



Community Engagement for Preserving the “Kubur Tujuh” Site of the Kao War 1904, as One of the Historical Traces in Kao District in North Halmahera

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ABSTRAK

The “Kubur Tujuh” site in Kao Village, North Halmahera, represents an important historical trace associated with the Kao War of 1904 during the colonial period. However, public awareness regarding the importance of its preservation remains relatively low, posing risks to both its physical condition and historical value. The methods employed include participatory socialization through lectures, group discussions, and community-based outreach. An educational approach was also applied by delivering materials on the history of the Kao War of 1904, the significance of the site, and preservation strategies grounded in local wisdom. The program actively involved community leaders, village officials, and youth as the primary target groups. The results indicate an increase in community understanding of the historical and cultural values of the “Kubur Tujuh” site. The community has begun to demonstrate positive attitudes toward preservation efforts, as reflected in emerging local initiatives to maintain cleanliness, protect the site, and develop it as a source of historical education and potential cultural tourism. Conclusion: The socialization of the preservation of the “Kubur Tujuh” site has proven effective in enhancing community awareness and participation in Kao Village. The sustainability of this program requires collaborative support among the community, government, and academics to ensure that the site is preserved and utilized sustainably as a historical heritage.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized as a country endowed with a rich diversity of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. This heritage serves not only as a marker of national identity but also as a source of historical knowledge, local wisdom, and socio-economic potential for communities. In this context, the preservation of historical sites becomes an imperative, particularly in the face of globalization, which may erode local values if not adequately safeguarded (Wulandari, 2023, p. 45). The preservation of historical sites fundamentally encompasses three main aspects: protection, maintenance, and development. These aspects must be implemented in an integrated manner to ensure that the physical integrity of sites is sustained while maintaining their relevance in contemporary society (Astiana, 2020, p. 67). However, in practice, preservation efforts often encounter various challenges, including limited resources, insufficient historical documentation, and low public awareness regarding the significance of such sites as cultural heritage (Rizkyantha et al., 2024, p. 12).

Furthermore, modernization and urbanization pose serious threats to the existence of historical sites. Many sites have experienced degradation or even disappearance due to land-use conversion and development activities that neglect conservation considerations (Lukman & Imandiharja, 2019, p. 18). This condition indicates that preservation requires not only governmental policies but also active community participation, as local communities are both the inheritors and custodians of cultural heritage. From a broader perspective, cultural heritage preservation is closely linked to the strengthening of national identity. Globalization, while offering opportunities, also introduces external influences that may weaken a nation's cultural foundations if not balanced with sustained efforts to preserve local values (Ardiwidjaja, 2019, p. 28). Therefore, the preservation of historical sites should be understood as part of a broader cultural strategy aimed at maintaining the continuity of national identity.

A community-based preservation approach has been identified as an effective strategy for ensuring the sustainability of cultural heritage sites. The concept of living heritage emphasizes that preservation is not solely the responsibility of formal institutions but also of local communities who maintain direct relationships with these sites (Safitri & Ikaputra, 2023, p. 55). In this regard, local wisdom plays a crucial role as a value system guiding sustainable preservation practices. This perspective is supported by Savitri (2024, p. 102), who demonstrates that the successful preservation of the Imogiri royal cemetery is closely tied to the active role of local communities in maintaining traditions and cultural values associated with the site. Thus, community involvement not only safeguards the physical aspects of heritage sites but also preserves their symbolic and spiritual meanings.

In Indonesia, cultural preservation policies have been formalized through various regulations that emphasize the importance of safeguarding cultural heritage as part of national development.

Nevertheless, the implementation of these policies still faces numerous challenges, particularly in terms of inter-institutional coordination and community engagement (Lubis et al., 2024, p. 135). Therefore, concrete initiatives, such as community-based outreach and educational programs, are necessary to bridge the gap between policy and practice. Moreover, institutions such as libraries and archives play a significant role in supporting preservation efforts through documentation and dissemination of historical information. Archives serve as strategic resources that enhance public understanding of the historical value of cultural sites (Safira et al., 2025, p. 3). Hence, preservation efforts should not only focus on physical conservation but also on knowledge transmission and education.



Figure 1: The Tomb of Kubur Tujuh is seen from the front in an open field area, near which stands a tree and the residence of local inhabitants who serve as the custodians of the site (Source: Photo collection of the community service team, Wednesday, November 4, 2021).



Figure 2: The Kubur Tujuh burial complex as seen from the rear and lateral perspectives within the village field area of Kao (Source: Photograph from the contributor's collection, Wednesday, 4 November 2021).

In the local context, the “Kubur Tujuh” site in Kao Village, North Halmahera, represents an important historical legacy associated with the Kao War of 1904. The site holds significant historical and symbolic value for the local community.

However, like many other heritage sites, its existence faces challenges, including limited public awareness and the absence of systematic preservation efforts. Therefore, intervention through a Community Service Program is necessary to enhance community awareness and participation in preserving this site. This preservation socialization initiative is expected to serve as an initial step in fostering collective awareness among the local community regarding the importance of safeguarding historical heritage. Through an educational and participatory approach, the community is positioned not merely as an object but as an active subject in preservation efforts. Consequently, the sustainability of the “Kubur Tujuh” site as a historical trace of the Kao War of 1904 can be ensured and transmitted to future generations.

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

The implementation of the Community Service Program entitled “Socialization of the Preservation of the ‘Kubur Tujuh’ Site of the Kao War of 1904 in Kao Village, North Halmahera” was designed using an integrative approach that combines participatory engagement, educational outreach, and community-based heritage conservation strategies. This approach is grounded in contemporary perspectives on cultural heritage preservation, which emphasize the importance of integrating local communities into conservation processes to ensure sustainability and long-term impact. The implementation phase began with a preliminary assessment aimed at identifying the physical condition of the site, the level of community awareness, and the socio-cultural context surrounding the “Kubur Tujuh” site. This initial stage is crucial, as heritage conservation requires contextual understanding to ensure that interventions are both culturally sensitive and socially acceptable (Chen & Wang, 2024, p. 6). Field observations and informal interviews with community leaders, elders, and youth were conducted to gather baseline data regarding local perceptions of the site and its historical significance.

Following the preliminary assessment, the program adopted a participatory socialization method, which is widely recognized as an effective strategy in community-based heritage conservation. This method involved interactive lectures, focus group discussions (FGDs), and community workshops. The participatory approach allows community members to actively engage in knowledge exchange, rather than acting as passive recipients of information. According to Khadijah et al. (2024, p. 4), active community participation significantly enhances the effectiveness of heritage preservation initiatives by fostering a sense of ownership and collective responsibility.

The educational component of the program focused on delivering structured materials related to the history of the Kao War of 1904, the cultural significance of the “Kubur Tujuh” site, and the principles of heritage preservation. These materials were contextualized within local knowledge systems to ensure accessibility and relevance. The integration of local wisdom into educational activities has been shown to strengthen conservation-oriented attitudes and behaviors within communities (Yasir et al., 2024, p. 1420).

This approach ensures that preservation efforts are not perceived as external impositions but as extensions of existing cultural values. In addition, the program incorporated community engagement strategies aimed at strengthening social sustainability. Community members were encouraged to participate in practical activities such as site cleaning, environmental management, and the installation of informational signage. Such hands-on involvement plays a critical role in reinforcing emotional and cultural bonds between people and heritage sites (Usmaedi et al., 2024, p. 53). The concept of “people-place attachment” highlights that conservation efforts are more sustainable when communities feel directly connected to heritage spaces (Chen & Wang, 2024, p. 8). Furthermore, the implementation included the formation of a local heritage awareness group composed of village youth and community representatives. This group functions as a local agent of change responsible for continuing preservation efforts beyond the duration of the program. Community-based monitoring and involvement have been identified as key factors in maintaining the long-term sustainability of heritage conservation initiatives (Nguyen & Thanh, 2024, p. 182).

From a methodological perspective, this program employed a qualitative and participatory action research (PAR) framework. PAR emphasizes collaboration between researchers and community members in identifying problems, implementing solutions, and evaluating outcomes. This method is particularly relevant in heritage conservation contexts, where local knowledge and lived experiences play a crucial role in shaping sustainable practices. Moreover, recent studies indicate that heritage conservation methodologies are increasingly shifting toward interdisciplinary and community-centered approaches, integrating social, cultural, and technological dimensions (Li et al., 2025, p. 3). The evaluation of the program was conducted through observation, feedback sessions, and reflective discussions with participants. Indicators of success included increased community awareness, active participation in preservation activities, and the emergence of local initiatives aimed at protecting the site. These outcomes align with findings from Hermawati et al. (2024, p. 120), which demonstrate that community engagement significantly contributes to the sustainability of cultural heritage preservation and can enhance its potential as a resource for education and cultural tourism.

In conclusion, the implementation and methods applied in this program emphasize the integration of participatory approaches, local wisdom, and community empowerment. By positioning the community as both the subject and agent of preservation, this initiative not only enhances awareness but also ensures the sustainability of the “Kubur Tujuh” site as a historical and cultural heritage asset. The methodological framework adopted in this program reflects current global trends in heritage conservation, which prioritize inclusivity, sustainability, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Kao, administratively, is both a village and a sub-district located in North Halmahera Regency, North Maluku Province. It is also widely known as the Old Settlement of Tanah Kao, whose territorial extent is larger than that of other sub-districts in North Halmahera. In comparison with other villages and sub-districts within the regency, Kao is regarded as both the oldest and the largest administrative unit. Despite its historical significance, scholarly attention to Tanah Kao has been almost entirely absent, suggesting that Kao represents a “missing history” within both the local historiography of North Maluku and the broader national history of Indonesia.



Figure 3: Rear and left-side view of the Seven Graves Tomb within the field area in Kao Village (Source: Author’s photo collection, Wednesday, November 4, 2021).



Figure 4: The Seven Graves Tomb (Source: Author’s photo collection, Wednesday, November 4, 2021).

Nevertheless, a visit to the coastal area of Kao (Kao Pantai) reveals the presence of a small permanent structure, measuring approximately 3 by 6 meters with a height of around 3 meters, situated on an open plot of land amidst local residences. This structure is, in fact, an old burial site locally referred to as the “Grave of Seven” (Kubur Tujuh), believed by the community to contain the remains of seven individuals who perished in battle. These individuals are commemorated as heroic soldiers of the Kao War who bravely resisted Dutch colonial forces in 1904. Although the burial site has been permanently constructed and is relatively well maintained by local residents, it has not yet been optimally managed, particularly in terms of its utilization as a medium for enhancing historical awareness among the younger generation of Kao.

The historical site of the “Grave of Seven” requires formal protection and preservation, as mandated by Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage. The preservation of such historical traces is fundamentally an effort to safeguard cultural and historical assets from the past, which possess not only historical value but also economic potential, particularly in relation to the development of heritage tourism. Such initiatives can significantly contribute to improving the socio-economic welfare of the local community. Within the framework of this community service program, the planned methodology involves socialization activities conducted in schools through limited Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), primarily targeting selected community leaders alongside representatives of the younger generation of Kao Village.



Figure 5: Documentation and measurement activities at the Seven Graves Tomb, Kao Village (Source: Author’s photo collection, Wednesday, June 24, 2020).

In the implementation of this community engagement activity, no formal institutional partners were directly involved. However, prior to the field activities, the service team established both direct and indirect coordination with

the village head and the leadership of the Village Consultative Body (BPD). Overall, these local authorities expressed a positive reception toward the program and demonstrated appreciation for the team's planned activities in their village. They further expressed expectations that, moving forward, the team would actively contribute to advancing more in-depth studies, research, and scientific publications concerning the history of the Old Settlement of Tanah Kao, particularly the historical significance of the "Grave of Seven," which continues to be regarded as a sacred site by the local community.



Figure 6: Pilgrimage and cleaning activities at the Seven Graves Tomb, Kao Village, Kao District, North Halmahera Regency (Source: Reproduced field photograph from the author's team collection, Kao, December 2, 2021).

This reverence is rooted in the site's status as a crucial historical marker of the strong nationalism and patriotism demonstrated by the heroes and fighters of Kao during the Kao War against Dutch colonialism in 1904. The village head and the leadership of the BPD also emphasized the importance of documenting and publishing the history of the Kao War of 1904, along with related narratives and research findings – especially those concerning the "Grave of Seven" – in the form of a book. Such a publication is intended to reach a wider audience, including government institutions and the broader community of Kao Village, with particular emphasis on the younger generation. These efforts are considered essential for strengthening historical awareness among the youth of Kao, who have often exhibited differing interpretations and understandings compared to the older generation regarding the history of the Kao War and the existence of the "Grave of Seven" as a significant historical testament to that conflict.



Figure 7: The research team in front of the Sacred Seven Graves of the Kao War together with elementary, junior high, and senior high school students in Kao Village (Source: Field photo collection from the research team, Kao, December 4, 2021).



Figure 8: Providing socialization guidance to elementary, junior high, and senior high school students in Kao Village on the preservation of the Seven Graves Tomb of the Kao War, conducted at the front area of the site (Source: *Reproduced photograph, field collection of the author, Kao, December 4, 2021.*)



Figure 9: Socialization lecture on the introduction and preservation of the Seven Graves Tomb Site of the 1904 Kao War, delivered in a classroom setting to students of SMA Negeri 3 North Halmahera in Kao (*Source: Reproduced photograph, field collection of the author, Kao, December 4, 2021*).



Figure 10: Field visit and focus group discussion (FGD) activities conducted around the Seven Graves Tomb to obtain information and insights regarding the historical site from local community leaders (*Source: Author's photo collection, Wednesday, June 6, 2018*).



Figure 11: FGD interview attended by Mr. Haji Imar Jafar (holding a hereditary sword) in Tobelo, concerning his ancestors' involvement in the 1904 Kao War and its connection to the Seven Graves Tomb and the Sacred Tomb of Syekh Al-Mamsyur at Bukit Popon, West Kao (Source: Author's photo collection, Wednesday, June 6, 2018).



Figure 12: With three FGD informants (from left to right: Mr. A.R. Salampe [community leader, 56], the author, Mr. Syukur Salampe [Head of the Village Consultative Body of Kao, 56], and Mr. Ramli [religious leader, 59]) as key informants regarding the Seven Graves Tomb in Kao Village, Kao District, North Halmahera (Source: Researcher's photo collection, Wednesday, November 3, 2021).



Figure 13: FGD interview on the Seven Graves Tomb and its preservation with Mr. Syukur Salampe (Head of the Village Consultative Body of Kao, 56) and Mr. Hakim Fatahuddin (61), a descendant of the Kao community residing in Ternate (Source: Community service documentation, Wednesday, November 3, 2021).



Figure 14: Visit to the residence of the Head of Kao Induk Village, Kao District, North Halmahera Regency, Mr. M. Nasir [47] (Source: Author's photo collection, December 6, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the introduction and discussion presented above, it can be concluded that the “Grave of Seven” (Kubur Tujuh), a historical remnant of the Kao War (1904), constitutes one of the most significant historical sites in Kao Village, Kao Sub-district, North Halmahera. The collective awareness of the Kao community to continuously preserve and utilize this burial site for purposes of knowledge development, education, and tourism must be consistently promoted. Such efforts should include sustained socialization regarding the importance of conserving this historical site in accordance with the mandate of the Republic of Indonesia Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage.

In general, informants ranging from traditional leaders to youth figures possess a basic understanding of the origins of the “Grave of Seven” in their village. However, their knowledge remains limited, as it is largely derived from oral traditions and narratives passed down by earlier generations.

Based on a brief field survey conducted at the site of the community service (PKM) activities, several local residents—particularly selected informants—expressed the expectation that the history of the Kao War (1904) and the existence of the “Grave of Seven” should be further examined through rigorous academic approaches. They emphasized the importance of involving scholars, particularly those from higher education institutions, such as the Department of History, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Khairun in Ternate.

It is further expected that comprehensive research and scholarly writing on the Kao War (1904) and the “Grave of Seven” will result in the publication of academic books at both local and national levels. These publications would ideally be accessible to the broader community of Kao Village, especially the younger generation. The dissemination of such historically grounded works is anticipated to address and reconcile the differing interpretations and perspectives that currently exist among some members of the community regarding the Kao War (1904) and the “Grave of Seven.”

Community leaders in Kao Village have also emphasized that the implementation of community service programs (PKM) by lecturers from the Department of History, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Khairun, should not be limited to a one-time activity. Instead, such initiatives should be conducted on a sustained basis, accompanied by continuous and in-depth academic research on the history of the Kao War (1904) and the “Grave of Seven.”

Moreover, activities related to site cleaning and maintenance should actively involve the younger generation of Kao Village. Attention must also be given to other historical sites surrounding the “Grave of Seven,” ensuring their proper preservation and protection through collaborative efforts involving the local community, government institutions, and private sectors—both in moral and material or financial support.

One tangible form of preservation effort would be the naming of streets, alleys, neighborhoods, and public facilities in Kao after the “Grave of Seven” and the names of the Kao warriors or heroes buried within the site. Such symbolic recognition would serve not only as a form of commemoration but also as a means of strengthening collective historical memory within the community.

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