



Kudus Kulon as a living heritage site: The dialectics of heritage preservation

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study aims to determine the characteristics of continuity in the Kudus Kulon living heritage site. Furthermore, this study seeks to explain the process of cultural heritage preservation through the lens of spatial production, which involves the collaboration of various actors. This research is expected to provide deeper understanding of studies on living heritage and spatial production, as well as provide practical contributions to strengthening community-based preservation strategies in living heritage site. **Methods:** This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study strategy to understand cultural heritage preservation in Kudus Kulon as a living heritage site. Data were obtained through field observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies, then analyzed thematically using the living heritage framework and Lefebvre's theory of spatial production. The analysis was conducted to identify forms of continuity, community practices, and the reproduction of spatial meaning in the cultural heritage preservation process. **Findings:** These research findings confirm and enrich the Western concept of living heritage by highlighting the continuity of original functions, transformation, the involvement of core communities, and sustained adaptability. The Sunan Kudus Heritage site, the traditional Joglo Pencu house, and the Buka Luwur and Dandangan traditions demonstrate that heritage remains alive not by being frozen in time, but through continuous use, maintenance, and reinterpretation by the community and local foundations. In this context, social change and institutional adjustments do not weaken the heritage; rather, they become integral to the sustainability strategy of the heritage space. **Conclusion:** Kudus Kulon demonstrates its capacity as a dialectical space of living heritage, where continuity and change do not negate each other, but rather complement each other within a unique and contextual framework of socio-spatial relations. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This study offers a novel contribution by integrating the "living heritage" perspective and Lefebvre's theory of the production of space to interpret cultural heritage preservation as a dialectical socio-spatial process.

KEYWORDS: intangible heritage; living heritage; space production; tangible heritage.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary world, historic areas in various parts of the world face significant existential challenges due to the escalation of modernization, commercialization of space, and mass tourism. This external pressure often triggers a crisis of place identity, where the heritage area is slowly losing its original spirit and authenticity (loss of character) in order to accommodate the new urban function. So far, the mainstream response to these threats has often been dominated by conventional conservation (material-based approaches)

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(Munasinghe, 2022; Sully et al., 2023). This static approach seeks to "freeze" the physical elements of a building as if to stop the passage of time, but in practice often fails to take care of the social, cultural, and spiritual life of the communities within it (Miura, 2005). As a result, many traditional areas are reduced to mere visual commodities or dead artifacts that are cut off from the memory of their inhabitants. This condition urges a paradigm shift in preservation towards a more dynamic spatial strategy, where cultural heritage is not isolated from the changing times, but is negotiated to keep alive organically.

Responding to the need for a more dynamic conservation strategy, contemporary spatial discourse is increasingly placing place identity as a crucial foundation for the resilience of a region (Peng et al., 2020). In contrast to place brand identity, which is often an artificial image designed by an external party (supply-side), place identity is better understood as an organic perspective from below—that is, how people authentically recognize their living space while defining their identity in it (Boisen et al., 2011; Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015). This is where an intimate dialectic occurs; Space becomes the framework that shapes human character, and conversely, humans continue to shape the meaning of the space as a reflection of the values of their community (Malpas, 2012). It is this emotional bond that bridges people and places that ultimately gives birth to a deep commitment to caring for an area (Tournois & Rollero, 2020). Unfortunately, the urgency of maintaining this emotional bond is often overlooked by conventional approaches to conservation of Western heritage. This conventional approach tends to view heirlooms only in terms of material aspects or their physical form (fabric), thus implicating the marginalization of local communities from the living spaces they build and inherit (Chirikure et al., 2010). In such an approach, time is seen as a linear line, the past is considered an 'ended panorama' that is only viewed from a distance.

According to Philippot (1996), this view is the core of the weaknesses of the conventional approach. The disconnection of past and present relations freezes cultural heritage in a certain time dimension which cuts the value of diversity, continuity, and community involvement (Wijesuriya, 2016). In fact, for many traditional societies, the bond between the past, present, and future is never broken, but manifests in the concept of cyclical and constantly rotating time (Wijesuriya, 2016). This awareness of time resilience is the main foundation of the Living Heritage approach. Rejecting the principle of conservation that freezes space, this approach asserts that historic sites will only continue to "live" if their original functions have continuity, are managed directly by the core community, and are allowed to adapt (Poulios, 2014). Therefore, in order to prevent alienation between residents and their own areas, aligning the uniqueness of the perspective of the local community with the pace of modernization is absolutely necessary (Insch & Walters, 2018). Through this theoretical linkage, traditional spaces are no longer seen as fragile artifacts of historical relics, but rather as dialogical entities that continue to actively negotiate the sustainability of their identity in the midst of modernization.

Living heritage can be understood through the theory of spatial production as a dialectical process between material space, social practices, and cultural meanings that together maintain the collective identity of a community over time (Lefebvre, 2014). In this perspective, cultural heritage is no longer treated as a static artifact that is only assessed by its physical form, but rather as a space that is continuously produced, lived, and negotiated through the relationship between daily practices, symbolic representations, and the spatial experiences experienced by the community (Lefebvre, 2012; Soja, 1980). This approach is also in line with the understanding that place identity is formed organically from below, through the emotional attachment and social practices of the community to their living space, not solely through images constructed from the outside (Boisen et al., 2011; Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015). In the context of heritage, meaningful space emerges when the community not only lives in it, but also continues to fill it, maintain it, and adapt it to changing times; Thus, the sustainability of cultural heritage depends on the ability of spaces to remain socially, spiritually, and symbolically relevant (Ioannis Poulios & Poulios, 2014; Tournois & Rollero, 2020).

The evidence is substantial and multifaceted. The recent studies (2025) directly apply Henri Lefebvre's production of space framework to living heritage contexts. Song & Kim (2025) demonstrate that sustainability of traditional villages manifests "not only in the persistence of physical spaces, but more fundamentally in the maintenance of social bonds and spiritual culture." Wang et al., (2026) show how "material, social, and symbolic dimensions interact" in cultural landscape transformation, revealing that "traditional festivals and rituals are being reimagined through modern artistic practices." (Ma & Wu, 2026) further illustrate how spatial production involves contested negotiations between official preservation policies and lived community practices.

Despite the ever-growing topic of living heritage and spatial production, studies integrating these two main frameworks within the context of Islamic Historic Districts in Indonesia are still limited. This research complements previous research conducted by Wulandari et al., (2024) that focused solely on the aspects of continuity and change in the Kudus Kulon living heritage site, which was limited to exploring the role of the core community in preservation. The topic of living heritage in Kudus Kulon, which focuses on continuity and changes, has also been studied, but emphasizes discussions of the three value systems that underlie the research focus: value systems, activities, and artifacts Wulandari et al., (2025). These two previous studies highlight the importance of continuity in both community preservation practices and the underlying values. This study aims to determine the characteristics of continuity in the Kudus Kulon living heritage site. Furthermore, this study seeks to explain the process of cultural heritage preservation through the lens of spatial production, which involves the collaboration of various actors. This research is expected to provide deeper understanding of studies on living heritage and spatial production, as well as provide practical contributions to strengthening community-based preservation strategies in living heritage site.

2. Methods

This research uses a qualitative paradigm by applying a case study strategy that raises the Islamic historic district of Kudus Kulon as a single case. This area was chosen based on its uniqueness as the only relic of Sunan Kudus that can still be observed for its physical character and still adhered to its values and traditions. According to Espín-León et al., (2020), a single case study is appropriately applied to a bounded case in a real-world context to explain how or why something happened in a real context. In addition, the heritage of life in Kudus Kulon is appropriately raised as a single case because it fulfills several main points mentioned by Gaya & Smith, (2016), including: rich in information, unusual, critical, and theoretically useful, clear case limitations.

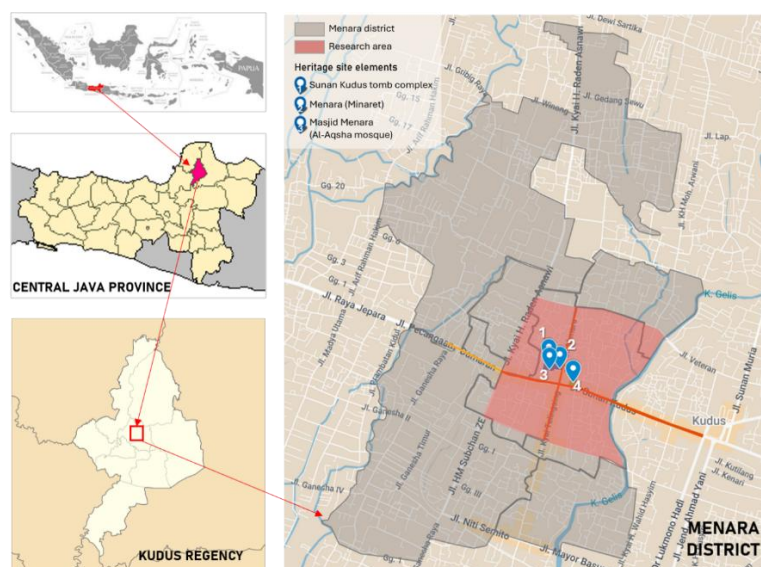


Fig. 1. The research area

The design of this study implies that generalization is not the final result, but emphasis is given to understanding the complete context in understanding the adaptation mechanism in the western kudos life heritage site. The findings of these specific cases can be justified to answer broader issues both in the framework of theoretical testing and theory development. To maintain a robust methodology, a linear iterative process as described by Yin, (2018) is applied in this study which involves: a planning process (pre-research), collection, analysis and revision that complement each other. The single case of Kudus Kulon is deeply correlated to ferivy the concept of Living Heritage and the theory of Place Identity. To defend such analytical arguments, the triangulation process relies on a combination of various data collection techniques to uncover authentic spatio-cultural reality.

Field data collection was carried out during the period January – December 2025 so that researchers can capture the momentum of the implementation of the annual tradition typical of Kudus Kulon which is also a national intangible cultural heritage, namely Buka Luwur which is carried out in conjunction with the Islamic New Year and the Dandangan tradition which is carried out ahead of the Holy Month of Ramadan. As an observation unit, the two main traditions include complex economic, social, cultural, and religious activities. Other observation units are the site of the mosque, the tower and the tomb of Sunan Kudus, and the built environment around it (see figure 1). The data collection techniques in this study are observation, archive documentation, and interviews of key informants.

Table 1. The research informant

Key Informant	Key Informat Criteria	Number of informant
Local foundation -Yayasan Masjid Menara dan Makam Sunan Kudus (YM3SK)	Central authority of Masjid Menara and Sunan Kudus Heritage Site	1
Dinas Pariwisata dan Kebudayaan Kabupaten Kudus	Formal regulator (Kudus Regency Government)	1
Village head	Territorial representation	5
Local contemporer community	Cultural agents	3
Historic adademician	Objective	1
Inhabitant	Everyday space users	5

The interpretive sensemaking approach used in this study prioritizes in-depth contextualization to understand the specific reality of the case being studied (Tsang, 2012). The data condensation process is guided using the continuity criteria of the Living Heritage concept, where field data is filtered to capture how local communities interpret and negotiate their living spaces. The subjective interpretation is then presented (data display) visually through spatial mapping and comparative matrices. At the conclusion drawing stage, empirical patterns that are closely tied to the context of Kudus Kulon are crystallized into a typology of spatio-cultural adaptation. This typology is then dialogued with Place Identity theory to provide an in-depth analytical description of how living heirloom works organically in caring for spatial identity without having to give up its cultural roots.

Table 2. The analysis units

Kudus Kulon Cultural Heritage	Analysis Unit
Kudus Kulon Tangible Heritage:	- Heritge safeguarding practice
- Sunan Kudus Heritage Site (minaret, mosque, tomb complex)	- Interaction and participation actors
- Langgar Dalem Mosque	- Dimensions of continuity and changes
- Langgar Bubrah (heritage structure)	- Spatial dimensions of heritage
- Traditional house Joglo Pencu	
Kudus Kulon Intangible Heritage	
- <i>Buka Luwur</i> ceremony	
- Traditional weapon cleaning rituals (<i>Jamasan Keris Cintoko</i>)	
- <i>Dandangan</i> ceremony	

3. Results and Discussion

In the results section, Kudus Kulon is placed in the framework of living heritage because of the fulfillment of continuity criteria, regardless of the form of change and adaptation which will be explained specifically in each subchapter. The discussion section will then integrate these empirical findings with the framework of place identity theory. This theoretical discussion was conducted to construct an understanding of how the negotiation mechanism of space and time by various cultural actors can sustainably maintain regional identity in the face of modernization pressures.

3.1 *Kudus Kulon context as a living heritage entity*

The Living Heritage approach has significantly shifted the traditional preservation paradigm that tends to freeze historic monuments in their past. In the discourse of conservation, the definition of a "living heritage site" is often conceptualized differently based on the degree of community attachment. This attachment can refer to a local community that simply resides around the boundaries of a site (dwelling/local community), where the definition of membership is often ambiguous in the midst of globalization (Cohen, 1985; Robertson, 1995; Erb, 2003; Miura, 2005). In many cases, these kinds of community bonds are weak and vulnerable to being co-opted by the preservation authorities. Authorities often marginalize local communities in favor of the physical protection of buildings, for example through access restrictions (Fentress & Palumbo, 2001) or even the relocation of residents (Akrawi, 2002; Hadidi, 1986).

Rejecting views that weaken the role of society, the true inheritance approach places continuity as the strongest form of attachment. In contrast to community bonds that simply claim associations without historical validity (Matero, 2004) or communities that have changed the context of their original use (van Vucht Tijssen, 2004), continuity represents a valid historical bond of the original community. This community does not reject change, but rather consciously embraces and adapts to contemporary conditions such as modernization. Based on the synthesis of the literature, the determination of the existence of living heirlooms is measured through three main variables, (1) continuity of original, functions and association, the site retains valid historical ties and is actively used for the original purpose of its construction. This function is not interrupted or simply changed in context, but continues to live as a spiritual, ritual, and socio-cultural epicenter; (2) authoritative involvement of core communities, local communities are not reduced to fringe objects or removed by the control of formal preservation authorities. On the contrary, they act as the main subjects who have the authority over the use and management in caring for and reproducing the meaning of heritage space for generations; (3) sustainable adaptation capacity, there is the ability of heritage areas and their communities to make spatial and temporal adjustments. This adaptation became an instrument of compromise to accommodate the urgency of modernization without breaking their traditional roots of sacredness and bonds.

In the context of this study, the Islamic historic district of Kudus Kulon meets all three criteria for living heritage. This area represents the upholding of a resilient aspect of continuity, despite the occurrence of various changes and adaptations in its society (Wulandari et al., 2024). The core element, marked by the site of the Sunan Kudus tomb complex, mosque and minaret, continues to serve as an uninterrupted spiritual epicenter. Referring to the continuity of original functions and associations, the role of this region has evolved organically. In the past, Kudus Kulon functioned as a government center as well as a da'wah base for the spread of Islam by Sunan Kudus. After the death of Sunan Kudus who was buried in the area behind the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the function of the space slowly transitioned as a pilgrimage destination.

In contrast to the phenomenon of marginalization of indigenous people at various other world heritage sites, the core community in Kudus Kulon has actually undergone a transformation without losing the essence of its value. As the embryo of the modern city of

Kudus, this area was once dominated by families, students, and followers of Sunan Kudus. Today, the identity of such direct descendants is rarely published—a cultural practice rooted in Sunan Kudus' teachings on humility (*tawadhu*). Although empirical evidence regarding the lineage of past disciples is difficult to trace, inherited social and religious values survive. The spatial layout in Kudus Kulon is dominated by the functions of trade, services and educational institutions in the form of various Islamic boarding schools and formal Islamic educational institutions at various levels.

Yayasan Masjid Menara dan Makam Sunan Kudus (YM3SK) acts as a driving force that collaborates with the local community and the government in the preservation of the Sunan Kudus Tower Mosque Site and tomb. Preservation of heritage sites Together with the people who live around the site, YM3SK continues to preserve various traditions initiated by Sunan Kudus centuries ago. This proves that although the physical entity of its core community has changed with the times, the traditions and essence of noble teachings are still held to be collectively upheld. Furthermore, this capacity for sustainable adaptation is also manifested in the maintenance practices of heritage sites. The physical preservation of the core site of the Sunan Kudus Tower Mosque and Tomb is not carried out centrally and exclusively, but is executed through a collaborative approach involving the community, village government, district government (through the culture and tourism office), the Central Java Provincial Cultural Preservation Center, and the Foundation.

Based on the argument above, the Kudus Kulon Area can be analyzed through the "lens" of living heritage. Rather than being frozen artifacts of the past, heritage preservation practices in Kudus Kulon suggest that dynamic continuity plays a significant role. The occurring changes—both demographic transformations within the core community and cross-sectoral adjustments in management—do not represent a degradation of historical values. On the contrary, these changes are a tangible manifestation of a continuous adaptation strategy, deliberately undertaken to preserve the religious and social value as Kudus Kulon identity amidst modernization. The mechanisms of compromise and spatio-cultural adaptation that confirm the continuity of living heritage are further classified and dissected specifically into three main typologies in the next subchapters.

3.2 Continuity of original functions and associations in Kudus Kulon

The continuity of a heritage's original function refers to its original purpose or use, such as religious, social, economic, or cultural functions. In this study, the religious function refers to the role of heritage spaces or practices in supporting religious activities and community spirituality. The social function refers to the ability of heritage spaces or practices to serve as a forum for meetings and interactions between residents, both in informal and formal contexts. The economic function relates to how heritage—both cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage—can serve as a source of livelihood, livelihoods, and local economic activity. The cultural function refers to the role of heritage spaces and practices in maintaining the identity, values, artistic expression, and collective memory of the community. In the context of Kudus Kulon, the continuity of heritage's original function is clearly visible in cultural heritage, which encompasses three functions: religious, social, and cultural. Meanwhile, the intangible cultural heritage in Kudus Kulon—Buka Luwur Sunan Kudus and Dandangan—demonstrates various forms of functional continuity consistent with the original purpose of these traditions, regardless of whether they are performed annually.

The original function of the Buka Luwur and Jamas Pusaka traditions remains intact, continuing as a form of respect for Sunan Kudus. Furthermore, the Dandangan tradition also serves as important evidence of continuity connecting the past and the present. This tradition is rooted in a custom pioneered by Sunan Kudus to mark the arrival of Ramadan and continues to be commemorated today, both in its traditional form and with the expansion of accompanying cultural and economic activities. Although its form and participation have changed, the primary function of this tradition as a reminder of spiritual and social values remains preserved by the local community.

Beyond intangible cultural heritage, the continuity of its original function can also be observed in the Joglo Pencu cultural heritage building. Among several joglo buildings that have undergone conversion, one Joglo Pencu house has been designated as a cultural heritage site and continues to function as a residence by its owner. Interestingly, the house's maintenance and upkeep are carried out on personal initiative, not due to regulatory requirements or government incentives. This demonstrates that the continued function of cultural heritage does not depend solely on legal status or formal intervention, but also on the owner's awareness and emotional attachment to the building's historical value.

Meanwhile, other cultural heritage sites, such as the Sunan Kudus heritage site (the Menara Mosque Complex and Sunan Kudus Tomb) and the Langgar Dalem Mosque, are two cultural heritage sites that were interconnected in the past. Religious and social functions are inherent in both, but in different contexts, depending on the activities within them. The Langgar Dalam Mosque is believed by the community to have been Sunan Kudus's residence and personal place of worship, while the Menara Mosque was the center of worship, preaching, and government activities led by Sunan Kudus.

Meanwhile, the Madureksan Mosque also demonstrates the continuity of religious and social functions. As a building constructed before the Menara Mosque, it serves as a connecting place for various communities and eras. In the pre-Islamic era, the Madureksan Mosque initially functioned as a studio—a center of community activity in the past, reinforced by the presence of the town square (now the Menara Park) and the banyan tree, which are synonymous with the configuration of ancient Javanese city centers Ashadi, (2019). When Islam arrived in Kudus (Kyai Telingsing – Sunan Kudus), the studio was transformed into a prayer room (langgar), and the community believes the Madureksan Mosque was once used as a place to reconcile two disputing parties. Based on this, the Madureksan Mosque's initial function demonstrates both religious and social functions, which continue to this day, albeit in different contexts. Unlike the Langgar Bubrah, a cultural heritage structure dating back to the megalithic era, its religious function is closely linked. Pre-Islamic communities held prayers (worship) and rituals there. From the arrival of Islam to the present day, this religious function continues to accommodate individual spiritual activities that draw closer to the Creator. This contrasts with mosques and langgars, which are used for communal worship.

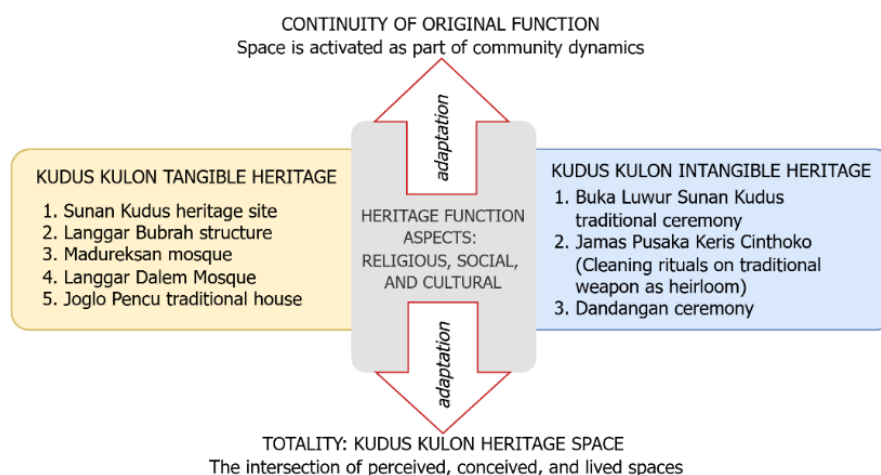


Fig. 2. The continuity of original function in Kudus Kulon

The categorization of cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage demonstrates that heritage functions depend not only on their physical form, but also on the social practices that accompany them. In this context, the people of Kudus Kulon actively maintain the original functions of heritage sites, not only as symbolic rituals but also as a form of social continuity that is integrated into daily life. Spaces are not frozen as relics of the past, but continue to be activated as part of community dynamics. Continuity of original functions in the context of living heritage in Kudus Kulon is not interpreted as mere preservation of

physical form, but as an effort to maintain the meaning, role, and social value of the heritage itself, even with adaptation to changing contexts.

3.3 *The continuity of community connection: Authoritative involvement*

The continuity of the relationship between the community and heritage sites in Kudus Kulon reflects the depth of the community's social, spiritual, and collective identity ties to these historical spaces. This relationship is not uniform, but is uniquely woven at each site based on its values, function, and associated history. Based on the findings, the continuity of the community's connection to heritage in Kudus Kulon shows varying degrees, layers, and diversity, according to the heritage's position in people's lives. Therefore, in this dissertation, to provide an objective interpretation of the continuity of community connections, the following characteristics of the community's connection to heritage in Kudus Kulon are highlighted.

First, deeply rooted connection to the Menara Mosque Complex and the Tomb of Sunan Kudus. The Menara Mosque Complex is the heritage site with the strongest and most deeply rooted connection among all cultural heritage sites in Kudus Kulon. Although the core community—namely the descendants of Sunan Kudus or his disciples—do not entirely reside in the area, collective ties remain intergenerationally maintained. This is primarily due to its ongoing religious and symbolic functions through pilgrimages, worship, and the implementation of traditions such as Buka Luwur, Dandangan, and even Ta'sis Menara. Government preservation programs also strengthen this connection, although they do not always involve the community dominantly in planning. Its status as a national cultural heritage site and its image as a key spiritual space make this complex a center of socio-spatial gravity, as discussed in the previous pattern matching results.

Second, active and ongoing connection to the traditional Joglo Pencu house. The community's connection to the traditional Joglo Pencu house is evident in the practice of domestic inheritance that has been passed down through generations. The house is still occupied, maintained, and passed down from generation to generation. Its original function as a residence is maintained, and maintenance is carried out on private initiative, without government involvement. Although not directly connected to Sunan Kudus's da'wah activities, Joglo Pencu plays a significant role in strengthening the identity of the Kudus Kulon settlement as a heritage space, while also demonstrating informal, family-based participation.

Third, symbolic and functional connection to the Langgar Dalem Mosque. Despite the mosque's historical significance, its religious activities tend to be routine and limited to the five daily prayers, while socio-religious activities such as religious study groups and Islamic holiday commemorations are more concentrated at the Menara Mosque, only about 200 meters away. This situation indicates that the community's social experience with Langgar Dalem is minimal and has not developed collectively. Social experience in this context refers to: the extent to which the community experiences, uses, and engages in daily life in the space; how often the space serves as a place for gathering, sharing meaning, and establishing recurring social relationships; and whether the space becomes part of a collective memory that is continuously passed down through concrete activities. In the case of Langgar Dalem, the lack of collective activities outside of routine worship prevents the space from becoming a center of social interaction or a strong symbol of community connectedness. The community's connection to the site is residual—preserved in its physical form and basic functions, but not undergoing a meaningful social reproduction process as occurs at the Menara Mosque Complex or the Joglo Pencu house.

Fourth, new connections are growing through community initiatives at Langgar Bubrah. Langgar Bubrah is an example of a site where community connections have been revitalized through cultural initiatives. Since the arrival of Sunan Kudus and the spread of Islam, this building has been discontinued for worship. However, in recent years, new connections have been established through the organization of the Langgar Bubrah Festival by the local community and village government. Although this festival has always taken

place elsewhere, the presence of Langgar Bubrah has served as a collective trigger for constructing a new narrative, especially for younger generations who lack a direct historical connection to the site. This trigger refers to a starting point that sparks emotional and participatory engagement and strengthens previously dormant community participation. Thus, despite its weak historical connection, Langgar Bubrah's social potential is revitalized through collective cultural interventions. In the context of living heritage, the continuity of community connections is not based on lineage, but rather through the participatory activation of cultural meaning.

Fifth, a separate and limited connection to the Madureksan Mosque. The Madureksan Mosque is located in the same area as the Menara Park and the Menara motorcycle taxi stand. Although the building is still functionally used as a place for the five daily prayers, the community's connection to the mosque is limited and poorly integrated into the community's social and cultural practices. The mosque is not a center for religious or social activities such as religious study groups, Islamic holiday commemorations, or community deliberation forums. The activities that take place tend to be personal and sporadic, such as use by motorcycle taxi drivers or park visitors who happen to need a place to pray or rest. This indicates that despite the mosque's historical value and strategic location, it has not yet fully functioned as a vibrant social space in the community's daily lives. Therefore, from a living heritage approach, this connection can be categorized as a separate and limited heritage connection. It exists as a recognized heritage site, but has not yet been internalized in the community's daily social practices. This context emphasizes that the production of space as a living heritage requires the active involvement of the community in creating, interpreting, and transforming the space in a sustainable manner. The Madureksan Mosque tends to be viewed as a functional facility, rather than as a meaningful space that strengthens collective identity.

In the context of Kudus Kulon, the community's relationship with heritage cannot be simplified as either 'present' or 'absent'. Rather, these connections span a complex spectrum—from deeply rooted in spirituality and history, to emerging connections through contemporary community initiatives. The levels of these connections are shaped by how heritage integrates with everyday life, community conservation efforts, and the integration of cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage. The curved arrow next to the pyramid indicates that heritage sites can shift levels over time depending on the socio-cultural context, conservation programs, or community participation. Community connections to heritage can be seen as a dynamic process, not a closed categorization. Heritage that is currently "separate and limited" can one day become "active and sustainable" through social intervention and the strengthening of meaning; while even sites that are entrenched can weaken if not collectively nurtured.

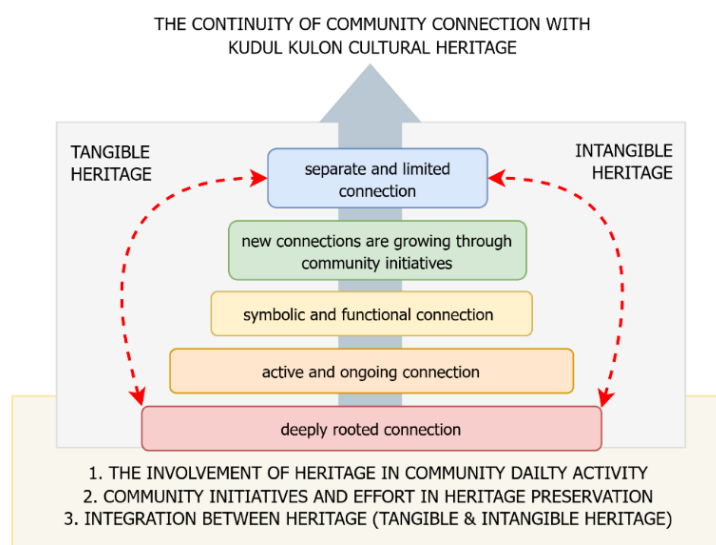


Fig. 3. The continuity of community connection with Kudus Kulon cultural heritage

3.4 *The continuity of heritage safeguarding in kudas kulon: sustainable adaptation capacity*

The term safeguarding in this study is not limited to heritage sites that only refer to cultural heritage, but will be expanded to intangible cultural heritage in Kudus Kulon. Based on this, the term safeguarding in this study will be associated with heritage protection efforts as a series of preventive and mitigation efforts against all forms of threats that can cause damage, loss, destruction, or extinction to Indonesian Cultural Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage.

3.4.1 *The continuity character of Kudus Kulon heritage safeguarding*

In the context of Kudus Kulon, cultural heritage protection not only reflects the continuity of preservation practices but also reveals diverse and multi-layered levels of community involvement. The five cultural heritage sites studied demonstrate varying protection patterns, both in terms of initiative, local actor capacity, and level of institutional support. Based on field findings and analysis, the following is a synthesis of the forms of cultural heritage protection in Kudus Kulon, the Menara Mosque Complex and the Tomb of Sunan Kudus, as a national cultural heritage, demonstrate the strongest and most systemic continuity of protection. Its high symbolic and historical status makes this site a focus of attention for various actors, from the Mosque Foundation, academics, and government institutions. Protection practices here take place within a formal and structured framework, with regulations, conservation programs, and ongoing documentation. However, public involvement in the preservation of this site tends to be relational and supplementary. They participate in rituals or religious activities but do not hold strategic positions in decision-making. This reflects a top-down form of protection, where continuity is maintained through institutionalization, but risks neglecting more organic local dynamics. Therefore, the formal-institutional protection of the Minaret Mosque Complex and the Tomb of Sunan Kudus demonstrates a tendency toward systemic continuity.

The Joglo Pencu House, on the other hand, demonstrates the most independent and autonomous family-based cultural heritage protection. The homeowner and heir maintains its original function as a residence, maintaining the structure independently without state intervention. In addition to being a residence, this cultural heritage building also serves as a symbol of family identity. In this context, continuity stems from family memory and intergenerational responsibility for heritage. Although it lacks formal status as a cultural heritage site, this house remains preserved thanks to personal commitment and values passed down through generations. This demonstrates that protection does not always require state legitimacy but can rely on heritage ethics and intergenerational solidarity. The protection of the Joglo Pencu traditional house illustrates family-based protection, with its tendency toward autonomous continuity.

The Langgar Dalem and Langgar Bubah mosques exhibit communal and incidental protection. Maintenance of these two sites is carried out by mosque administrators and local residents, but not within a systematic framework. Conservation activities often depend on specific occasions, such as Islamic holidays or government restoration projects. Although the potential of cultural heritage has been administratively recognized, the institutional mechanisms that ensure its continued preservation are arguably inadequate to ensure its continued protection. Consequently, the existence of these cultural heritage sites is highly dependent on local social and economic dynamics. This form of protection is quite vulnerable to disruption, but still has the potential to be strengthened through facilitation and community capacity building.

Madureksan Mosque, as a Presumed Cultural Heritage Object, exhibits the weakest continuity of protection. There is no institutional system explicitly organizing the preservation of the site's historical or symbolic values. The role of mosque management focuses more on daily operational functions—such as maintaining cleanliness, security, and the smooth running of worship activities—without active involvement in targeted preservation efforts. However, the mosque's continued social function as a space for

worship and community remains a crucial foundation that enables implicit protection. In this context, protection is not absent, but rather present in a form that has not been explicitly articulated as a cultural heritage preservation effort. The potential for more substantial protection remains latent—stored in collective memory, daily practices, and the possibility of broader community involvement in the future.

3.4.2 The continuity character of Kudus Kulon intangible heritage safeguarding

The Dandangan tradition and the Buka Luwur ceremony of Sunan Kudus, as Indonesian intangible cultural heritage, are celebrated and carried out as annual traditions. Interestingly, the protection of these two intangible cultural heritages shows different patterns. Dandangan tends towards a top-down, formal legal approach. Buka Luwur, on the other hand, tends towards a bottom-up approach. The Buka Luwur ceremony is participatory and initiated by the community through the Menara Mosque and Tomb of Sunan Kudus Foundation (YM3SK), a local institution fully responsible for implementing the event. This indicates a collaborative approach, a hybrid of top-down and bottom-up. This approach emphasizes collaboration between state (government) and non-state actors (communities, society, and local institutions).

The implementation of Buka Luwur demonstrates a form of preservation rooted in the community through a system of inherited values, rituals, and the role of local institutions. The event is managed by the Menara Mosque and Tomb of Sunan Kudus Foundation, involving the community in the form of community service (*perewang*), logistical support, and event security. Although the implementation is technically coordinated by local elites, active community involvement is evident, particularly in the form of voluntary and symbolic participation. Heritage protection in this case does not rely on national legal instruments, but rather on historical and affective social structures. Protection efforts are evident in cross-generational community participation at every stage of the activity and the facilitation of various parties in human resource development, such as training in luwur making and efforts to document and digitize all activities. This form of heritage protection reflects the continuity of intangible cultural heritage through internal participation, which is embedded in the religious and cultural life of the Kudus Kulon community. This confirms the form of protection of unique cultural heritage, as mentioned in the previous section, the protection of the Buka Luwur tradition. demonstrates the characteristics of a hybrid approach, where community initiatives are facilitated through local institutions with social and cultural legitimacy, without relying entirely on formal state structures.

Unlike Buka Luwur, the Dandangan tradition more closely reflects a pattern of state-based institutional protection. As an event on the Kudus Regency cultural calendar, its implementation involves various government agencies and is regulated by official decrees regarding the composition of the committee and the location of the activities. The continued protection of the Dandangan tradition is evident in the government's efforts to maintain it, even within a formal framework. Interestingly, within Dandangan, there are clear boundaries to its implementation. Profane activities such as traditional markets and festivals held in public spaces fall under the government's responsibility. Meanwhile, sacred activities, such as the drum-beating ritual centered at the Menara Mosque Complex and the Tomb of Sunan Kudus, fall under the responsibility of YM3SK.

The government's involvement in the implementation of Dandangan implies the implementation of its mandate to encourage participation and facilitate preservation, as mandated by regulations. Meanwhile, the role of the Menara Mosque and Tomb of Sunan Kudus Foundation reflects the presence of local actors with social and religious legitimacy in maintaining the continuity of this tradition, while also actualizing the principle of community-based protection within the national policy framework. Although Dandangan protection tends to be top-down, there is an integration of local elements that makes its preservation layered and adaptive to the local socio-cultural context.

So, where does community participation in Dandangan lie? Structurally, community participation is not directly involved in planning or major decision-making because most of

the activity agenda is coordinated by institutions. This positions the community as participants, not managers. However, upon closer examination, community participation in this tradition remains evident in the form of cultural contributions and daily practices. This is reflected in the active presence and involvement of the community in traditional markets and cultural festivals, which represents a cultural response to the traditional space; furthermore, this presence affirms cultural attachment and emotional affiliation with the Dandangan tradition. It is also evident in the reproduction of local cultural elements through traditional arts performances, as well as in involvement in core ceremonies which, although institutional in nature, has historically voiced collective aspirations and embodied the social legitimacy of the local community.

For these reasons, community participation in Dandangan is indirect, mediative, and symbolic. This participation exhibits a unique form, one that is not based on formal community involvement in planning or decision-making, but nonetheless demonstrates meaningful cultural and social engagement. These three characteristics—indirect, mediative, and symbolic—are unique forms of participation in the protection of traditions like Dandangan, which, despite its context, is not based on formal community involvement in planning or decision-making, yet nonetheless demonstrates meaningful cultural and social engagement. These three aspects form a spectrum of participation in which the community is not merely a "passive spectator," but rather a subject negotiating its cultural space through means not always visible in formal settings.

The Dandangan and Buka Luwur traditions reflect two poles of a continuous approach to the protection of intangible cultural heritage: one through formal institutional structures with symbolic community participation, and the other through local institutions rooted in the community. Both form a configuration of intangible cultural heritage protection in Kudus Kulon that relies on actor negotiation, social governance, and collective memory, showing that the continuity of intangible cultural heritage does not only depend on administrative legality, but on the relational vitality between space, institutions, and society.

3.4.3 Configurative spectrum of heritage conservation continuity by communities in Kudus Kulon

To explain the continuity of heritage protection in Kudus Kulon, it is necessary to first consider the forms of protection of cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage. Given that Kudus Kulon has a diversity of heritage types that cannot be generalized, the schematic diagram on the next page shows how cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage protection efforts are implemented and the underlying aspects. The continuity of cultural heritage protection in Kudus Kulon cannot be reduced to a single measure, such as strength or weakness, but rather needs to be understood as a configurative spectrum reflecting the relationships between communities, local institutions, and the state. The use of the term "spectrum" to describe the continuity of preservation refers to the general definition of the term itself as a continuous range consisting of various interconnected positions, forms, or conditions, without rigid or absolute boundaries between the elements within it.

The two-way arrow with a dotted line between the factors and forms of continuity indicates a reciprocal relationship. In cultural heritage preservation practices, factors such as community participation or institutional support not only influence the form of continuity—they are also influenced by the form of continuity itself. In addition, the two-way arrow is a relational marker that reinforces the message that there is no single fixed path in heritage protection, but rather many possible outcomes depending on the context.

The continuity of heritage protection (cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage) in Kudus Kulon demonstrates that this continuity cannot be understood uniformly. It is a result of historical relationships, the status (ownership, management, and administration) of heritage, and the internal capacity of communities. Communities involved in heritage protection in Kudus Kulon include both site managers and communities maintaining traditions. The continuity of heritage protection in Kudus Kulon exhibits

diverse forms, meaning that in practice, it does not always depend on the existence of formal government regulations or involvement. Rather, heritage protection can also occur autonomously and organically within communities.

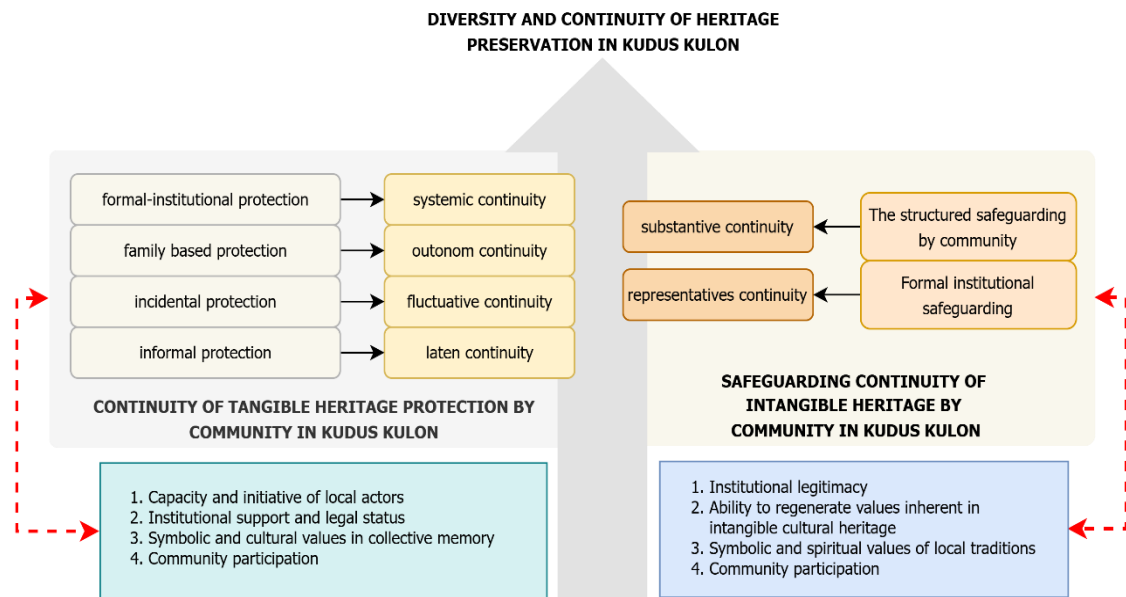


Fig. 4. The continuity of community connection with Kudus Kulon cultural heritage

From the perspective of spatial production theory, the continuity of heritage protection in Kudus Kulon emphasizes the process of re-formation. Heritage is not merely preserved as artifacts or physical entities, but is reproduced through the social roles of each existing community, both formal and informal. This fragmentation of cultural heritage protection in Kudus Kulon reflects the dialectical reality of preservation, where continuity occurs in contexts that are not always balanced and structured.

3.5 Heritage dialectic: Interaction between continuity and changes in Kudus Kulon

The previous result outlined heritage preservation practices in Kudus Kulon, demonstrating elements of continuity and change. However, in social reality, these two do not exist in a separate dichotomy. Instead, the preservation process in Kudus Kulon exhibits a dialectical character: living heritage is shaped by the relationship between inherited values and evolving values. Therefore, this section discusses how negotiations between the two occur. What is meant by "negotiation" in this context? In heritage preservation in Kudus Kulon, negotiations are not limited to formal debates within the local government, which often arise in planning processes involving various stakeholders. Rather, the negotiation process here culminates in a dialectical process—a struggle and interplay between traditional Kudus Kulon values (spirituality, sacredness, taboos, and the original function of buildings) and the contemporary demands of modern urban areas: commodification, tourism, functional and visual aesthetic demands, technology, and formal management. These negotiations do not occur linearly but through informal compromises, overlapping spatial representations, and gradual but meaningful changes in spatial function.

In Kudus Kulon, this negotiation process is depicted in a layered spiral diagram, showing the continuous journey of heritage in Kudus Kulon. It begins with a sacred state and ends with the coexistence of old and new meanings—a dynamic, not linear, process. The red line that returns from stage 6 to stage 1 emphasizes that this process does not stop in a single cycle. The living heritage space is continuously negotiated over time, with generational changes, and social dynamics. In this context, the heritage dialectic in Kudus Kulon is not a clash of two poles, but rather a dynamic social process that continues to produce new meanings, functions, and forms of heritage.

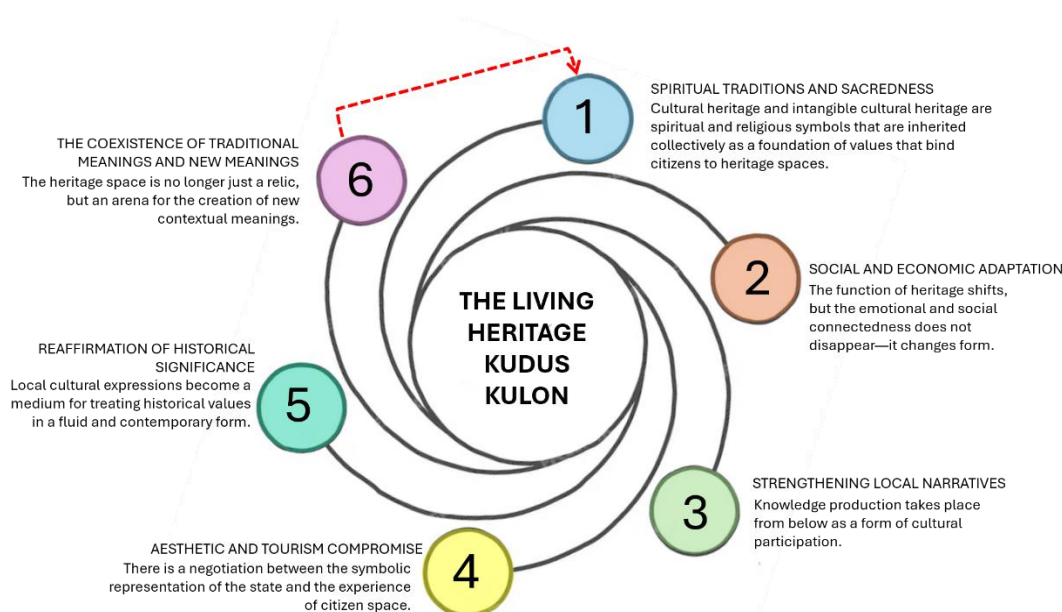


Fig. 5. A dynamic social process of Kudus Kulon living heritage site

The first stage is spiritual tradition and sacredness, this stage begins with the recognition of the spiritual and sacred value of space. Kudus Kulon is not a space formed out of nothing; the past activities of Sunan Kudus shape the space. These "traces" of the past are stored in the community's collective memory, reflected in religious practices (the direct actions of humans as servants of God) and traditions that have been passed down through generations. The Buka Luwur Sunan Kudus and Dandangan, as Indonesian intangible cultural heritage, are not merely ceremonial events but also serve as the initial mode of meaning production within the heritage space. This initial mode of meaning production means that these traditions serve as the initial means or mechanisms for shaping, enlivening, and giving meaning to the heritage space. In this context, the space around the Menara Mosque and the Tomb of Sunan Kudus becomes a space enlivened by ritual and sacredness. This demonstrates a strong form of continuity, indicating the community's ongoing connection to the heritage site through values derived from the Wali Songo, Islamic teachings, and local wisdom values imbued in collective rituals. This process shapes the space as a socio-religious entity that embodies the "right to spirituality" of the Kudus Kulon community. However, these sacred values are not static but dynamic and adaptive. The involvement of the younger generation, changes in the form of celebrations, and the opening of access to outside visitors indicate that the spiritual space is beginning to engage in dialogue with new contexts. However, the transformations that occur do not eliminate sacredness itself; instead, they demonstrate that spirituality can be the starting point and pivot of the heritage dialectic.

Social and economic adaptation, the second stage in the living heritage dialectic demonstrates the community's response to social and economic needs while maintaining the space's original meaning. Kudus Kulon, originally a center of government and religion, gradually established itself as an economically active space, primarily through trade, accommodation for pilgrims, and the conversion of houses into kiosks around the Tower complex, as well as educational functions. Spaces that previously served as residences, lodgings for Islamic students (*santri*), or parts of religious social networks are now undergoing functional transformations. Some residents have converted parts of their homes into shops, stalls, and even parking lots for pilgrims. This is not merely an economic strategy, but a form of spatial adaptation to the demands of contemporary life. The above phenomenon cannot be reduced to simply "commodification or commercialization of space." Rather, this adaptation demonstrates how old meanings and new functions respond to each other. In the context of living heritage, this demonstrates that the sustainability of a space is determined not only by the preservation of its physical form but also by its ability

to transform socially and economically. At this stage, socio-economic adaptation implies that heritage spaces are negotiated spaces. Local communities not only maintain sacred values but also utilize the space as a source of livelihood, creating a new dynamic between historical function and current economic needs.

Strengthening local narratives, the third stage in the living heritage dialectic demonstrates the emergence of community initiatives to rebuild emotional and cultural connections to heritage spaces, particularly through local historical narratives that have often been marginalized by official discourse. This is evident in the development of several walking tour communities, which actively explore, document, and disseminate stories of Kudus' history through various media, including tour booklets, Instagram accounts, and ongoing open discussions. These activities not only facilitate the process of reinterpreting space but also enliven the social function of historical spaces where collective memory is shared. Based on this, in this study, local narratives are considered a subtle means of resistance to the dominance of the state or economic actors in depicting space, which often view it solely from a technocratic and economically oriented perspective. In the context of the living heritage approach, the strengthening of these narratives represents the active life of heritage—not merely preserved as an object, but as a social subject that continues to grow in intergenerational dialogue. Walking tour participants, for example, not only convey information but also invite the community to participate in the production of spatial meaning, making them part of the heritage itself. This stage shows that the continuity of heritage in Kudus Kulon occurs actively through efforts to construct narratives that affirm the identity of the local community at the same time.

Aesthetic and tourism compromise, at this stage, heritage spaces are being reorganized through tourism programs, visual adjustments, and regional promotional strategies—such as the implementation of *Sapta Pesona* or the branding of Kudus as the "City of Kretek." These interventions bring heritage spaces into a new narrative, oriented more toward visitor comfort and economic value than their original social meaning. While these efforts are claimed as preservation efforts within a formal framework, from a living heritage perspective, these changes represent a disruption to the continuity of the space's original function in Kudus Kulon. Its original function—namely as a place for religious practice, local rites, or community cultural expression—is no longer the focus of management. Instead, heritage spaces in Kudus Kulon demonstrate a management tendency toward functional aspects, visual quality, and commercial purposes. Therefore, from this perspective, the continuity of the original function has shifted, and this shift demonstrates a form of compromise in meaning that tends to favor the interests of outsiders. This situation highlights the vulnerability of heritage to shifts in meaning if the involvement of the Kudus Kulon community is not a primary principle in the transformation of heritage spaces.

Reaffirmation of historical meaning, this stage occurs when heritage that has lost its relevance or functional meaning is revived in new forms of social representation. In Kudus Kulon, this process is evident in the *Langgar Bubah* Festival, initiated by the Demangan Village Government, along with interfaith youth groups and organizations. Although the original structure of the *Langgar Bubah* served as a place for ritual practices for the Hindu community in the past, its function remains unchanged despite the loss of the core community's connection to the site. The festival revives the historical meaning inherent in this cultural heritage structure and also creates new cultural expressions. Furthermore, the *Langgar Bubah* serves as a meeting point across generations through contemporary social practices that represent a continuity of values. The community's initiative in organizing the festival emphasizes that heritage is not simply transmitted intact but reconstructed and reinterpreted by the community within a contemporary social framework. In other words, the festival embeds the evolution of cultural expression—the old ritual space is reduced but its social function is expanded, so that it becomes not only a religious ritual but also an expression of communal identity through collective activities.

Coexistence of traditional and new meanings, the final stage in the dialectic of living heritage in West Kudus is marked by the emergence of a form of coexistence between inherited traditional meanings and new meanings generated by contemporary needs and

dynamics. This coexistence is not merely a compromise, but rather an expression of the local community's capacity to maintain its traditional roots while simultaneously embracing change and the diversity of spatial functions. This phenomenon is reflected in the daily lives of the community around the Menara Mosque Complex and the Tomb of Sunan Kudus, where spiritual activities, pilgrimages, trade, and tourism can occur simultaneously. The complex remains a center of spirituality and sacredness, but is also animated by economic and social activities such as trade, tourism, and community activities. Through the framework of living heritage, this situation illustrates that the meaning of heritage is not static, but is constantly renewed through collective experience. The community does not reject modernity outright, but adapts to it while maintaining its local character. Thus, new functions do not erase old meanings but coexist within a single social space. This shows that Kudus Kulon as a heritage space is not frozen in conservatism, but becomes a creative arena where negotiations between old and new values take place continuously, making heritage not only historically relevant, but also meaningful in contemporary life.

Through these six stages, it is clear that the process of preserving cultural heritage in Kudus Kulon is neither linear nor deterministic. Instead, it forms a constantly evolving dialectic between old values and the demands of the times. The coexistence of traditional and new meanings—between spiritual and socio-economic spaces—is proof that heritage space in Kudus Kulon is not a static entity, but rather a "living space" continually negotiated by various actors. Through this series of stages, Kudus Kulon demonstrates its capacity as a dialectical space of living heritage, where continuity and change do not negate each other, but rather complement each other within a unique and contextual framework of socio-spatial relations.

4. Conclusions

Viewed through the lens of "living heritage," cultural heritage preservation in Kudus Kulon reveals a dialectical process involving the ongoing negotiation between traditional values and the demands of modernism. The tangible and intangible heritage in Kudus Kulon cannot be understood in isolation; they are interconnected elements that shape a living heritage space. These research findings confirm and enrich the Western concept of living heritage by highlighting the continuity of original functions, transformation, the involvement of core communities, and sustained adaptability. The Sunan Kudus Heritage site, the traditional *Joglo Pencu* house, and the *Buka Luwur* and *Dandangan* traditions demonstrate that heritage remains alive not by being frozen in time, but through continuous use, maintenance, and reinterpretation by the community and local foundations. In this context, social change and institutional adjustments do not weaken the heritage; rather, they become integral to the sustainability strategy of the heritage space. From a living heritage perspective, Kudus Kulon demonstrates an ability to maintain continuity between the past and the present. Meanwhile, the theory of the production of space reveals that heritage spaces in Kudus Kulon are continuously reproduced through social practices, religious activities, governance, and the community's daily experiences. Heritage spaces in Kudus Kulon are not limited to physical elements but are the product of dynamic, evolving social relations. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of the living heritage concept by emphasizing that preservation must be understood as a dialectical socio-spatial process. Practically, these findings can inform community-based preservation strategies, particularly in balancing physical protection, the sustainability of cultural practices, and the dynamics of spatial change. The study also demonstrates that successful heritage preservation depends not only on formal regulations but also on the local community's capacity to continuously produce spaces that are meaningful for their identity and collective life.

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Author Contribution

The first author contributed to the conceptual development of the study, research design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and drafting of the manuscript. The second and third authors, as dissertation supervisors, contributed to the supervision of the research process, critical review of the manuscript, and approval of the final version for submission. All authors have read and approved the submitted manuscript.

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We encourage all authors of articles published in this journal to share their research data. This section provides details regarding where data supporting reported results can be found, including links to publicly archived datasets analyzed or generated during the study. A statement is still required when no new data is created or unavailable due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Grammarly to assist in improving grammar, clarity, and academic tone of the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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