

Local community support, attitude and perceived benefits in the UNESCO World Heritage Site

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Community
and World
Heritage Site

Mohd Hafiz Hanafiah

*Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA,
Shah Alam, Malaysia*

Mohd Raziff Jamaluddin

Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Malaysia, and

Agus Riyadi

Trisakti Institute of Tourism, Jakarta Selatan, Indonesia

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to explore the support and attitudes of the local community together with the benefits of living in the vicinity of George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site. George Town is one of the popular UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Malaysia.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 319 respondents residing in the gazetted area of George Town World Heritage Sites were interviewed. The covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) analysis was conducted to test the study's hypotheses.

Findings – The community's attitudes and personal benefits were identified to strongly influence community's support towards the conservation and development of the World Heritage Sites in George Town. While a small number of community members acknowledged the significant opportunities through tourism, majority of them expected economic and non-economic benefits from the development of World Heritage Sites.

Practical implications – The findings from this study are expected to contribute to the ongoing debate on the perceived effects, benefits and future support of the World Heritage Sites from the local community's perspectives.

Social implications – Understanding the behaviour of the local community to create successful tourism planning, especially in delicate heritage destinations.

Originality/value – This study enriches the scarce empirical research study on community's behaviour living in the vicinity of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, especially in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) region.

Keywords Support, Attitude, Benefit, Local community, UNESCO World Heritage Site

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Tourism has long been regarded as a vital component contributing foreign direct investment, currency exchange and employment to the Malaysian economy (Ghaderi *et al.*, 2012; Hanafiah and Harun, 2010; Tang and Tan, 2015). However, the remarkable growth in tourism led to new challenges, particularly in maintaining the sustainability of tourism sites and their potential detrimental impacts on the local environment. This phenomenon affects the unique and fragile environments, primarily involving the cultural and historical sites (Caust and Vecco, 2017; Gilmore *et al.*, 2007; Yang *et al.*, 2019). Alike other countries, the Malaysian Government is also actively gaining official recognition from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) on the extant cultural or historical sites. Based on the continued growth of recognition request for heritage sites, the planning and management at UNESCO World



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Heritage sites as a tourism destination are critical, especially when it could affect the local community's well-being (Cameron and Rössler, 2018; Chhabra, 2019; de Fauconberg *et al.*, 2018).

To date, Malaysia is preserving its historical remains in the form of monuments and buildings, depicting the European, Chinese, Indian and Islamic architectural styles (Harun, 2011; Rashid *et al.*, 2018; Said *et al.*, 2013). However, the efforts of conservation, preservation, adaptive reuse or restoration were unsuccessful due to uncontrolled development and town planning (Said *et al.*, 2013). George Town, which is located in the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia, is popular amongst the tourists for its historical value. Nevertheless, the city was gazetted as a "UNESCO Historical City" in 2008. Meanwhile, Malacca, another historical city in Malaysia that was found thousands of years ago, was only inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2018. Such recognition by UNESCO directly generated tourism demand as it enhanced Malaysia's image in conserving the cultural heritage of the historical places (Harun, 2011; Hitchcock *et al.*, 2010; Moy and Phongpanichanan, 2014).

Several researchers have discovered the impacts of tourism development on the various destinations (Aas *et al.*, 2005; Nicholas *et al.*, 2009; Yüksel *et al.*, 2005). Most of the studies proposed that tourism development should create a "saleable tourism product" that can significantly improve the local environment and quality of life of the local community (Inskip, 1991; Konu, 2015; Pigram and Wahab, 2005). Moreover, recent studies on local community's attitude towards tourism development received a considerably high interest from academicians, policymakers and industry players (Andreck *et al.*, 2005; Boley *et al.*, 2014; Hanafiah *et al.*, 2013; Lankford and Howard, 1994; Mason and Cheyne, 2000; McCool and Martin, 1994; Teye *et al.*, 2002). However, only a few studies examined the community's behaviour towards the UNESCO World Heritage Sites recognition.

The success of tourism industry will only materialise if the community that is indirectly involved with the industry plays a significant role in tourism development (Lee and Chang, 2008; Leigh and Blakely, 2016; Nunkoo, 2015). The local community is the primary stakeholder in any tourism development, thus obtaining the community's support is essential (Aas *et al.*, 2005; Mason, 2015). Nonetheless, the stages of destination life cycle rely heavily on the support of the local community (Gursoy *et al.*, 2010). Besides that, many studies also revealed that the local community's attitude is critical to sustainable tourism development (Hanafiah *et al.*, 2016; Ko and Stewart, 2002; Sharpley, 2014; Sinclair-Maragh *et al.*, 2015). The attitudes of the local community towards tourism will directly or indirectly generate income, improve public facilities and provide employment opportunities (Hanafiah *et al.*, 2013; Zhou *et al.*, 1997).

This study aims to examine the attitudes of the local community and the benefits of living in the heritage site by highlighting the role of the local community. Additionally, this study also proposed an integrated social exchange theory (SET) framework, which includes factors influencing the local community's perceptions and support for tourism development.

2. About George Town, Penang

George Town, a city that represents the best restored and readaptive traditional architectures of Malaysia, became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008. The recognition was long overdue for the city that was famous for its multicultural trade community. The influences of the Malay, Chinese, Indian and European culture were evident through heritage buildings, food, fashion and art. The pre-war buildings with "unique architectural and cultural townscape" became the signature landmarks differentiating George Town from the other heritage cities in South East Asia (Huff and Angeles, 2011; Lee *et al.*, 2008; Shamsuddin *et al.*, 2018). The historical monuments erected throughout the city became the primary reason for tourists to visit George Town. It also significantly contributed to the tourists' arrival statistics of Malaysia (Chai, 2011; Farahani *et al.*, 2012).

The George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site is divided into two different zonal areas, namely, the core and buffer zones. The core zone covers a total of 109.38 ha, which is bounded

by the Straits of Malacca on the north-eastern cape of Penang Island. More than 1,700 historic buildings are located within this core zone throughout the four main streets of Lebu Pantai, Pengkalan Weld, Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling and Lorong Love. Hence, the core zone is protected by a 150.04 ha of the buffer zone, bounded by a stretch of sea area around the harbour.

On the other hand, the Department of Statistics Malaysia reported that the population of Penang Island would increase beyond 1.8 m people by 2020 (The Star, 2018). From the total population, the average age of residents is 31.9 year with 72.2% (1.3 m) people are between the age of 15 years old to 64 years old, while only 8.4% were those who were more than 65 years of age. This statistic indicated that more significant infrastructure improvement would be needed to accommodate not only the Penangites but also to the increasing number of tourists. As of 2017, Penang Island welcomed 919,506 international visitors, an increment of 8% from the previous year and ranked number two as the highest domestic arrivals in Malaysia (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2018). However, booming tourism activities have led to the migration of Penangites away from the island. The key reason for the migration of Penangites was the high cost of living, specifically the pricey rental for a heritage building (Swan and Chieh, 2017).

In a special report of “*Building Social Capital: The George Town Experiment*”, the Khazanah Research Institute of Malaysia revealed that approximately 8,500 local communities or equivalent to 591 households have moved out from Penang Island after it was nominated as a World Heritage Site in 2007 (Ismail *et al.*, 2017). As a result, 200 local residential properties were transformed into commercial buildings to cater to the need for tourism activities like lodging, restaurant and bars. In accordance with the restrictions by UNESCO World Heritage Site, refurbished or new building constructions higher than 18 m are not permitted. Ismail *et al.* (2017) also noted that more than 200 properties have been left vacant due to high rental since 2015. Therefore, this urbanisation trend has left the UNESCO World Heritage Site’s status in jeopardy.

3. Literature review

Local communities’ involvement and attitude are crucial for tourism development (Getz, 1994). The communities are directly involved in the process of developing a sustainable tourism sector (Allen *et al.*, 1988; Choi and Murray, 2010; Lee, 2013). Higher local communities’ involvement leads to higher support for the tourism industry; hence, it is an essential component in the sustainable development framework (Hanafiah *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, the local communities are the main actors that offer the accommodation, information, transformation, facilities and services to the tourism activities (Andereck and Nyaupane, 2011; Kim *et al.*, 2013).

The assessment of the local community’s attitude towards tourism development stipulated that tourism development does impact the local community (Azjen, 1980; Choi and Sirakaya, 2005; Hunt and Stronza, 2014; Lee, 2013; Moghavvemi *et al.*, 2017). The positive outcomes of the social and cultural concept of tourism development correspond to positive attitudes (Harrill, 2004; Wang and Xu, 2015; Woo *et al.*, 2015). Harrill (2004) also suggested that the local community’s attitudes included a combination of benefit enjoyment, decision-making involvement, destination life cycle stage and economic earnings through tourism development. Similarly, Garay and Cánoves (2011) added that in the Cycle of Revolution Model, the attitude of the local community transformed to be positive in line with the progression of tourism development. However, the attitudes changed when the tourism product cycle approached the maturity stage.

It was also noted that the interaction between local communities and tourists will help shape the attitude towards tourism development (Allen *et al.*, 1988; Hanafiah *et al.*, 2013; Hunt and Stronza, 2014; Sautter and Leisen, 1999; Wang and Xu, 2015). Although some researchers postulated that personality influences how the local community values personal benefits

through tourism (Cheng *et al.*, 2019; Choi and Murray, 2010; Jackson and Inbakaran, 2006; Moghavvemi *et al.*, 2017; Ryan *et al.*, 1998; Wang and Pfister, 2008), the local community's knowledge, in general, does not reflect its attitude towards the impact of tourism.

Having said that, in tourism studies, personal benefit refers to economic and non-economic value domains that might influence the community's attitudes (Hanafiah *et al.*, 2013; Wang and Pfister, 2008; Woo *et al.*, 2015). According to Perdue *et al.* (1990), tourism positively influences cultural activities, entertainment facilities along with the development of public and recreational facilities for the local community. Hence, those who economically benefit from the tourism industry would give their full support to the development in tourism because it generates employment opportunities and increases personal income (Hanafiah *et al.*, 2013; Lee, 2013; Perdue *et al.*, 1990; Rivera *et al.*, 2016). Meanwhile, those who are not economically affected would not be inclined to tourism development.

Consequently, the local community will perceive tourism to either positively or negatively impact lives depending on the social and cultural effects of the tourism activities. SET posits that the belief of the local communities will shape their view towards the tourism industry; thus, it may favourably influence them to support tourism development (Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2015). Notably, local community's supports depend on what type of benefits they received from the current and future tourism development (Nunkoo, 2016). Similarly, Andereck *et al.* (2005) and Wang and Pfister (2008) also revealed that perceived benefits are essential in shaping the character and support of the local community towards tourism development.

3.1 Hypothesis development

SET is a prominent theory used by previous researchers to analyse the perception of the local community's attitude and perception towards the tourism development framework (Wang and Pfister, 2008; Ward and Berno, 2011). SET has four stages, namely, the (1) initiation of an exchange, (2) exchange formation, (3) exchange transaction and (4) evaluation of exchange consequences (Sirakaya *et al.*, 2002). SET was deployed widely in studies related to tourism solely to determine the response of the local community towards economic, environmental and sociocultural impacts through tourism (McGehee and Andereck, 2004; Perdue *et al.*, 1990; Sirakaya *et al.*, 2002). As a result, SET assisted these researchers in understanding the reactions of local communities towards the importance of future societal and tourism development (Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2015; Ward and Berno, 2011).

SET explains the effect of personal benefits towards community support in tourism development (Chang, 2018; Pavlina and Vogt, 2012; McGehee and Andereck, 2004; Özel and Kozak, 2017; Perdue *et al.*, 1990; Sirakaya *et al.*, 2002). Besides that, SET explains the economic and non-economic gains from active interaction between the local communities and tourism players (Nunkoo, 2016; Rivera *et al.*, 2016; Wang and Pfister, 2008). For instance, the probability of an individual participating in tourism developmental activities is better if the perceived cost is lower than the benefit (Nunkoo, 2016; Ward and Berno, 2011). Similarly, the local community's support will be greater if no unacceptable costs occur in tourism development (Hanafiah *et al.*, 2013; Lee, 2013; Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2017). However, the local community members are more inclined to oppose future tourism development if the perceived negative impacts are overwhelming than that of the positive impacts (Hanafiah *et al.*, 2013; Hunt and Stronza, 2014; Lee, 2013). Furthermore, Lee (2013) also added that the local community will particularly participate in tourism development which generates an economic advantage for them.

On the other hand, previous researchers have also stated that the relationship between the local community's attitude and support towards tourism development were inconclusive (Hanafiah *et al.*, 2013; Lee, 2013; Perdue *et al.*, 1990; Rivera *et al.*, 2016). One such significant finding indicated that the local community members' positive acceptance towards tourism depends heavily on their satisfaction with the quality of life (Allen *et al.*, 1988; Andereck *et al.*,

2005; Hanafiah *et al.*, 2013; Hunt and Stronza, 2014; Lee, 2013; McCool and Martin, 1994; Wang and Xu, 2015; Wang and Pfister, 2008). Therefore, this study took the initiative to examine the local community's attitude and support towards tourism development of George Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The research framework (Figure 1) demonstrated the hypothesised relationship between the community's attitudes and personal benefits of tourism development towards community's support for tourism development.

4. The research method

This study employed a quantitative research design. The questionnaire utilised the five-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree) comprising adapted instruments used and verified by previous studies. The first section of the survey measured demographic information including age, gender, education, occupation, residence and length of residency. The second section measured the community's attitude through 12 items adapted from previous literature (Choi and Murray, 2010; Hanafiah *et al.*, 2013; Wang and Pfister, 2008). Meanwhile, the third section measured the personal benefits from tourism development, with six items adapted from Wang and Pfister (2008). Finally, the five instruments in the final section adapted from Hanafiah *et al.* (2013) and Lee (2013) assessed the local community's support for tourism development. The surveyed instruments were tested for validity by five academicians. A pilot survey was also conducted to test the reliability with 32 respondents, where the final survey instruments were slightly refined based on their feedback.

The study was undertaken in the gazetted area of George Town World Heritage Site within the compounds of Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, Kek Lok Si Temple, Kuan Yin Temple, Sri Mariamman Temple, St. George's Church and the Queen Victoria Memorial Clock Tower neighbourhood. This study employed a judgmental sampling method to select the respondents similar to that of Marshall (1996). Local communities who resided in the gazetted area of George Town World Heritage Site were targeted as respondents for the research study. The process of recruiting respondents began with a simple starter screening question of "are you a local community of George Town?" If the answer was "yes", then we proceeded with the interview. The interview sessions were conducted face to face, where they were tape-recorded. The data collection continued four months involving a total of 310 households as study's samples. The final valid response rate in this study was 98% ($N = 319$).

The tabulation of descriptive statistics comprised four main sections, namely, the demographic profiles, community's attitudes, personal benefits and support for tourism development. This study also employed the structural equation modelling (SEM) tool to test the proposed hypotheses in the research framework (Figure 1).

5. Results

5.1 Demographic profiles

The descriptive statistics tabulated the essential demographic profiles of the respondents. The unit of analysis of this study is respondents residing within the vicinity of the UNESCO

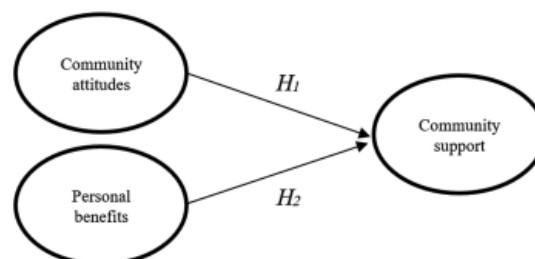


Figure 1.
The research
framework

World Heritage Site. A total of 319 respondents residing in the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, the Kek Lok Si Temple, the Kuan Yin Temple, the Sri Mariamman Temple, St. George's Church and the Queen Victoria Memorial Clock Tower were interviewed. Table 1 depicts the respondents' demographic profile.

Based on Table 1, the majority of the respondents were female ($N = 204$; 63.9%), with 115 male (36.1%). Approximately 40% of the respondents were between 41 and 50 years of age, while 22.1% were above 51 years. Most of the respondents ($N = 212$; 66.4%) had at least completed high school education. In terms of employment, 113 (35.4%) respondents were directly employed in tourism sectors, while a majority ($N = 206$; 64.6%) were working in non-tourism-related industries. Of the total 319 respondents, 221 (69.3%) were living within the core zone, while 98 (30.7%) were residing within the buffer zone.

5.2 The descriptive analysis

The descriptive analysis reported the mean score of the perceptions of the local community's support, attitude and perceived benefits as per Table 2.

The mean scores of the community's attitudes revealed that majority of the respondents claimed that tourism development encourages the participation of cultural activities by the local community ($M = 4.67$; $SD = 0.520$). Besides that, the recognition of George Town as a UNESCO World Heritage Site created more recreational activities ($M = 4.73$; $SD = 0.896$) and desirable employment opportunities ($M = 4.49$; $SD = 0.574$) for the local community. Moreover, a majority of the respondents agreed that the benefits of tourism to the community outweigh its costs ($M = 4.42$; $SD = 0.681$).

In regards to personal benefits from tourism development, the community also enjoys the additional facilities as a result of George Town being feted as a UNESCO World Heritage Site ($M = 4.50$; $SD = 0.575$). Apart from that, they generated additional income from the tourism industry ($M = 4.15$; $SD = 0.761$) and benefitted from the current tourism development in George Town ($M = 4.32$; $SD = 0.901$). The tourism community, as common-sense dictates,

Demographic profiles	<i>N</i>	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	115	36.1
Female	204	63.9
<i>Age</i>		
Less than 30 years	59	18.5
31–40 years	62	19.4
41–50 years	127	40.0
Above 51 years	71	22.1
<i>Education level</i>		
High school or lower	212	66.5
Bachelor's degree	89	27.9
Master's degree or higher	18	5.6
<i>Employment</i>		
Working within the tourism industry	113	35.4
Working within the non-tourism-related industry	206	64.6
<i>Residency area</i>		
WHS core zone	221	69.3
WHS buffer zone	98	30.7

Table 1.
Demographic profiles **Note(s):** $N = 319$

No	Factors	Mean	Std. deviation	Community and World Heritage Site
<i>Factor 2: Community's attitude</i>				
1	The benefits of tourism to the community outweigh its costs	4.42	0.681	
2	Tourism creates desirable employment opportunity for the local community in the country	4.49	0.574	
3	Local businesses benefit the most from tourists	4.10	0.900	
4	Tourism helps to improve the economic situation for many local people in the community	4.07	0.717	
5	Tourism provides more recreational activities for the local community	4.73	0.896	
6	Tourism encourages the participation of cultural activities by the local community	4.67	0.520	
<i>Factor 2: Personal benefits</i>				
7	I generate extra income from the tourism industry	4.15	0.761	
8	I feel secure of my current job	4.31	0.716	
9	I am getting the extra facilities resulting from the tourism industry	4.50	0.575	
10	I get the best condition of the environment	3.20	0.564	
11	I enjoy the recreation opportunity available	3.90	0.772	
12	I benefited from current tourism development in George Town	4.32	0.901	
<i>Factor 3: Support for tourism development</i>				
13	I believe that the tourism industry should be actively encouraged in my community	4.73	0.896	
14	I support tourism and would like to see it become an important part of my community	4.67	0.520	
15	I will support new tourism development that will attract more tourism in my community	4.63	0.546	
16	I believe tourism activities should be actively encouraged in George Town	4.58	0.541	
17	I believe the tourism sector will continue to play a major role in the economy of the George Town community	4.73	0.746	

Note(s): $N = 319$

Table 2.
Mean scores of community's support, attitude and perceived benefits

will have higher expectations from tourism development with respect to revenue generation, employment generation, investment in the tourism business, development of basic infrastructure, etc. However, as the numbers of tourists are growing, this study found that majority of them moderately claimed that they get the best condition of the environment from tourism development ($M = 3.20$; $SD = 0.564$). Thus, the local government needs to combat overtourism in George Town by managing the destination carrying capacity and reducing the ecological footprint of tourists.

The communities in George Town appreciate that the tourism industry should be actively encouraged ($M = 4.73$; $SD = 0.896$) and play a significant role in the economy of the local community ($M = 4.73$; $SD = 0.746$). Such perceptions were expressed as tourism is accepted as an important economic sector of George Town city. They would like to see tourism industry becoming an essential part of their community ($M = 4.67$; $SD = 0.520$) and will undoubtedly support new tourism development to attract more tourists to George Town ($M = 4.63$; $SD = 0.546$).

5.3 Structural equation modelling

Next, the data were subjected to the SEM analysis using the covariance-based approach. The two-step process included the evaluation of the measurement (confirmatory factor analysis) and structural models (hypotheses testing).

5.3.1 *The measurement model* This section explains the measurement model assessment as per suggestions by Hair *et al.* (2014). First, the survey instruments were examined to ensure that they met a factor loading of 0.70 or higher. Next, the average variance extracted (AVE) value was calculated to confirm the presence of convergent validity. The value of AVE should be higher than 0.50 to ensure adequate convergence. Since AMOS software is unable to perform the composite reliability and AVE calculations, the measurements were computed manually. Table 3 summarises the assessment of the measurement model.

Based on Table 3, all factor loadings were higher than 0.7. Moreover, the AVE values for each construct were higher than 0.50, indicating the presence of discriminant validity in the measurement model. Furthermore, no item was removed from the initial proposition. Thus, strengthening the model fit criteria. The hypothesised model also demonstrated convincing evidence of unidimensionality, reliability and convergent validity (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Hence, based on all measures, the measurement model employed in this study was confirmed to possess the necessary criteria to be further tested using the structural model evaluation.

5.3.2 *Structural modelling*. To conclude that the model has an acceptable good fit as recommended by Hair *et al.* (2014), three to four indices are sufficient. Referring to Table 3, the chi square–df ratio (χ^2/df) met the threshold of less than 5.00 (3.182). The RMR value represents the average residual value of the hypothesised model at 0.046, denoting the correlation within the models with an average error of 0.046. The IFI (0.971), GFI (0.924) and CFI (0.970) values also further suggested that the hypothesised model fits the data well. Meanwhile, the value displayed by the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) for the overall model (0.073) was ideal ($0.03 < x < 0.08$), indicating an excellent fit. Moreover, the result also strengthened the overall fit of the model concerning its adequacy of the observed data.

The scale reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha and Dillon-Goldstein’s rho as proposed by Chin (1998). The acceptable scores for Cronbach’s alpha and Dillon-Goldstein’s rho should be higher than 0.70 Chin (1998). The results were satisfactory whereby the community’s attitude (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.874; Dillon-Goldstein’s rho = 0.918), personal benefit (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.891; Dillon-Goldstein’s rho = 0.926) and support for tourism development (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.925; Dillon-Goldstein’s rho = 0.942) indicated good fit. According to the measurement model analyses, it can be concluded that the hypothesised model qualified for structural model evaluation.

The relationships between the constructs were then tested as the measurement model was found to be fit. As an effort to meet the structural model evaluation, the hypothesized study model, with its structural paths, has been evaluated. Table 4 represents the significance of the hypothesised paths in the directional model. All three hypotheses were accepted.

Overall goodness-of-fit indices	Measurement model	Structural model	Recommended value by Hair <i>et al.</i> (2014)
χ^2	225.852	227.915	$P < 0.05$
Degree of freedom	71	73	
P	0.000	0.000	$P < 0.05$
χ^2/df	3.181	3.122	<5
RMR	0.046	0.053	<0.10
GFI	0.924	0.923	>0.90
AGFI	0.888	0.890	>0.80
IFI	0.971	0.971	>0.90
CFI	0.970	0.970	>0.90
RMSEA	0.073	0.072	<0.08

Note(s): $N = 319$

Table 3. Model fit summary for the final measurement and structural models

Based on Table 4, the local community's attitudes significantly affected their support for tourism development in George Town ($\beta = 0.775^{***}$; t -value = 17.438). This finding was consistent with other studies on the community's positive perceptions on World Heritage Site conservation and development impacts (Caust and Vecco, 2017; de Fauconberg *et al.*, 2018; Farahani *et al.*, 2012; Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, George Town's community members perceived tourism development to improve their quality of life due to its economic effects in which it created new employment opportunities for the locals. Besides that, the tourism development spillover effects also included the development and improvement of the general and recreational infrastructure. Therefore, they maintained a favourable attitude towards tourism development and were willing to support the development of George Town as a tourist attraction.

Next, this study also confirmed that personal benefits from tourism positively affected the local community's support towards tourism development in George Town ($\beta = 0.347^{***}$; t -value = 4.470). This result is also in line with previous findings (Choi and Murray, 2010; Hanafiah *et al.*, 2013; Mason and Cheyne, 2000; Rivera *et al.*, 2016; Teye *et al.*, 2002; Wang and Pfister, 2008). Since tourism development could provide economic benefits and improve the living conditions of the local community members, they will continue to support tourism in George Town. This finding supports SET's assertion that the local population would only support tourism development only if the benefits outweigh the costs. Hence, both the community's attitudes and personal benefits influence the tourism development of the World Heritage Sites in George Town.

6. Conclusion

This study validated that the development of the tourism industry is directly affected by the attitudes of the local community living in George Town. Besides that, the local community conveys favourably perceived tourism value and supports tourism development in George Town. The findings of this study indicated that the local community members who personally benefited from tourism development viewed tourism more positively and hence appeared to be more supportive of future development in their neighbourhoods. This paper argues that the success of tourism planning depends greatly on the local community's attitudes and perception towards the potential benefits and costs of the tourism development. The local government should recognise the local communities as their industry partners in the area, paying more attention to the community grievances, issues and concerns. Moreover, in order for the local community to be able to accept tourism as a core industry, policymakers must educate and inform them about current tourism development at the World Heritage Sites.

Apart from the local authorities and tourism players, active involvement and participation of the local communities would ensure the success of tourism activities at the World Heritage Sites destination. Due to the long-term sociocultural costs, the inclusion of their voices during

Hypothesis	Effect type	Beta value	t -value	p	Result
H1 Local community's attitudes positively affect its support for tourism development in George Town	Direct effect	0.775	17.438	***	Significant
H2 Personal benefits from tourism development positively affect the local community's support for tourism development in George Town	Direct effect	0.347	4.470	***	Significant

Note(s): *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4.
The summary of direct hypothesised results

the planning process would ensure that they are not left out in the development process. Hence, the World Heritage Site's conservation must include the local community in the planning and execution stages. The attitude of the local community is the key to a thriving success of World Heritage Site destination because of the positive word of mouth coming from high visitor's satisfaction level. The active participation from the local community will also smoothen the tourism activity, hence ensuring the sustainability of the World Heritage Site. In short, the involvement of both parties is essential for the success and the sustainability of World Heritage Site.

There is a need for active engagement between the local authorities and the tourism business to ensure that the World Heritage status not only generates short-term economic benefits but also genuinely acts as a source of sustainable economic activities for the local community. Thus, an adequate monitoring and policymaking are essential to ensure beneficial outcomes and long-term sustainability from such tourism activities. By focussing solely on the local community's perception, this study offers future research opportunities to examine the perceptions of other stakeholders such as the tour operators, tourists and government/local authorities on World Heritage Sites' impacts and sustainability. This study contributes new body of knowledge by presenting findings based on a real case study involving a World Heritage Site destination. Other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) can replicate the study to examine the variables that suit the local context. The insertion of new variables will offer a unique perspective that could be beneficial for future tourism planning.

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Corresponding author

Mohd Hafiz Hanafiah can be contacted at: hafizhanafiah@uitm.edu.my

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