporary needs without erasing their historical and cultural significance. CAS extends beyond the physical preservation of structures to encompass the rearticulation of place meaning. As a renewal strategy, it emphasizes the active involvement of local communities and the integration of local knowledge at every stage of a heritage building's life cycle—from site planning to operational management (Barrera et al., 2016; Luo et al., 2022; Zhong et al., 2024). Such engagement often emerges in response to social resistance, where cultural symbols are mobilized to generate new meanings and reinforce collective identity (Giblin, 2013), with the broader aim of enhancing community well-being through the strategic use of cultural assets (Zhou et al., 2018).

CAS functions as a bridge between the past (tradition) and the future (innovation) (Crossley, 2000; Li & Karakowsky, 2002; Pan, 2024), ensuring that historic sites—such as heritage buildings, mosques, and other culturally significant landmarks—are neither erased nor replaced, but instead remain vibrant and meaningful within modern contexts (K. Wang & Fouseki, 2025). At the same time, CAS operates as a form of cultural marketing, integrating cultural values into heritage promotion and communication strategies (Taneja et al., 2023). In doing so, institutions move beyond merely “selling” products to honoring and celebrating cultural diversity as an integral part of regional identity. This dual role positions CAS as both a preservation framework and a civic engagement tool, fortifying heritage systems to remain relevant and responsive in changing times.

Research Objective

The renewal of cultural values in CHBs, exemplified by the Jami Mosque of Mentok, demands an approach that safeguards physical heritage while enhancing its environmental image through aesthetic narratives. Within a region's CAS, such narratives bridge preservation, spatial aesthetics,

and social participation, offering a cost-effective alternative to large-scale projects and fostering public ownership and cohesion. For policymakers and planners, they enable contextually grounded, socially inclusive interventions that avoid top-down, commercialized aesthetics. This study examines how aesthetic characteristics can reconstruct the mosque's cultural value and how observational factors shape community perceptions, positioning aesthetic narratives as strategic tools for civic engagement and heritage resilience. It further constructs the heritage narratives of the Jami Mosque of Mentok and situates them within a comparative framework of Western theories and Global South praxis, bridging these perspectives to reveal the tensions, adaptations, and opportunities that arise when global frameworks meet local practices. Using a multidimensional framework—participatory (community involvement), historical (local narratives, archives, ethnohistory), PNM (architectural forms, ornamentation, *tawhīd*-Islamic principle of divine unity-inspired symbols), and strategic (policy integration)—the research frames the mosque as a dynamic cultural space. Situated in the Global South, it demonstrates how participatory conservation rooted in local values transforms sacred space into a living arena of civic life, reinforcing identity, agency, and adaptive capacity in the face of social change.

Research Design and Case Study

Mentok, on Bangka Island, embodies two UNESCO cultural landscape criteria—multicultural architecture and traditional settlement patterns—shaped by its nineteenth-century tin and pepper trade and the openness of its inhabitants to cultural hybridity (Kurniawan et al., 2020). The Jami Mosque of Mentok, built in 1881 by Temenggung Kertanegara II Abang Muhammad Ali as the first stone mosque replacing an eighteenth-century wooden *surau*, reflects this layered history. Over time, the mosque has served as a center of Islamic education, a site of national struggle, and a locus of community adaptation, undergoing successive physical modifications from wartime repairs to the addition of public facilities. Designated a Cultural Heritage Building of West Bangka in 2018, it remains a focal point of Islamic cultural life, with its intangible values renewed annually through the *Ziarah Kute Seribu* (pilgrimage) led by Malay and Arab communities. The continuity of use, adaptation, and community stewardship positions the mosque not merely as a preserved monument but as a living civic space. Such continuity refers to the mosque's ongoing role as a site of worship, communal deliberation, and cultural negotiation, sustained through everyday practices rather than through formal preservation protocols. Its continued use for education, ritual pilgrimage, and community gatherings demonstrates how heritage functions dynamically, integrating spiritual meaning with social resilience. Operationalization of these practices distinguishes the mosque from a static monument and situates it as an active arena of cultural continuity within the West Bangka context.

Data Collection Techniques

The research adopts an interdisciplinary qualitative approach combining participatory conservation and aesthetic narrative to engage the local community in preserving the Jami Mosque of Mentok through interviews, observation, and FGDs, supported by ethnohistorical inquiry, visual documentation, and spatial analysis. Architectural, ornamental, and symbolic elements are examined as expressions of Malay spiritual and social values and as *tawhīd*-inspired cultural signifiers, with PNM used not only to record but to co-construct heritage narratives linking lived experience to spatial and symbolic representation (Lapum et al., 2015). The study further integrates community-based data collection, heritage curation, and policy formulation, supported by comparative analysis to link local and global contexts.

The following subsections disaggregate the methods to clarify specific objectives, data sources, and analytical procedures, thereby addressing the interdisciplinary scope of the study with greater precision:

Methods

Ethnohistorical Inquiry

Archival research and oral history were employed to trace the historical trajectory and evolving meanings of the mosque. Primary sources included five colonial records from KITLV, five local government and mosque archives, and secondary literature on Bangka's tin and pepper trade. In addition, eight semi-structured interviews (45–90 minutes each) with religious leaders, community elders, and mosque caretakers provided oral traditions and community perspectives spanning from the eighteenth century to the present.

Visual Documentation and Spatial Analysis

To examine how the mosque's material form and spatial setting embody tangible and intangible heritage values, this study integrated visual documentation with spatial analysis. Architectural and symbolic elements were recorded through high-resolution photographs, field sketches, spatial diagrams, and historical images from the 1940s–1950s, while community rituals were documented during three months of fieldwork in 2022. Building on this record, spatial relationships between the mosque, surrounding settlements, and adjacent public spaces were analyzed using five historical maps, three contemporary maps, and the waqf land plan, supported by six weeks of systematic observation of congregational patterns and community activities. Simple visual mapping was applied to assess accessibility and linkages. Together, these methods provided a comprehensive basis for evaluating architectural continuity, adaptive transformations, and the mosque's role within the wider urban and cultural landscape, directly informing the discussion on spatial transformation and heritage integrity.

Community-based Data Collection

Community perspectives were collected through eight interviews, two focus group discussions with cultural activists and government officials, and a PNM survey involving forty-five respondents. These methods explored perceptions of heritage value, architectural signifiers, and aspirations for conservation, generating both qualitative narratives and quantitative perception data.

Analytical Structure

Data were analyzed through a comparative framework informed by aesthetic narrative theory and Southeast Asian Mosque case studies. The analysis focused on three dimensions: historical narratives (archives and oral histories), visual evidence (architecture, symbols, rituals), and spatial patterns (maps and observations). Table 1 synthesizes the materials by linking contexts, sources, and values, revealing how colonial history, construction processes, architectural elements, cultural influences, and Malay design traditions generate both tangible outcomes (urban form, building fabric, construction techniques) and intangible meanings (religious devotion, interethnic solidarity, cultural adaptation, and identity). Taken together, the analysis illustrates how the Jami Mosque embodies material continuity while sustaining evolving cultural significance, positioning it as both a local archive and part of a wider regional discourse.

Comparative Analytical Framework

To ensure analytical consistency, this study employs a comparative framework that juxtaposes Western heritage theories with Global South praxis. Data from ethnohistorical sources, visual-spatial mapping, and PNM are systematically aligned with both sets of criteria, enabling the study to trace points of convergence and divergence between global theoretical models and locally embedded practices. In doing so, the analysis clarifies how the Jami Mosque of Mentok embodies both inherited frameworks and context-specific adaptations.

To interpret the findings, the study draws on Hall (1997) and Eco's (1986) cultural semiotics, reading the mosque as a living semiotic space where symbols, rituals, and structures converge to

produce meaning. Within this framework, the mosque is positioned as both a repository of memory and a civic space that strengthens cohesion, agency, and cultural resilience.

Context	Source	Tangible Values	Intangible Values
Mentok During the Colonial Period	Archival Records of Mentok from KITLV	Visual documentation of Mentok's urban development as the historical context of the mosque.	Colonial Socio-Political Dynamics Influencing the Construction and Function of the Mosque.
Historical Background of the Mosque's Construction	Reconstructing oral traditions and local histories	Introducing key figures and interethnic interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ The spirit of resistance was deeply intertwined with religious devotion and aspirations for social equality. _ Ethnic participation played a vital role in shaping communal identity. _ Religious traditions have been actively preserved. _ New local customs have emerged and are now celebrated which has become part of a renewed interpretation of spiritual and cultural heritage.
Architectural Elements of the Jami Mosque of Mentok	Measured field surveys and digitally rendered drawings narrate the mosque's 19th-century construction technologies.	Traditional architectural education is fostered through documentation and interpretation. While new functional spaces have been added, original components remain carefully preserved. The main structure retains its 19th-century Malay eclectic style.	Language and identity preservation are integral to the conservation approach.
Cultural Influences on Architectural Components	A comparative study of the architectural elements of the Jami Mosque of Mentok and the cultural forces that shaped contemporaneous mosques.	The design reflects a distinctive colonial-era Malay eclecticism, evident in building elements and construction techniques.	Processes of acculturation and cultural adaptation are embedded in the mosque's character, shaped by interactions between local and colonial traditions—including spiritual and social values.
Cultural Signification in Malay Mosque Design	Documentation of the ideas, practices, and material artifacts of the Malay community in Mentok.	Key factors reveal the aesthetic dimensions of local philosophical thought.	The use of indigenous Malay terminology and design aesthetics affirms and sustains local cultural identity.

Table 1

Aesthetic Narrative & Context

The findings show that most historical and cultural assets in West Bangka—particularly in Mentok District— maintained buildings, sites, and artifacts whose conditions range from intact to severely degraded, with many lacking formal Cultural Heritage status and thus legal protection. Since 2017, the local government has taken incremental steps, including forming a Cultural Heritage

Results

Expert Team (TACB) to improve documentation, assessment, and designation, yet limited expertise and institutional capacity have slowed progress; by 2018, only 55 objects had been recorded under the ten heritage categories defined in Law No. 5/2017. The Jami Mosque of Mentok, built in 1881–1883 as the first stone mosque in the region, embodies nineteenth-century Malay–Chinese solidarity and remains a living symbol of Mentok’s multiethnic identity, earning national Cultural Heritage Building status in 2010. Its preservation is challenged by both policy and technical gaps, requiring integrated physical and narrative strategies—spanning architectural assessment, participatory conservation, aesthetic interpretation, and adaptive updating to protect its material fabric, sustain its cultural meanings, and strengthen community agency for long-term resilience.

Heritage at the Crossroads: Aesthetic and Social Narratives of the Jami Mosque

The study focuses on the construction of the Jami Mosque of Mentok, along with its subsequent reconstruction and modifications, situated in Tanjung Subdistrict, Mentok, West Bangka Regency. The mosque, with a total floor area of 446.12 m², is jointly managed by the Jami Mosque of Mentok Prosperity Council (*Dewan Kemakmuran Masjid, DKM*) and the local Malay community of Mentok. It stands within a historically segregated settlement cluster of Malay and Chinese ethnic groups, a spatial arrangement established by the Dutch colonial administration in 1824 (Fig. 1-A1 & A2). Within this cluster are numerous heritage buildings and landscapes, including the Kung Fuk Miaw Temple (2), the tombs of Malay nobility who founded the town of Mentok (4), the residence of a Malay leader (5), and Surau Tanjung (Arab kampung prayer house) of the Arab community (6), which form a historically layered urban landscape.

Fig. 1

Author’s Analysis of
Heritage Structures in
Mentok City



The setting positions the mosque as both a religious anchor and a catalyst for interethnic interaction, community cohesion, and the safeguarding of shared heritage—functions essential to sustaining civic engagement

and strengthening the community’s adaptive capacity in the face of future challenges.

Built between 1880 and 1883, the Jami Mosque of Mentok emerged from the intertwined social, economic, and political currents of the late nineteenth century, driven by the need for a larger worship space, the Malay community’s unity under colonial pressure, and its role as cultural resistance asserting Islamic and local identity. Initiated by leaders such as Demang Abang and Mohammad Ali (Temenggung Kertanegara II) with support from elders, religious figures, and a multiethnic network—including Malay, Chinese, and local villagers—the project was sustained through *gotong royong* (communal cooperation) and the use of both local and imported materials. Land contribution from Abang Muhyidin’s family, together with cross-authority support from colonial and Chinese leadership, underscored its broad-based legitimacy.

The Visualization of participatory conservation in colonial-era Mentok integrates geographical, social, and political context into a critical narrative (Fig. 2). Colonial maps (1799–early 20th century) depict Mentok as a space mapped and controlled by imperial power (Fig. 2.a), while the existence of the *Urang Mentok* (Malay community of Mentok) reveals a living identity amid exploited natural resources; segregated settlements highlight unequal access to land (Fig. 2b & 2c), and Mount Menumbing—recurrent in colonial maps (Fig. 2.a) serves as both a landmark and a metaphor for

colonial surveillance. More than a historical record, the imagery becomes an interpretive space to interrogate how mapping and conservation reinforced power relations and shaped local identity. The mosque's monumental form and the collective labor of men and women alike cemented it as more than a place of worship: it became a lasting emblem of civic solidarity, cultural identity, and adaptive resilience that continues to anchor the community in the face of change. By prompting viewers to question the past, it affirms heritage as a living discourse that fosters civic awareness and strengthens cultural resilience in the face of contemporary challenges. These findings not only reveal the mosque's role in shaping aesthetic and social narratives but also illustrate how local praxis aligns with, and at times diverges from, Western heritage frameworks.



Fig. 2

Colonial maps (a), the *Urang Mentok* community (b), segregated settlements (c), and Mount Menumbing together illustrate the interplay of imperial control, local identity, and colonial surveillance, Source: KITLV Image Collection, Leiden University Libraries.

The Jami Mosque of Mentok, a two-story structure with a double-tiered roof and a nineteenth-century arched gateway, retains about 90% of its original fabric (Fig. 3). Community-led restoration by the local Malay population has replaced elements damaged during the Japanese bombing of 1942, while preserving the building's overall integrity. Though some original features, including the first ablution area and its iron columns, are no longer in use, the mosque remains a potent symbol of local heritage. Its sustained authenticity and layered history exemplify how community-based conservation can protect material culture while reinforcing civic engagement and the adaptive capacity needed for long-term cultural resilience.

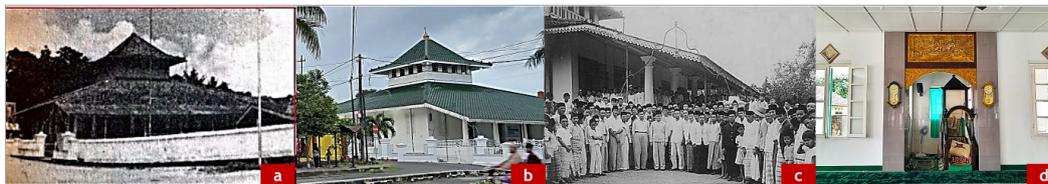


Fig. 3

Jami Mosque of Mentok: (a) photo by M. Jamaludin Isa, estimated to be from the 1950s; (b) photo by the author, taken in 2022; (c) photo of an Indonesian leader performing Friday prayers during his exile in 1949 (M. Jamaludin Isa); and (d) photo by the author showing the mosque's pulpit.

The Jami Mosque of Mentok is experiencing structural deterioration in several areas (Fig. 4). Repairs remain pending as proposals from the DKM and TACB are still under government review. Given the current conditions, any intervention must follow the original construction methods, with decayed timber tested before replacement. Such technical requirements are essential to preserving both authenticity and structural safety. Within this context, the negotiated, multi-stakeholder process underscores that heritage conservation is not only about safeguarding physical integrity but also about fostering civic participation and strengthening the community's adaptive capacity for the future.

Negotiating Change: Spatial Transformation and Heritage Integrity

The Jami Mosque of Mentok has undergone significant spatial transformation since the 1950s, as seen in archival records and the 1985 waqf land plan. Additions such as a library, *madrasah*-elementary Islamic school (2008), multipurpose hall (2012), and both a minaret and student dormitory (2015) reflect evolving community needs, while shifts in materials and forms signal

changing aesthetic values and construction methods (Fig.5). The removal of the original *qola* (ab- lution pool) and the creation of two new ablu- tion areas demonstrate adaptive reorganization but also challenge the preservation of the mosque’s earliest fabric. Together, these changes reveal an ongoing negotiation between functional demands and heritage integrity—one that sustains civic engagement and strengthens the community’s capacity for resilient, future-oriented stewardship. The spatial configuration of the Jami Mosque of Mentok emerges from the interplay of its natural landscape, physical elements, and intangible cultural heritage, reflecting the history and values of the Mentok community. The mosque’s identity is defined not solely by its architectural form, but also by the traditions, collective memory, and cultural practices that animate it. By combining tangible and intangible dimensions, the analysis underscores the mosque’s role as a living heritage site—one that continues to foster intergenerational knowledge transfer, strengthen civic bonds, and enhance the community’s capacity to adapt and thrive in the face of future challenges. Such negotiations highlight how adaptive practices resonate with Global South approaches while chal- lenging the rigidity of Western conservation frameworks.

Fig. 4

Details of the original condition of culturally significant buildings requiring restoration.

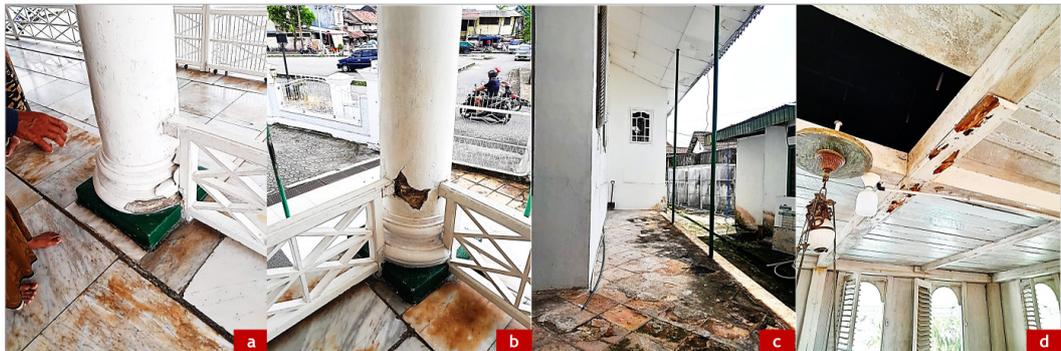
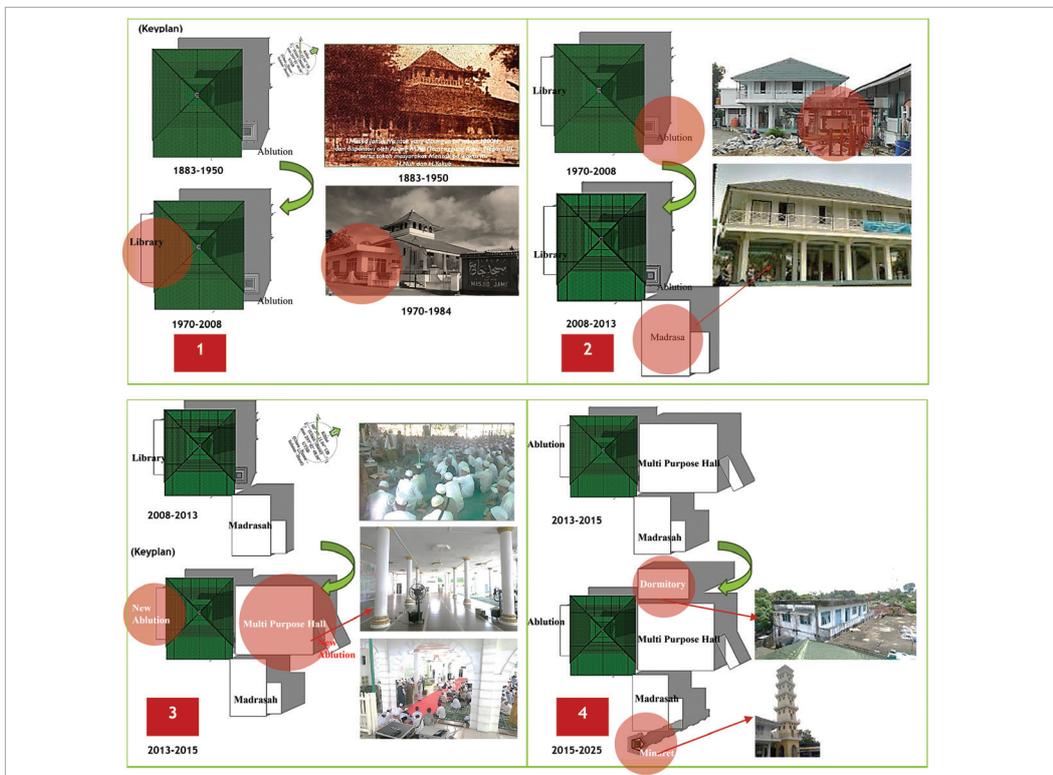


Fig. 5

Documentation by the author on the expanded functions of the Jami Mosque of Mentok site.



Civic Engagement through Participatory Conservation as an Experience

The participatory conservation of the Jami Mosque of Mentok illustrates how heritage preservation can function within a community context, blending top-down coordination by the West Bangka Office of Culture and Tourism with grassroots management by the DKM, composed of local Malay and Arab-descendant residents. While this arrangement ensures a strong commitment to safeguarding ancestral heritage, some perceive a decline in the once-vibrant ethos of togetherness as focus shifts toward physical preservation. The case highlights that conservation must protect not only historic fabric but also the social bonds and cultural meanings it embodies, and that aligning formal structures with community expectations is critical to fostering civic engagement and strengthening the adaptive capacity essential for long-term resilience.

The participatory conservation of the Jami Mosque of Mentok unfolded through three core stages: gathering and validating cultural data with multi-level stakeholder input, synthesizing and drafting the Regional Cultural Strategy for formal adoption, and evaluating the plan to refine priorities and processes (Fig.6). Framed as more than a technical documentation exercise, this sequence reflects a governance approach that relies on collaboration, transparency, and sustained community engagement—strengthening institutional capacity and building the adaptive frameworks essential for the mosques and community's long-term resilience.



Fig. 6

Author participation in Phase 1 of the Participatory Conservation Program for the Jami Mosque of Mentok.

During discussions with participants in the vicinity of the Jami Mosque of Mentok, Fahmi, the mosque's caretaker, explained: *"Many of the mosque's original elements have changed, particularly in its architecture, ornamentation, and spatial layout. But we strive to preserve its traditional values."* He also highlighted the impact of land development on the mosque's function and aesthetics: *"The need for modern facilities and the growing number of worshippers have required certain adjustments, but always with a conservative approach,"* he added. Following the interview, Fahmi guided us through the mosque grounds, from the outer courtyard to the main prayer hall, pointing out facilities such as the parking area, activity rooms, and garden. *"All of this is designed to make worshippers feel comfortable, while still connected to the old values,"* he remarked. The interview shows that preserving the mosque means protecting not only its physical structure but also its social functions and cultural values. Such an approach affirms heritage sites as living civic spaces that foster cohesion, encourage participation, and build the adaptive capacity needed for long-term cultural resilience.

One of the ways the Malay community of Mentok sustains the living cultural values embedded in the Jami Mosque of Mentok is through the *Ziarah Kute Seribu* pilgrimage, held two days after the Eid al-Adha celebration. This event draws thousands of worshippers from Palembang and across Bangka who recognize the mosque's historical significance (Fig.7.a). Religious traditions and communal activities that have evolved in and around the mosque are the direct result of sustained community participation in shaping and safeguarding these living cultural values (Ajar, 2025).

In discussions with members of the *Ziarah Kute Seribu* community, one noted, *"This mosque is not only a place of worship, but also a symbol of Malay cultural identity passed down through generations,"* stressing the need to preserve traditional values. Others warned that modernization could erode such values, while urging historical education for youth— *"If children do not know the history of the mosque's history, they may lose their sense of belonging."* In a focus group, Pak Seno of Mentok Community Heritage described how Malay culture, rooted in the eighteenth

century, endures through language, arts, rituals, and games, adapting to change while safeguarding core values. “If it is not taught, local wisdom can simply disappear,” he cautioned. Together, these voices frame cultural preservation as a living practice that sustains identity, fosters inter-generational knowledge transfer, and strengthens the community’s resilience against social and environmental change.

Fig. 7

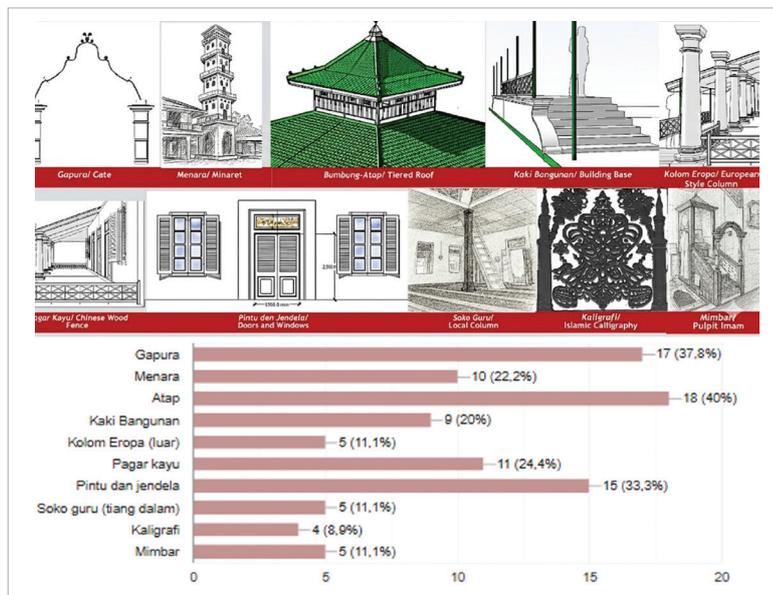
Documentation from the West Bangka Culture and Tourism Office on the intangible values of the Mentok Grand Mosque: (a) Kute Seribu Pilgrimage and (b) Grand Tabligh (Da’wah).



Survey results on the architectural and spatial elements of Masjid Jami Mentok that most strongly reflect Mentok’s cultural identity reveal a clear hierarchy of perception (Fig. 8). The *Bumbung-Atap* (tiered roof) emerged as the most frequently cited feature, mentioned by 18 respondents (40%), underscoring its role as a dominant visual marker and cultural symbol. Close behind, the *Gapura* (gate) was identified by 17 respondents (37.8%), valued both as a religious emblem and as a distinctive landmark. The *Pintu dan jendela* (doors and windows) were highlighted by 15 respondents (33.3%), indicating that ornamental details and the design of openings are integral to the mosque’s aesthetic identity. The *Pagar kayu* (Chinese wooden fence), cited by 24.4% of respondents, reflects continued appreciation of traditional materials and local craftsmanship. The *Menara* (minaret) was noted by 22% as a key building signifier. Other elements—including the *kaki bangunan* (building base) (20%), *Kolom Eropa* (European-style exterior columns) (11.1%), *Soko guru* (local interior column) (11.1%), *Mimbar* (pulpit Imam-praying leader) (11.1%), and *kaligrafi* (Islamic calligraphy) (8.9%)—were acknowledged as contributing to the mosque’s cultural character, though with less prominence. Overall, the findings suggest that large, visually dominant structural components—particularly the roof, minaret, and doors and windows—are perceived as the strongest cultural signifiers, while interior details and ornamental features serve as complementary expressions of Mentok’s architectural heritage.

Fig. 8

Community Experience and Perceptions through PNM Questionnaire.



In a recent focus group on preserving Mentok’s cultural heritage (Fig.9), an academic stressed that “cultural preservation cannot be carried out in isolation” and must involve government, community, and academia for real impact. A cultural community member highlighted technology’s role, noting that “digitalization can

serve as a bridge to introduce local culture to younger generations living in a fast-paced era.” Education emerged as equally vital, with a community leader warning, “If children are not introduced to their culture from an early age, they will grow distant from their roots.” Participants agreed that Mentok’s people must be active agents, not passive custodians, in safeguarding their heritage—laying the groundwork for concrete, sustainable action plans that keep cultural wealth vibrant, adaptive, and a shared civic responsibility for future generations.

The participatory conservation of the Jami Mosque of Mentok reveals the community’s active role in its upkeep, ranging from physical maintenance and sustaining religious traditions rooted in local values to shaping its historical narrative. This engagement not only reinforces collective ownership but also transmits customary values *tawhīd* across generations. More than a preservation tool, participation itself becomes the core of heritage resilience, where the process—rich with interaction, learning, and emotional connection—holds as much value as the physical outcomes. In doing so, conservation emerges as a living practice that cultivates civic responsibility, strengthens cultural identity, and equips the community to adapt and sustain its heritage amid future change. This participatory model underscores the divergence from Western expert-driven models and affirms the Global South praxis of community-led resilience.

Building on this community-driven momentum, the initiative launched on November 8, 2024, resulted in a visual documentation scheme for the mosque that—while drawing methodological inspiration from the Western-framed Burra Charter—remains fundamentally rooted in Malay intellectual traditions. In line with the Indonesian Ministry of Public Works and Housing Regulation No. 19/2021, the preparatory phase encompassed research, identification of cultural significance, physical condition assessment, and a feasibility study, followed by photography, videography, measurement, architectural drawing, and proposed preservation measures. This documentation illustrates how aesthetic narratives emerging from community-led efforts transform visual records into cultural instruments—linking tangible heritage, local participation, and value transmission—thereby reinforcing the mosque’s role as a living heritage site with resilience against future change.

To synthesize the findings, Table 2 summarizes the comparative alignment between Western heritage frameworks and Global South praxis as reflected in the case of the Jami Mosque of Mentok. The comparative perspective outlined here provides the basis for the following discussion.

Aspect	Western Conservation	Participatory Conservation in Mentok (Global South)
Decision-making	Top-down, expert-driven; community input is limited or consultative.	Bottom-up, community-led decisions emerge from local consensus and lived practice.
Focus of Value	Prioritizes material authenticity, physical integrity, and universal heritage criteria.	Prioritizes continuity of meaning, identity, and socio-spiritual function alongside physical form.



Fig. 9

West Bangka
Department of Culture
and Tourism, FGD on
CAS data collection and
formulation.

Discussion

Table 2

Western Frameworks vs.
Global South Praxis in
Heritage Conservation

Aspect	Western Conservation	Participatory Conservation in Mentok (Global South)
Role of Theory	Applies universal frameworks (e.g., Hall, Eco) without major adaptation to local contexts.	Revises and extends theory through local epistemologies, challenging Global North assumptions.
Community Role	Community is a stakeholder but not the primary agent of conservation.	Community is the central actor; conservation is embedded in ritual, gotong royong (communal cooperation), and everyday life.
Approach to Modernization	Modernization is managed through regulation and controlled adaptation.	Modernization is negotiated through integration of technology, design innovation, and adat (custom).
Outcome Orientation	Seeks compliance with international heritage standards and preservation of form.	Seeks resilience by sustaining cultural identity, strengthening social cohesion, and adapting to change.

The Jami Mosque of Mentok's unaltered structure, modest scale, and material integrity embody the architectural knowledge and environmental harmony of its era, privileging simplicity and local attachment over the grandeur seen in Mecca's mosque design (Saad, 2022), and aligning with heritage-preserving precedents like the Kobe Muslim Mosque and Kudus Mosque (Ajar, 2025). While the mosque's physical authenticity positions the site as a valuable living heritage asset, community focus remains on intangible practices, with limited attention to building conservation; historical knowledge is often stronger among outsiders, despite local autonomy over the surrounding built environment (Saad, 2022). Weak awareness of heritage as both national identity and economic potential (Mazzetto, 2023) underscores the need for mosque institutions to integrate tangible and intangible heritage management (Ajar, 2025) in ways that shape Mentok's urban fabric (Kurniawan et al., 2020). Collaborative stewardship could transform the mosque into a cultural hub and recognized Intangible Cultural Heritage, reinforcing civic participation, shared identity, and resilience amid change.

Although participatory conservation of the Jami Mosque of Mentok has begun, engagement remains largely confined to localized initiatives, with planning and implementation still dominated by external actors, making participation more symbolic than substantive (Timmer et al., 2019; Al-Saffar, 2024; Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2019). The 2025–2029 CAS aims to shift toward a community-based model, positioning local stakeholders as active agents, supported by expert guidance to ensure appropriate restoration (Ahmed et al., 2023), with the long-term goal of a fully community-driven framework by 2029–2033. Global precedents—from Guangzhou's placeness approach (Zhong et al., 2024) to mosque preservation in Malacca (Harun & Othman, 2011)—demonstrate that bottom-up models better sustain cultural values than top-down methods (Ajar, 2025; Saad, 2022). Comparable lessons emerge from heritage reconstructions such as Viking ships and wooden churches, which link preservation to public engagement through education and events (Basundoro et al., 2024; Groth et al., 2024). In Mentok, the *Ziarah Kute Seribu* pilgrimage fosters similar emotional bonds, yet gaps in digitalization and intergenerational inclusion persist. Preserving these intertwined values ensures conservation transcends physical safeguarding, sustaining the community's moral, aesthetic, and spiritual capital while reinforcing civic identity, cohesion, and resilience. In this sense, conservation is framed as safeguarding heritage and religious symbolism to strengthen civic identity, intergenerational value transmission, and resilience (Santosa & Noorwatha, 2025). The architectural analysis of the Jami Mosque of Mentok centers on five elements—site, exterior, interior, calligraphy, and ornamentation (Fig.8)—that together integrate aesthetic value, function, and symbolism. Its siting and orientation respond to geographic

and social context, adapting Islamic architecture to local climate and culture while offering an environmental ethic for sustainable human–nature relations (Alnajjar & Dinçel, 2024; Abedi-Sarvestani & Shahvali, 2008). The exterior’s roof form, façade, and structure, and the interior’s spatial layout with mihrab, pulpit, and *soko guru* pillars, synthesize local traditions and foreign influences (Wiryomartono, 2023). Arabic calligraphy and ornamental motifs convey Malay–Islamic identity and the semiotics of *tawhīd*, linking the physical form to theological foundations (Alokun et al., 2024). As cultural signifiers, these elements position the mosque as both a vessel of faith and a marker of collective identity, reinforcing civic pride, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and the adaptive resilience essential to sustaining heritage in a changing world.

The cultural values of the Jami Mosque of Mentok stem from the interplay of ideas, actions, and artifacts in its architectural form (Fig. 8). Elements such as the *Gapura* (gateway), elevated steps, veranda, *qola* (ablution pool), and *bumbung tumpang* (tiered roof) embody Malay–Islamic spiritual and social ideals through both function and symbolism (Rassool, 2021). Using Hall’s (1997) and Eco’s (1976) cultural semiotics, the mosque is read as a living semiotic space where symbols, rituals, and spatial structures converge to produce meaning. These frameworks are critically re-examined, as the Mentok Malay community’s encoding and decoding of architectural symbols reveal the limits of Western theory in capturing Southeast Asia’s layered, multiethnic realities, while extending its interpretive reach through a Global South lens (Miura, 2022; Ray, 2018; Rownd, 2017). In this context, the *bumbung tumpang*, *simbar* (roof finials), and floral–faunal ornamentation function as cultural codes expressing relational *tawhīd*, *tasāmuh* (cultural tolerance), and social harmony. Ritual engagement with key elements—such as vine-motif columns and the *qola* pool—materializes purification, transcendence, cosmic order, and the threshold between sacred and profane realms.

These architectural expressions are inseparable from the core values of the *Urang Melayu* (Malay community) Mentok, which shape their attitudes, behaviors, and life philosophy. Spiritually, they uphold *beriman* (faith), embodying humility, gentleness, and sincerity in living for the sake of God, guided by the *maxim adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah* (customs grounded in Islamic law, with that law itself rooted in the Qur’an). Aesthetically, values such as *bererat* (closeness), *besame* (togetherness), and *baek* (goodness) emphasize kinship, solidarity, compassion, and virtuous conduct remembered across generations. Utilitarian principles—*bijak* (wisdom), *berani* (courage), *bergune* (usefulness), and *besadar* (self-awareness)—promote responsibility, productivity, and social harmony. Nature, regarded as a sign of God’s greatness, inspires Malay cultural motifs that symbolize Islamic appreciation of the natural world, depictions of paradise (Khalifa & Lafi, 2025), and abundance (Ahmad et al., 2018). Together, these values integrate spiritual, social, and functional dimensions, sustaining cultural identity while enhancing adaptive capacity, civic responsibility, intergenerational solidarity, and resilience amid social and environmental change.

The *Urang Melayu Mentok* are regarded as *beradab*—civilized—when embodying values that integrate spiritual, social, and functional dimensions, sustaining cultural identity while enhancing adaptive capacity, civic responsibility, intergenerational solidarity, and resilience amid social and environmental change. In Malay culture, mosque architecture reflects three interrelated values—*al-qimatu an-nafiyiyatu* (utility), *al-qimatu al-jamaliyyatu* (beauty), and *al-qimatu ar-ruhiyyatu* (spirituality)—which, as noted by Mustafa Hasan Badawi in Yulianto (2021), form the essence of Islamic art and reinforce the theological role of conservation (Aboul-Enein, 2017). Shaped through *be’tindak* (concrete acts) and *be’pikir* (reflective interpretation), the mosque serves not only as a place of worship but also as a communal, aesthetic, and spiritual space, where ornamentation and active use embody the convergence of function, beauty, and devotion (Çakiroğlu et al., 2025). The Mentok Malay aesthetic concept, rooted in Islamic manuscripts and lived practice, rests on

three pillars: (1) spiritual and customary values expressed in local terms such as *muet*, *gune*, *bine*, *berumpon*, and *sejiran*; (2) the relational ethic of *membina* (to build) and *beradat* (to uphold custom) in harmony with God, humanity, and nature; and (3) an aesthetic triad of spirituality, beauty, and utility grounded in *tawhīd* (Rassool, 2021). Preserving these intertwined values frames conservation as a dynamic process that transcends the mere safeguarding of physical structures, sustaining both cultural meaning and community resilience.

Aesthetic narratives in heritage conservation, practiced globally, safeguard the historical, spiritual, and symbolic values of sites such as mosques as integral to collective identity (Lukito & Syahid, 2017), while adapting religious and secular functions to sustain both cultural identity and tourism appeal (Chetry, 2025; Mahmoud et al., 2024; Yan et al., 2024). Examples range from Iran's Azadi Monument, uniting history, spirituality, and modernity (Ebrahimbaysalami, 2024), to the Fiu Gallery in Yuyuan and the Parish of Dobruvica, which narrate visual diversity (Hromada et al., 2024; Luo et al., 2022), and public rituals like Indra Jatra and Holi that reinforce local identity (Ren et al., 2025). Yet, without credible grounding, such narratives risk romanticizing poverty and inequality, as seen in parts of the Global South, obscuring political realities (Mostafanezhad, 2013), while top-down, authoritarian mosque projects distort spatial justice (Saad, 2022). Critical, inclusive approaches—sensitive to ideology, policy, and polarization (Bhatt et al., 2024)—are essential to ensure authenticity, civic participation, and resilience. The Jami Mosque of Mentok affirms and extends these concepts by demonstrating how living civic space and adaptive capacity can be grounded in locally embedded values, spirituality, and sustained community participation. Its model strengthens Malay identity, advances SDGs 11 and 16, and embeds conservation in lived practice through donations, volunteerism, and cultural celebrations (Oladeji et al., 2022; Çakıroğlu et al., 2025). In post-conflict contexts, such models rebuild trust (Giblin, 2013) and, through blending tradition with design and technological innovation (Alghamdi & Al-Ashwal, 2025; Pistola et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2025), challenge Global North paradigms by foregrounding *tawhīd*-inspired semiotics, gotong royong, and adat (tradition/custom)-based governance as epistemic contributions to global heritage discourse.

Conclusions

Preserving the Jami Mosque of Mentok requires safeguarding both its physical integrity and the social, spiritual, and aesthetic values of the community. Participatory conservation serves as the primary approach, with the active involvement of local stakeholders—particularly the Mentok Malay community—playing a decisive role in sustaining the heritage over time. However, challenges remain, including limited technical expertise, the dominance of top-down decision-making, and the pressures of modernization. Preservation strategies that integrate aesthetic narratives, intergenerational education, and visual documentation can reinforce local cultural identity. Aligned with the Cultural Advancement Strategy 2025–2029, the proposed approach has potential for policy transfer to other heritage governance contexts at the city or national levels.

Theoretically, this study makes a significant contribution to the development of community-based cultural conservation scholarship through an aesthetic-narrative approach. It expands understanding of how architectural elements, symbolism, and spiritual values can be integrated into heritage preservation, particularly within multiethnic contexts such as Mentok. Grounded in field evidence, these insights reframe the aesthetic-narrative approach through a Global South lens, showing how locally embedded practices can refine and expand theoretical models of cultural conservation. The concept of *Urang Melayu Be'pikir dan Be'tindak* (“The Malay Way of Thinking and Action”) offers a new foundation for interpreting the relationship between space, identity, and cultural practice.

Practically, the findings show that participatory conservation—supported by visual documentation, historical education, and cross-sector collaboration—can strengthen ownership, ensure continuity, and address modernization challenges. Such strategies demonstrate how community

engagement can be embedded in heritage governance to sustain cultural identity and resilience over time.

While the aforementioned contributions are significant, the study acknowledges several limitations that open avenues for further research, including the need for longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of aesthetic-narrative approaches and comparative analyses across different cultural settings.

Building on the theoretical and practical contributions outlined above, the present study also acknowledges several contextual and methodological limitations that warrant consideration. Contextually, its focus on a single cultural site—the Jami Mosque of Mentok—limits the extent to which its findings can be generalized to conservation practices in other regions. Community participation has also remained largely localized and has yet to be fully inclusive of groups beyond the core community. Methodologically, the qualitative approach employed was not complemented by measurable participation evaluation tools, nor did it include a systematic analysis of policy impacts. Future research of this kind would benefit from a mixed-methods approach, incorporating quantitative surveys, spatial analysis, and longitudinal studies to assess the sustainability of conservation efforts over time. Further development could focus on creating locally grounded conservation models that are replicable in other contexts, alongside the integration of digital technologies for documentation and public education. By integrating resilience, transformative change, and meaningful civic engagement, this study offers a transferable model for the Global South, showing that heritage preservation can safeguard the past while shaping an inclusive and adaptive urban future.

Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

Artificial intelligence was employed solely to refine sentence structure and eliminate redundancies in the manuscript. The authors retained full responsibility for the intellectual content, analysis, and interpretation of the work. No AI system was credited as an author, and peer reviewers did not use AI to generate or edit their review reports.

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