

ICONSPADU 2021**International Conference on Sustainable Practices, Development and Urbanisation****UNESCO CREATIVE CITY OF GASTRONOMY: MELAKA'S
POTENTIAL FROM LOCAL COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE**

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21300 Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia, najwanapatah@umt.edu.my**Abstract**

In the post-COVID-19 era, UNESCO advised that cities should respond to the challenge by embracing the concept of becoming UNESCO Creative Cities. This study was conducted to determine the community's readiness to be involved if Melaka is designated as the Creative City of Gastronomy. This research applies the qualitative method of in-depth interviews with nineteen local community representatives from community associations, NGOs, gastronomy-related operators, experts, and external organisations and using thematic analysis to analyse the data. This study gains a comprehensive understanding of the Creative City of Gastronomy, the awareness level of the community, the motivation factor of the local community as well as the challenges regarding the local cuisine conservation efforts. The results show that the local community is ready to participate in the Creative City of Gastronomy if the program is applied in Melaka. Besides, the resources for the creative city, such as the local communities, are well ready, however, they need to be given more exposure and awareness related to the creative city and to be guided continuously. Therefore, this study is beneficial to all stakeholders to transform the Melaka city area into sustainable and resilient in the post-COVID era.

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1. Introduction

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has created a bizarre crisis in the tourism economy, giving an immediate and massive shock to the tourism industry (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020). According to Malaysian Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, the pandemic, which affected the tourism industry in Malaysia, cost the nation's economy about MYR 100 billion in 2020 (Chin, 2021). Due to the high dependency on the tourism industry, Melaka is one of the states that suffered the most from the Covid-19 pandemic. The outbreak reduced the number of tourists by over 70% in 2020 compared to 2019, when Melaka had received 18.7 million tourists, with a total receipt of RM21.298 billion (Bernama, 2021). The pandemic has caused thousands of jobs losses and affected the local community.

To recover from the pandemic effect and sustain the industry while safeguarding the World Heritage Sites (WHS) status given by UNESCO on 7th July 2008, the government should develop a resilient strategy and a more inclusive tourism industry. In a post-COVID situation, UNESCO, (2020) suggested that the cities could respond to this challenge by adopting the concept of becoming UNESCO Creative City Network (UCCN) as a recovery strategy. UCCN is one of the strategies and innovations to help the cities that faced urban development threats and challenges intending to promote cities' social, economic, and cultural development (UNESCO, 2016). By joining the UCCN, the destination can be pushed forward to strengthen its profile, increase its international attractiveness, build momentum on creativity and propel its local creative field and communities. This strategy leveraging renewed interest in sustainability to ensure the future of the city is both resilient and comprehensive in the long term. UCCN could become the vehicle for Melaka cities to develop new initiatives, strategies, and plans at making culture and creativity as a driving force for urban regeneration and sustainable development.

The gastronomy industry has been contributing a significant role to attract overseas and local travelers to Melaka especially with the diversity of gastronomy products. As settlements to numerous colonial powers in the past, Melaka has become a melting pot of Portuguese, Dutch, British, and Asian that display the uniqueness of Malaysian food heritage which attracted a lot of food tourists in Melaka City (Khoo & Badarulzaman, 2014). It also provides the highest employment for the local community in the tourism industry whose job opportunity range is wider in the food and beverage sector. The gastronomy's importance towards the city thus makes Melaka a potential candidate for the Creative City of Gastronomy. The Creative City of Gastronomy could gain an international reputation as a creative and sustainable tourism destination while supporting and complementing its status as a WHS, according to the guideline prepared by UNESCO. The UCCN will focus on cities' actions during the different stages of the pandemic while building a more resilient future for cities. Such an establishment would showcase Melaka's gastronomic image, identity, and prowess within the region and beyond. A strategy promoting sustainable development such as becoming the Creative City of Gastronomy could be helpful to face emergencies and restore the economic and social life of the city after the pandemic.

Nevertheless, to become UCCN, all the stakeholders need to engage and work together in conserving and creative development of the city heritage. The local community is a part of the main stakeholders and the force for the destination becoming a UCCN. Thus, it is crucial to study those aspects

because one of the criteria for Creative City of Gastronomy is to have a vibrant gastronomy community that including women and youngsters, food operators or providers, chefs and restaurateurs, culinary school, students, foodie club, academician, R&D institute and food industry organisation. Furthermore, one of the requirements to become UCCN is a high level of local community involvement (UNESCO, 2021) since they are regarded as stakeholders and custodians of the sites, creating a sense of belonging of the sites and actively participating in the protection of the site (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017). To establish Melaka as the City of Gastronomy, detailed research about the community's perspective regarding UCCN should be conducted.

In the past decade, many academic researchers have documented the connection between the local community readiness and tourism (e.g. Abdullah & Halim, 2018; Kamarudin et al., 2015; Nair & Hamzah, 2015). The Creative City of Gastronomy also received much attention from academic scholars (e.g. Forleo & Benedetto, 2020; Guler, 2016; Khoo & Badarulzaman, 2014; Suhaimi, 2021; Xiaomin, 2017). However, thus far, none of the studies have taken the effort to explore the local community's readiness to be involved if Melaka becomes the Creative City of Gastronomy. The readiness and awareness level of the local community on the local cuisine conservation effort is crucial to the destination manager as the information might serve as an indicator to denote the city's potential of becoming one of the UCCN. It will also assist Melaka's local authority to examine the potential product and services from the supply side to match the possibilities of Melaka to become a Creative City of Gastronomy.

Considering these situations, this study seeks to determine community perspective in terms of their readiness to assist and involve if Melaka becomes the City of Gastronomy. Thereby, this research presents the views of the local community's perspective on the possibilities for Melaka to become the Creative City of Gastronomy.

2. Problem Statement

Melaka is distinctly identified as a tourism destination as its capital city was recognized as the WHS on 7th July 2008 by the UNESCO under the title "Melaka, Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca" because of its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) (UNESCO, 2008). The multiculturalism of Melaka is manifested through its architecture, culture, and living heritage which meet three OUV criteria which are (i) unique and exceptional testimony to a culture tradition, (ii) building or architectural ensemble human history, and (iii) traditional human settlement which is representative of a culture tradition to a civilization.

As a World Heritage Site (WHS), Melaka should develop according to the context of WHS as stated by UNESCO and need to be synchronized with its OUV (Ullah & Saidin, 2018). The safeguarding of OUV is crucial as it contributes to the significance of the sites, keeping its value intact and challenges due to the development pressures and tourism. That is why Melaka must develop according to their OUV (Aziz, 2017). However, Melaka is now slowly losing it due to the introduction of uncontrollable activities on-site that might affect the integrity and authenticity of the properties on sites (Ismail et al., 2014). This will affect the Melaka OUV, which is responsible for keeping the WHS listed under UNESCO. Moreover, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Movement Control Order (MCO) and travel restrictions to

contain the pandemic have taken a toll on Malaysian tourism and hospitality businesses especially to Melaka since the city is highly dependent on the tourism industry.

UNESCO, (2016) suggested that the cities could respond to their major challenges they encounter by applying the city to become UCCN. Moreover, since 2004, more cities are transforming to be UCCN based on their respective city identity, image, and cultural capital. Tsuruoka City, Japan, Phuket, Thailand, Macao, China, and Jeonju, Korea are among the cities that conserve and protect their traditional cuisine while increasing local community level of awareness towards the importance of the gastronomy heritage. Such an establishment could ensure Melaka safeguards its OUV. Hence, Melaka has the potential of becoming a Creative City of Gastronomy to support and complement its status as a WHS, according to the guideline prepared by UNESCO.

Furthermore, a high level of local community participation is one of the prerequisites for being a member of UCCN (UNESCO, 2021). This is because local communities are recognised as stakeholders and guardians of the area, instilling a sense of ownership and actively participating in the site's protection, which meets UNESCO's criteria for ongoing listing (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017). To establish Melaka as the City of Gastronomy, detailed research about the community's perspective regarding UCCN should be conducted. Considering these situations, this study seeks to determine community perspective in terms of their readiness to assist and involve if Melaka becomes the City of Gastronomy. Thereby, this research presents the views of the local community's perspective on the possibilities for Melaka to become the Creative City of Gastronomy.

3. Research Questions

This research will examine several issues about the community's perspective regarding the potential of Melaka as the City of Gastronomy. Therefore, three main research questions have been formulated for this dissertation:

- i. What is the local community awareness regarding the local cuisine conservation effort?
- ii. Does the local community have enough resources for Melaka to become the Creative City of Gastronomy?
- iii. To what extent, the local community is ready to participate if Melaka becomes the Creative City of Gastronomy?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study has been developed as follow:

- i. To identify the awareness level of the local community on the local cuisine conservation effort.
- ii. To determine the available resources suitable for Melaka to become the Creative City of Gastronomy.
- iii. To discover the local community's readiness to be involved if Melaka becomes the Creative City of Gastronomy.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Qualitative Research Methodology

When a researcher is investigating a new subject field or attempting to identify and theorise significant concerns, qualitative research approach is considered appropriate (Jamshed, 2014). To gain the deepest understanding of the research questions, the study employs in-depth investigation.

5.2. Sampling Technique and Study Population

The purposive or selective sampling method will be used in this study to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are related to the gastronomy sector, which will enable the researcher to answer research questions (Patton, 2014). The purpose of using this kind of sampling is to provide as much insight as possible into the community readiness. The respondent chosen is the one who can provide in-depth and detailed information as well as be involved in the gastronomy sector at Melaka.

Since UNESCO had stated that the creative city must be the focus on the involvement of community especially for women and youth, the selected women and youth representatives from Baba Nyonya, Chetti, Portuguese and Malay community at Melaka have been chosen as respondents for this research. Not only that, the stakeholder involved in gastronomy related activity also selected based on the criteria listed by UNESCO which is the restaurateurs, tourism organisation, and community organisation. Nineteen in-depth interviews with the selected respondent were conducted. Of those respondents, 7 were representatives of community organisations, 6 from the community representative, 4 from gastronomy-related operator representatives and 2 from an expert representative. The table 1 shows the list of the respondents.

Table 1. The List of Respondent According to their Category

Respondents code	Representative	Respondents
1	Organizational	Secretary of Melaka Baba Nyonya Cooperation Bhd/ Melaka Baba Nyonya Peranakan Committee
2	Organizational	President of Melaka Baba Nyonya Peranakan Association
3	Organizational	Melaka Chetti Community Committee and Coordinator of Cultural Preservation and Promotion
4	Organizational	Secretary of Malacca Portuguese-Eurasian Association (MPEA)
5	Organizational	President of Save Portuguese Action Committee (SPAC)
6	Organizational	Ketua Pemuda Parti Amanah Cawangan Limbongan
7	Organizational	President of Melaka Tourism Association
8	Community	Admin Executive, Jonker Walk Committee
9	Community	Manager of Baba Nyonya Heritage Muzeum
10	Community	Curator of Chetti Museum
11	Community	Chetti Community Cultural Activist
12	Community	Owner of Portuguese Heritage Museum
13	Community	Tourism Executive, Villa Warisan Melaka, Kg Morten
14	Gastronomy Operator	Owner of Kocik Kitchen

15	Gastronomy Operator	Owner of Nyonya Makko Restaurant
16	Gastronomy Operator	Owner of Baba Charlie Nyonya Cake
17	Gastronomy Operator	Owner of De Lisbon Restaurant
18	Expert	Owner of Nancy's Kitchen/ Nancy's Cooking Class
19	Expert	Sous Chef of Majestic Hotel

5.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The integration of both secondary and primary data enhances this study project. To collect both primary and secondary data, a variety of data gathering strategies were used.

5.3.1. Field Work

The data collection and site survey have been conducted on 24 November 2019 until 3 December 2019. The site visit is focused on the main zone of WHS and Heritage Village.

5.3.2. In-Depth Interview

In-depth semi-structured one-on-one interviews with various local community representatives were used to obtain data for this study. These individuals were chosen for their substantial knowledge, expertise, experience, and involvement with the gastronomy-related sector in the study area. All questions are developed by the researcher's assumptions and input from the theoretical study, in-depth interview is the most suitable method to gather all the information.

5.3.3. Secondary Data

To address the research questions, the research required some secondary data collection. The major goal was to gain a well understanding of the background of the important issues that the study was attempting to investigate. This secondary data will be used in determining the relationship between gastronomy, tourism, creative city, and the local community while serving as a guideline in constructing the research variable for the local community perception on the readiness to participate and involve in the creative city program.

The data collected will be manually analysed using thematic analysis. It is the first qualitative method that should be learned as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis as stated by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis will figure out the local community readiness to participate in the potential Creative City of Gastronomy at Melaka.

6. Findings

6.1. Awareness Level

Local communities' awareness level were analysed based on first, their exposure on knowledge, history, ingredient, and uniqueness of their local cuisine, second, their awareness of efforts to conserve

and preserve the local cuisine and lastly, their awareness of the existence of the UCCN and its benefits to the city. This is to evaluate criteria number 4 and 7 of the Creative City of Gastronomy.

Analysis of the interviews shows that most of the respondents know about their cuisine details such as the history, the ingredients used, the way of cooking and the uniqueness of their local cuisine especially the Chetti and Portuguese community that still practice and cook local cuisine at their home. As stated by one of the respondents:

We do know well about our cuisine because we inherited it from our parents and we know in detail every ingredient used in cooking the local cuisine. (Respondent 4, 2019)

Most of the respondents did not know about the UCCN and its benefit to their local cuisine conservation and sustainability. Only Respondent 5 and Respondent 9 know a little bit about this program. Most of the local community know that the effort to sustain and conserve the local cuisine is important and some of them are involved in the effort to create awareness and give exposure to the local community and public through the cooking classes and demonstration.

We do a lot of cooking classes and guided tours to the local market for tourists to experience the authentic way of life. (Respondent 9, 2019)

As for the result, we can conclude that the communities are in the preparation stage as they have the knowledge about the local cuisine, issues faced, conservation effort and they are ready to participate. Local communities begin to develop conservation efforts that can be participated in by all of the local community. As stated by Plested et al. (2006), dynamic and energetic leaders began to plan the efforts intensely.

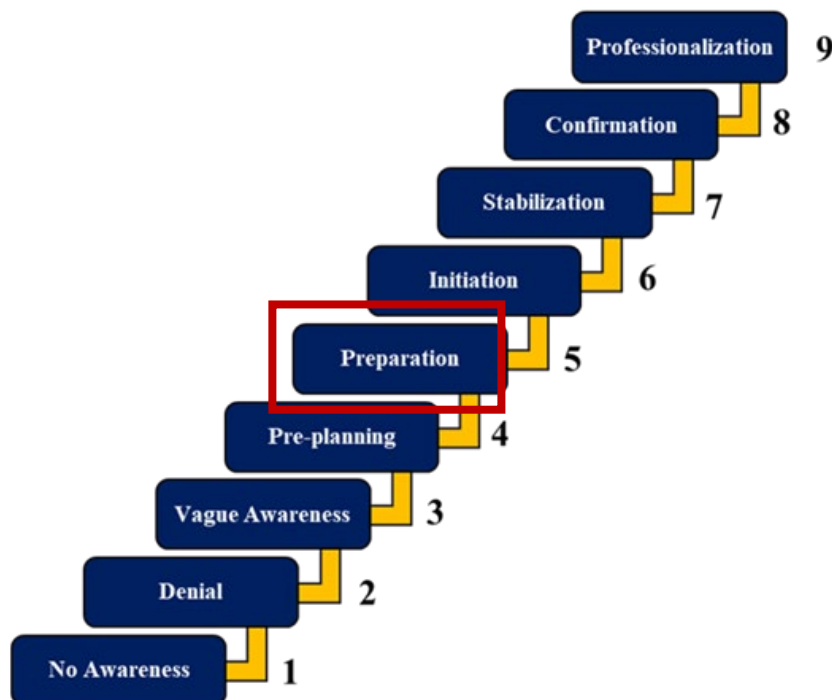


Figure 1. The Awareness and Readiness Level of Melaka's Communities

6.2. Available Resources

Five out of the eight criteria to become the Creative City of Gastronomy is related to objective 2 which is the resources available at the city. The resources available identified by the researcher are internal resources and external resources. Internal resources refer to the local resources such as time, people, space, and money that are available to support efforts. There are many resources at Melaka and the local community was ready to participate as the interview statement below:

There is still a lot of expertise in cooking local cuisine here and we got the space provided also for any program involving the local community. (Respondent 1, 2019)

Respondent 9, Respondent 11, Respondent 12, Respondent 14 and Respondent 19 said so. For the resources or products that local communities have, the respondent state:

There is a lot of community that knows how to make souvenirs, traditional food, traditional snacks, and souvenirs. (Respondent 4, 2019)

Criteria number 2 stated that the Creative City of Gastronomy should have a vibrant gastronomy community with numerous traditional restaurants and chefs. Due to the trading activities in Melaka before the colonization, the state becomes the home for the various ethnic communities such as Baba Nyonya, Chetti, Portuguese, Malay, Chinese and Indian community that create a vibrant and variety of gastronomy products in Melaka until today. Gastronomy-related outlets are everywhere in the city ranging from the fine dining restaurant to the local restaurant and food stall selling street local cuisine. There are many chefs and experts cooking the local cuisine that consists of the local community itself and the chefs. Not only that, the local community also has a very strong sense of belonging towards their local cuisine and heritage.

The other three criteria of Creative City of Gastronomy which are domestic ingredients used in cooking, traditional food markets, and tradition of hosting gastronomic awards, festivals, and contests were considered as the internal resources. It is the local resources available in the city such as people, time, money and space. From the findings of primary and secondary data, there are a lot of the internal resources available in Melaka, reflecting the diversity of the gastronomy products itself, the experts, food market, and gastronomy-related activities such as food festivals, food fairs and cooking competitions.

There are instances, even when the community has the resources, they do not know how to develop the gastronomy products and do not know how to use the resources for conservation efforts. There are some respondents that state that they need support from other stakeholders, especially the government to lead the move.

Melaka has a diversity of resources especially the gastronomy product and a very long historical line of cuisine and heritage. However, we need good governance and someone who can pull all the stakeholders together towards this effort. (Respondent 9, 2019)

The community needs a guideline and a platform and to be approached by a government body or someone that can introduce the concept of a creative city, the benefits, the effect of the program to the tourism industry, and the sustainability of their local cuisine. With the right channel, processes, and ways,

the Creative City of Gastronomy can be a great potential program to conserve and sustain the cuisine heritage.

For external resources, there are some organisations who know about the importance of conservation efforts and the benefits of the city to become the Creative City of Gastronomy that could assist the local community in various ways. From the interview with two respondents, which are from external sources, they are willing to participate if Melaka becomes the Creative City of Gastronomy.

We have TEKUN, MARA, FELCRA, RISDA, MARDI, and the Ministry of Rural Development to help the community. It consists of training, education, financial, modal, fund, tools or machines. (Respondent 14, 2019)

As for the result, many resources can be developed as a gastronomy product and fulfils the requirements of the Creative City of Gastronomy. However, the local community needs encouragement and guidance so that they can empower their resources. This will help communities generate income and produce more gastronomy products that elevate their traditional local cuisine. As stated by Barrow and Murphree (2001), community participation in conservation is sometimes present as a continuum of power-sharing between the two parties such as government and community.

6.3. Local community's readiness

There is a need to ensure the community was ready before the initiation of any program involving the community at the destination (ASEAN, 2016; Muhanna, 2006; Marzuki & Khoo, 2016). Community readiness is a significant factor that should be taken seriously by the state authority to initiate any program. Most of the local communities are willing to participate if Melaka becomes the Creative City of Gastronomy and if they were empowered to conserve their local cuisine. The interview statement supported this result.

We are willing to join if the UCCN establishes here because we know that is the right way to preserve and conserve the cultural heritage. (Respondent 8 & Respondent 9, 2019)

The other 11 respondents also supported these statements. However, there is some respondent stated that the local community is willing to involve but their attitude and mentality become constrain as stated by Respondent 8:

Some communities will be happy to participate but some of them have a very conservative mindset where they always think about what they can gain instead of what they can give. (Respondent 8, 2019)

This statement was supported by Respondent 3, Respondent 4 and Respondent 12. There are also some respondents that are willing to passively involve and support these efforts because they want to focus more on their business.

I will try my best to be involved in any effort promoting and conserving the local cuisine but I will focus more on my business because it is my priority and main source of income. (Respondent 11 & 9, 2019)

It is clear that the local communities have shown interest in the local cuisine heritage conservation and preservation, however, the budget needed for the conservation effort where a lot of money is needed will become a challenge for the local community.

Before this program is initiated in Melaka, the community needs exposure to the program, how it works, the benefit from it, and the impact of the program towards them. This will increase their willingness to be involved as they are well aware of the program to be developed at the destination. The incentives provided and efforts shown will motivate the local community to participate in the conservation effort as well as establish the destination as Creative City of Gastronomy since conservation effort needs a lot of money.

It is always an incentive that I think could motivate the community (Respondent 16, 2019)

There are 9 other respondents who agree with the statement. Other than that, several respondents emphasise the determination of the government and their effort could motivate the community to participate. The respondent state:

The seriousness of the government in the effort to conserve this cuisine and the collaboration between the locals could motivate people to participate. (Respondent 14, 2019)

These statements are supported by other 4 respondents.

Overall, the local community in Melaka is willing to participate and willing to participate in any conservation programs and activities including the possibility of the creative city to be developed there as long as they are well guided from start and being supported from time to time. It also can be concluded that the incentive and financial aid could attract the local community to participate and involve in the program. Other than that, the serious effort taken by the various stakeholders also could increase their motivation and influence the local community's willingness to participate in the program. As stated by Khatun et al. (2016), the readiness to participate is one of the crucial motivational readiness elements and it will have an effect on the development of the program.

7. Conclusion

This research shows the achievement of its objectives. The local community wants to be a part of the program's benefit distribution. This indicates that the overall participation of the local community towards the potential creative city in this study area will contribute positively towards the community standard of living and way of life. It will also help to preserve the local cuisine of Melaka's various ethnic groups.

Melaka has enough resources that are suitable and match the requirements set out by UNESCO for the Creative City of Gastronomy. The local community, on the other hand, requires support, guidance and direction so that they can empower their resources. Furthermore, incentives, financial benefits, and the government's determination could serve as motivation for the local community to become involved and engage in the programme. The issues and challenges faced by the local community also need to be addressed by all stakeholders before the program can be established in Melaka. This is to ensure that all aspects are considered and proper planning is done before the program is initiated at the destination.

The establishment of the Creative City also could mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 towards the city and tourism businesses in the area. The findings of this study also have practical implications towards the authorities responsible for the operations and sustainability of the Melaka City during the strike of COVID-19. The information gathered through this study may inform the relevant authorities and ministries on challenges faced by the local community which urgently need their interventions, both for short and long-term sustainability. The Creative City of Gastronomy could be the vehicle for the state to protect and safeguards its OUV, which is important for the city to remain in the WHS list.

Overall, the findings managed to adequately answer the research aims of the undertaken study and provide useful insights for Melaka's authorities to mitigate COVID-19 impact which supported the existing literature gap. Hence, this study could lead to other future research using quantitative methods to discover other tourism perspectives in the planning to develop Creative City at Melaka. This study will aid in conveying some innovative ideas as alternative strategies in redesigning Malaysia's tourism landscape amidst this challenging situation.

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