

Article

Canvas of Culture: Public Art's Role in Reinvigorating Pekan Parit

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Abstract: Public art is instrumental in enhancing tourism in Pekan Parit, Perak, by enriching the area cultural landscape. This study explores the multifaceted influence of public art on community perceptions, emotional responses, and its potential to attract tourists. We employed a mixed-methods design to collect data from 103 respondents through surveys, evaluating community attitudes towards public art and its role in fostering a cohesive community and boosting tourism. Key findings reveal that public art not only enhances Pekan Parit's aesthetic appeal but also significantly influences both residents and visitors. However, community engagement is closely linked to the effectiveness of public art in attracting tourists, so artistic initiatives must resonate with both locals and tourists. This underscores the critical role of public art in reflecting and preserving the town's cultural identity while involving the community in the planning and execution of these projects. The research concludes that public art can be a powerful catalyst for sustainable tourism growth, facilitating deeper connections to the area's cultural heritage and enhancing the overall visitor experience. These insights are essential for policymakers, urban planners, and cultural practitioners seeking to leverage public art as a strategic tool for revitalising tourism in Pekan Parit, Perak.

Keywords: Public Art; revitalization; engagement; identity; tourism

Introduction

Public art has progressively emerged as a crucial instrument for rejuvenating tourism, particularly in small towns seeking to enhance their cultural appeal and economic viability. Integrating art into public spaces allows towns to create visually captivating environments that resonate with both residents and visitors, fostering a sense of place and community identity (Zebracki, 2017). Despite the recognised benefits of public art, much of the existing literature, including studies by Zebracki (2017) and Sharp et al. (2005), primarily focusses on larger urban areas or specific case studies, leaving a significant gap in understanding the dynamics of public art and its influence on tourism in smaller towns like Pekan Parit, Perak. According to Muhammad et al., (2024), various programs are planned and implemented as an effort to promote tourism activities, such as improving the quality of infrastructure and facilities and diversifying tourism activities. Pekan Parit, a town rich in cultural heritage, presents a unique opportunity to explore how public art can stimulate tourism by enhancing the town's visual attractiveness and cultural vibrancy. The increasing presence of tourists will help the areas involved become more developed and advanced compared to other tourism areas in Malaysia (Azimah & Nur, 2024). On the other hand, local community also receives a positive economic impact from the tourism development process in the area (Muhamad & Novel, 2021). However, previous studies often overlook the specific socio-cultural contexts of smaller towns, which may have different community dynamics

and tourism challenges compared to larger cities. This research aims to fill this gap by investigating the unique interplay between public art, community engagement, and tourism in Pekan Parit.

The endorsement of public art by the local community is essential, as it enhances the effectiveness of such projects and ensures they resonate with both inhabitants and tourists (Sharp et al. 2005). While existing research indicates that public art can shape visitor behaviour by creating memorable experiences that encourage repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth (Hall & Smith, 2019), there is a lack of focused studies on how these dynamics manifest in smaller towns. Additionally, while public art has the potential to act as a catalyst for community involvement and foster a collective sense of identity (Senie, 2002), the effectiveness of these projects in smaller towns like Pekan Parit requires further investigation. This study aims to explore the effects of public art on tourism in Pekan Parit, specifically examining its impact on local perceptions and tourist behaviour. This research aims to provide valuable insights into how such projects can facilitate sustainable tourist development and enhance the town's cultural and economic progress by analysing the community's reception of public art. Through this focused approach, the study will contribute to the broader discourse on public art and tourism, emphasizing the need for localized research that considers the unique attributes of smaller towns.

This paper contributes to the field of public art and tourism by analysing how public art influences community engagement and tourism development in Pekan Parit, Perak. It enhances understanding of public art's role in revitalizing small towns by boosting cultural vibrancy and visitor appeal. Through a quantitative approach, the study reveals community attitudes and the effects of public art on tourist behavior. It emphasises the importance of community involvement in planning and executing public art projects, which can enhance local acceptance and promote sustainable tourism. The findings offer practical guidance for policymakers, urban planners, and cultural practitioners aiming to leverage public art for economic and cultural development.

Literature Review

Public art has long been recognized as a vital component of urban development, widely acknowledged for its role in enhancing the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of public spaces. Public art can serve as a visual narrative that reflects the history, culture, and identity of a place, contributing to a sense of belonging among residents and offering an authentic experience to visitors (Miles, 1997). The integration of public art into tourism strategies has gained traction, particularly in regions seeking to differentiate themselves in a competitive market. The broader concept of cultural tourism, which leverages a place's unique cultural assets to attract visitors, aligns with this approach (Richards, 2018). Research by Mathews (2014) highlights the transformative potential of public art in revitalising declining urban areas. Public art installations can attract tourists, generate media attention, and stimulate economic activity by creating vibrant public spaces that encourage social interaction. This is particularly relevant in small towns like Pekan Parit, where tourism is a crucial driver of economic sustainability.

The success of public art in such contexts, however, hinges on the degree of community involvement and acceptance. McCarthy (2006) noted that the community is more likely to embrace public art that resonates with local values and identity, thereby enhancing its appeal to tourists. Public art's role in fostering community engagement is another critical aspect explored in the literature. According to Cartiere and Willis (2008), public art can act as a medium for social dialogue, bringing diverse groups together and fostering a sense of collective identity. Utilising social practice theory, we can further understand how public art engages communities and promotes collaboration, which is particularly important in multicultural societies. Here, public art can bridge cultural divides and promote social cohesion. Such engagement can enhance the visitor experience in tourism by providing deeper insights into the local culture and fostering connections between tourists and the local community (Eshun & Madge, 2012).

However, the literature also highlights the challenges associated with public art in tourism development. Perceiving public art as inauthentic or disconnected from the local context, especially when imposed without sufficient community input, is a significant issue (Evans, 2005). In such instances, people may perceive public art as a cultural imposition instead of a genuine expression of local identity. This challenge aligns with the Experience Economy Theory, which posits that the value of tourism experiences hinges on authenticity and emotional engagement. Additionally, the maintenance and sustainability of public

art projects are critical factors that influence their long-term impact on tourism (Zebracki, 2012). In summary, the literature underscores the importance of public art as a tool for tourism revitalisation, particularly in culturally rich regions like Pekan Parit. However, effective public art requires thoughtful integration into the community, reflecting local values, and fostering genuine engagement. This approach not only enhances the cultural appeal of a destination but also contributes to sustainable tourism development.

Study Area

Parit, a small town in Perak, presents an intriguing opportunity to investigate the potential and reception of public art in the process of urban rehabilitation, particularly in relation to tourist developments, refer Figure 1. Mosaics and other forms of public art have the capacity to attract tourists and visitors, therefore providing a significant economic stimulus to the region. Through the analysis of the influence of public art on tourism in Parit, scholars may evaluate the potential of these projects to provide economic stimulation to the local community.

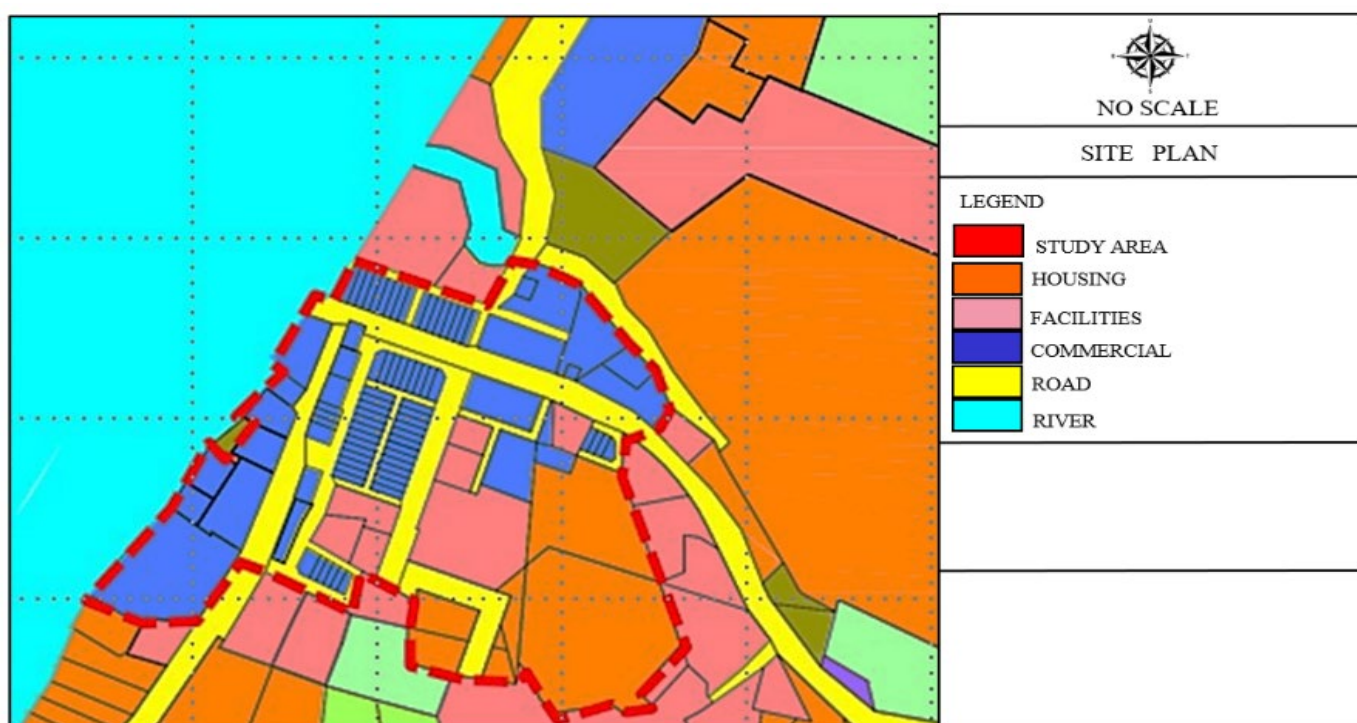


Figure 1. Site Plan

Moreover, public art has the potential to significantly contribute to the development of a distinctive character for Parit, therefore enhancing the attractiveness of the town to tourists, refer Figure 2. The goal of this study is to investigate the role of public art in shaping the town's character and enhancing its appeal as a tourist destination. Moreover, public art has the potential to greatly augment the visual allure of public areas, therefore converting Parit into a more captivating and welcoming destination. The project will investigate how these aesthetic enhancements may also augment the town's accessibility and navigation, therefore increasing its appeal to tourists. Parit, a tightly knit town, provides an ideal environment for involving residents in the process of rehabilitation through public art. This study aims to investigate the ways in which public art promotes community pride and involvement in tourist development initiatives. Indeed, Parit, Perak, is an excellent location for exploring the many advantages of public art in the process of urban rejuvenation. The municipality's capacity for tourism expansion, distinctive identity development, aesthetic enhancement, increased accessibility, and active community involvement make it a captivating and enlightening subject for analysis within the wider framework of public art and urban development.

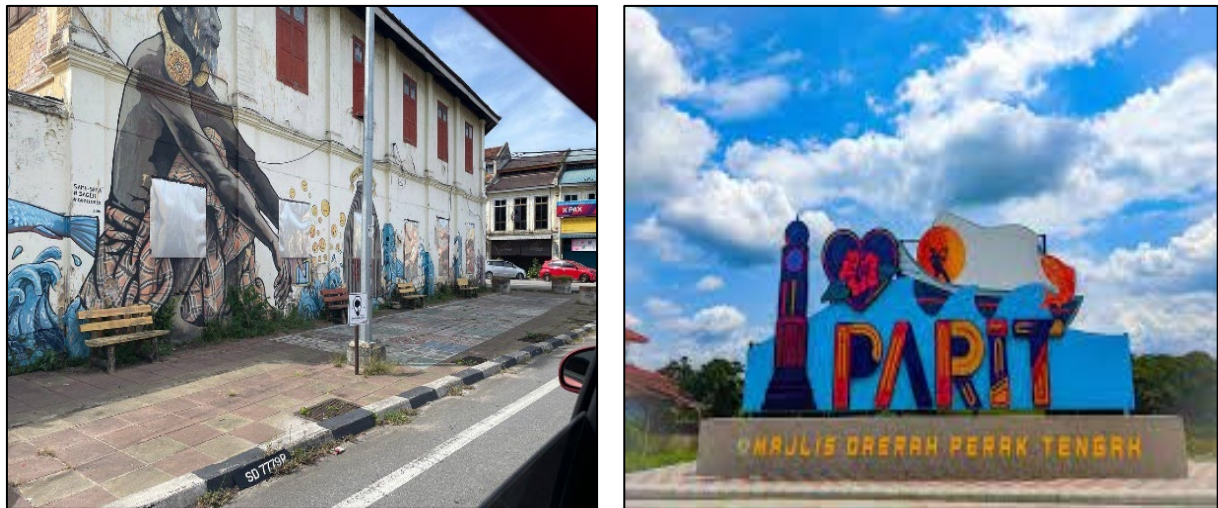


Figure 2. Public Art & Mural at Memory Lane in Pekan Parit
Source: Study Field (2024)

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of public art on tourism in Pekan Parit, Perak. Mixed-methods research integrates both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a more thorough investigation of the research issues (Creswell, 2014). This approach combines statistical analysis with contextual insights to examine the community's reception of public art.

1. Quantitative Data Collection

A questionnaire was developed to collect primary data from residents. The questions aimed to assess their views on the influence of public art on cultural identity, economic growth, and its appeal to visitors. A sample size of 103 respondents was selected using convenience sampling during site visits, targeting a diverse demographic including various age groups, occupations, and lengths of residency. While convenience sampling may limit generalizability, the sample size offers valuable insights into community perspectives.

2. Survey Instrument Validation

To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of participants. This helped refine the questions for clarity and effectiveness. The survey questions were also based on established scales and prior studies to maintain consistency and reliability in measuring the targeted variables.

3. Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative aspect of this study involves direct observation as a method for collecting secondary data. Observations were made during site visits to assess the current state of public spaces, the positioning and reception of existing public art, and the interactions between residents and tourists. This helped identify areas needing aesthetic improvements and opportunities for increased community engagement.

Data Integration

Both primary and secondary data sources were integrated to provide a comprehensive perspective. The quantitative data from the questionnaire offered quantifiable insights, while the qualitative observations added contextual depth. The qualitative findings complemented the survey data, providing a fuller picture of community interactions with public art and their emotional responses, which might not be fully captured through surveys alone.

4. Analytical Approach

A statistical analysis was conducted on the quantitative data to identify patterns, correlations, and trends. This helped determine the general level of acceptance of public art within the community. The integration of

qualitative and quantitative findings enabled a more detailed evaluation of public art’s role in revitalizing tourism, informing practical recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders involved in cultural and tourism development.

Findings

The analysis of the survey data reveals several important aspects of community perceptions and experiences regarding public art in Pekan Parit. The findings are organized under key themes: "Community Awareness," "Aesthetic Value," and "Cultural Relevance." This structured approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how public art impacts tourism and community engagement.

Table 1. Respondent’s profile

Respondent’s Profile	Frequency(n=103)	Percentage %
Gender		
Male	25	24.3
Female	78	75.7
Total	103	100
Age		
20 – 29 years	58	56.3
30 – 39 years	23	22.3
> 40 years	22	21.4
Total	103	
Race		
Malay	94	91.3
Indian	1	1.0
Chinese	8	7.8
Total	103	100
Employment		
Government	14	13.6
Private	27	26.2
Self-employed	18	17.5
Part-time worker	3	2.9
Housewife	2	1.9
Retired	3	2.9
Student	23	22.3
Fresh Graduate	1	1.0
Unemployment	12	11.7
Total	103	100
Locality		
Local people	69	67.0
Tourist	34	33.0
Total	103	100

Source: Study field (2024)

1. Community Awareness

The age group ranging from 20-29 years is the most prevalent, with much of the population being female (56.3%). The gender distribution indicates that women may have a greater propensity to participate in public art initiatives, which is consistent with research that indicates women frequently participate in cultural and aesthetic discussions (Eshun & Madge, 2012). Additionally, the respondent profile is primarily composed of younger individuals, which suggests that they are receptive to innovative cultural initiatives and have the potential to influence the development of tourism. In terms of public art awareness, the survey indicates that

81.6% of respondents are acquainted with the concept, with a mean Likert score of 3.84, Refer Table 2. This illustrates a substantial degree of public awareness, which is essential for the incorporation of cultural resources into tourism strategies. The argument by Richards (2018) that knowledge of public art is essential for nurturing community involvement and tourism growth is substantiated by this awareness level.

2. Aesthetic Value

The visual appeal of Pekan Parit is significantly improved by public art, as confirmed by a substantial majority of respondents (85.4%), resulting in a mean score of 4.12. This consensus emphasizes the significance of aesthetic value as a tourism driver. Residents view public art as a critical tool for attracting visitors by enhancing the aesthetic appeal of public spaces and fostering a sense of cultural identity. This corroborates the literature, with Mathews (2014) placing a particular emphasis on the role of public art in attracting visitors and improving aesthetic experiences. Furthermore, the respondents' perception of public art as a potent instrument for the preservation and promotion of heritage is demonstrated by the mean score of 4.13 for the belief that public art increases awareness of local cultural sustainability. This outcome is consistent with McCarthy (2006), who observed that public art has the potential to strengthen a community's cultural identity and foster long-term cultural sustainability.

3. Cultural Relevance

Although most of the respondent's express gratitude for the presence of public art, several challenges arise. The survey results indicate that 52.4% of participants believe that specific public art pieces are inappropriate for their locations, as evidenced by a mean score of 2.64. Furthermore, 64.1% of respondents are of the opinion that certain artworks do not accurately reflect the town's history, culture, or values, with a mean score of 2.5, Refer Table 2. These results suggest a discrepancy between the cultural expectations of the community and certain public art installations, which is consistent with McCarthy's (2006) research on the significance of aligning public art with local identity. Another critical issue is maintenance. Respondents' express apprehensions regarding the maintenance of public art, as evidenced by their mean score of 3.68, which suggests that inadequate maintenance undermines its longevity and efficacy. This discovery underscores the necessity of ongoing endeavors to guarantee that public art continues to be a captivating and influential aspect of the town's environment.

Table 2. Public's knowledge and appreciation of Public Art in Pekan Parit, Perak

Aspects	Likert Scale					Mean
	1 F	2 F	3 F	4 F	5 F	
1. Aware of the concept of public arts	1 1.0	3 2.9	11 10.7	84 81.6	4 3.9	3.84
2. Believe public arts can enhance the cultural ambiance of Pekan Parit	1 1.0	0 0	0 0	88 85.4	14 13.6	4.12
3. The presence of public arts in Pekan Parit adds aesthetic value to the town.	0 0	1 1.0	0 0	88 85.4	14 13.6	4.12
4. Public art in Pekan Parit contributes awareness to the sustainability of local culture and heritage.	1 1.0	0 0	1 1.0	84 81.6	17 16.5	4.13
5. Public art in Pekan Parit is neglected or poorly maintained	4 3.9	8 7.8	6 5.8	84 81.6	1 1.0	3.68
6. Public art in Pekan Parit in the city does not suitable in this current place	2 1.9	54 52.4	26 25.2	21 20.4	0 0	2.64
7. Public art in Pekan Parit does not reflect the history, culture, or values of the city.	3 2.9	66 64.1	16 15.5	16 15.5	2 1.9	2.5

Using Likert scale data, analysing the public's knowledge and appreciation of public art in Pekan Parit, Perak, reveals interesting things about the community's view of public art's function in elevating the town's aesthetic and cultural worth. According to the research, most people are pleased to see public art projects, particularly when they reflect the local culture and improve the town's visual appeal.

The Effects on Culture And Consciousness

Most respondents (81.6%) are familiar with the term "public arts," according to the mean Likert scale score of 3.84, Refer Table 2. This points to a high level of public art knowledge, which is essential for encouraging local participation in tourist initiatives that make use of cultural resources. In addition, 85.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that public art may enrich Pekan Parit's cultural environment, yielding a high mean score of 4.12. This is in line with research that shows how important public art is in fostering a culturally rich environment that draws in visitors and residents alike (Richards, 2018).

Beauty and Long-Term Cultural Viability

With an average score of 4.12, the community views Pekan Parit's public art as greatly enhancing its visual value, Refer Table 2. This near-universal agreement (85.4% of people) emphasizes the importance of public art in enhancing the aesthetic value of public places. Residents see public art as a vital instrument for promoting and protecting the region's cultural identity, as it contributes to creating awareness about the sustainability of local culture and history. The highest mean value of 4.13 demonstrates the impact of public art on this matter.

Obstacles: Upkeep and Pertinence

Although the survey found that public art in Pekan Parit was generally well-received, it did find several problems with its execution. The average score of 3.68 indicates that the lack of attention or care for public art is a significant issue. That public art is well-received but needs better upkeep to persist is a logical conclusion.

The community also believes that certain public art pieces do not represent the town's values, culture, or history or are inappropriate for their present sites, which is another important conclusion. A significant number of respondents (52.4% and 64.1%, respectively) were unhappy with these features, which resulted in mean ratings of 2.64 and 2.5, respectively, Refer Table 2. According to McCarty (2006), there seems to be a mismatch between the cultural expectations of the community and certain public art projects. This highlights the need to ensure that public art efforts are in line with the local identity and values. The findings suggest that while public art is generally well-received in Pekan Parit, its success in revitalizing tourism depends on maintaining its cultural relevance and ensuring proper upkeep. Public art that resonates with local values and enhances the town's aesthetic appeal is seen as a powerful tool for promoting cultural sustainability and tourism growth. However, to maximize its impact, there is a need for greater community involvement in the planning and maintenance of public art projects.

The findings suggest that while public art is generally well-received in Pekan Parit, its success in revitalizing tourism hinges on maintaining its cultural relevance and ensuring proper upkeep. Public art that resonates with local values and enhances the town's aesthetic appeal is seen as a powerful tool for promoting cultural sustainability and tourism growth. However, to maximize its impact, greater community involvement in the planning and maintenance of public art projects is necessary.

Discussion

The current study has examined the role of public art in revitalising tourism in Pekan Parit, Perak, thereby clarifying its significant impact on enhancing the district's cultural and aesthetic appeal. The findings indicate that the local community places considerable importance on public art due to its ability to refine the cultural ambiance and increase the visual appeal of the town. This finding aligns with the current corpus of empirical studies on the benefits of public art in metropolitan settings (Richards, 2018; Mathews, 2014). The significant levels of public art knowledge and endorsement highlight its potential as a very effective tool for encouraging community engagement and stimulating tourism development. However, the study also highlights crucial

issues that require attention. The slightly lower average evaluations regarding the importance of public art and its maintenance suggest that certain pieces fail to meet community expectations or lack adequate care. This suggests that public art should align closely with local values and maintain a superior standard of excellence to enhance its effectiveness in attracting tourists and enhancing cultural identity (McCarthy, 2006). The findings of this study underscore the complex interplay between public art and community engagement in Pekan Parit, Perak, highlighting both the positive impacts and areas for improvement. The high levels of awareness and acceptance of public art among the local community reflect a strong recognition of its potential to enhance the town's cultural and aesthetic appeal, which aligns with broader research on the role of public art in urban revitalization (Richards, 2018). However, to fully realize the benefits of public art, we must address the notable challenges revealed by the study.

1. Community Engagement and Cultural Impact

The mean scores indicating that public art enhances Pekan Parit's cultural ambiance (4.12) and adds aesthetic value (4.12) suggest a strong community belief in the positive contributions of public art. This supports the view that public art can play a significant role in enriching cultural experiences and beautifying urban spaces (Mathews, 2014). Public art not only improves the town's attractiveness to visitors by creating visually appealing environments, but it also fosters a sense of pride among residents. This aligns with the findings of Richards (2018), who emphasizes that cultural assets, including public art, are crucial for enhancing the appeal of tourist destinations by offering authentic and engaging experiences.

2. Challenges in Public Art Implementation

Despite these positive aspects, the study identifies critical issues related to the maintenance and relevance of public art. The mean score of 3.68 for public art maintenance indicates concerns about art installations' neglect or poor upkeep. Effective maintenance is essential for sustaining the visual and cultural impact of public art, as neglected installations can detract from their intended benefits and diminish community engagement (McCarthy, 2006).

Furthermore, the lower mean scores for the relevance of public art (2.64) and its reflection of local history and values (2.5) highlight a disconnect between some public art projects and the community's cultural expectations. This implies that the alignment of public art with local cultural narratives and historical context significantly influences its impact, despite its valued status. McCarthy (2006) argues that public art must resonate with the community's identity to foster meaningful engagement and support.

3. Implications for Future Public Art Projects

The findings suggest several implications for future public art projects in Pekan Parit. First, ensuring that public art reflects the town's cultural heritage and values is crucial for maximizing its impact. Engaging local stakeholders in the planning process can help align art installations with community expectations and enhance their relevance (Mathews, 2014). Additionally, improving maintenance practices is essential to preserving the aesthetic and cultural value of public art over time. Regular upkeep and community involvement in maintenance can help sustain the positive effects of public art and prevent it from becoming a source of dissatisfaction.

Overall, the study demonstrates that public art holds significant potential for revitalizing tourism and enhancing cultural identity in Pekan Parit. However, to fully leverage these benefits, it is vital to address issues related to maintenance and relevance. By aligning public art with local cultural values and ensuring its proper upkeep, Pekan Parit can enhance its appeal as a tourist destination and foster a stronger sense of community pride.

Conclusion

Overall, public art has shown its substantial value in augmenting the cultural and visual attractiveness of Pekan Parit, thereby making a beneficial contribution to tourism and community pride. To maximise this impact, policymakers, urban planners, and artists should prioritise inclusive planning processes that actively involve community members in the design and implementation of public art projects. Specific actions may include

conducting community workshops to gather input on desired themes and aesthetics, ensuring that the artwork resonates with local values and narratives. Additionally, establishing regular maintenance schedules and funding mechanisms will help preserve the quality and relevance of public art over time.

Nevertheless, it is critical to overcome obstacles associated with cultural relevance and preservation to maximize its influence. Future studies should prioritise a more comprehensive understanding of community attitudes, assess the long-term effects of tourism, establish efficient maintenance mechanisms, and investigate the wider urban development responsibilities for public art. Moreover, exploring how digital technology can integrate with public art and how public art influences long-term tourist behaviour presents exciting avenues for future research. Such endeavours will provide a more sophisticated understanding of the possibilities of public art and give direction for maximising its advantages in comparable situations.

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Conflict of Interest: We would like to declare that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this publication. This is our first work utilising the secondary data through article journals, books, and thesis that available and all authors have been fully participated actively in the study.

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